



# MENTORING ICEBREAKERS

## 4 TYPES OF QUESTIONS TO ASK A MENTOR

### 1. STORIES

To break the ice, have your mentor tell a story from his or her own career. Hey, everybody likes to talk about themselves! For example, you could inquire: **“How did you get to where you are today?”** or **“How did you land your current role?”** But you could also ask more specific questions that address your career objectives and concerns. Some questions to consider:

*Ask questions such as:*

- Think back to five years ago. Did you envision your career as it is today?
- Was there ever a role you applied for and landed, but 100% qualified to do? How did you proceed?
- What do you wish you had known before taking your first management role?
- Which leadership skills were the most difficult to develop?
- Can you tell me about a time when you had a difficult boss? How did you handle the situation?

### 2. SITUATIONS

*Ask questions such as:*

- Who are the people I need to align with in this organization to achieve success?
- My performance review is coming up. What type of preparation do you most appreciate seeing from your employees?
- I have two very different career path options available to me. Can you weigh in to help me make a final decision?
- I'm considering a career transition. What are some other areas of the business that might be a good fit for me?
- I've heard that taking an international assignment could help my career trajectory. What are the pros and cons?

Now that the conversation is flowing, get more granular in your requests and bring a specific situation to your mentor--one that you'd like help navigating.

### 3. SELF-AWARENESS

One of the greatest gifts you can give yourself is the gift of self-awareness, meaning the ability to see yourself as others view you. That way, if you like how you're perceived, you can embrace it and take steps to strengthen that positive perception. If you don't like how you are currently perceived, you can take steps to shift that perception to a more positive one that supports, rather than undermines, your career and leadership goals.

After starting with the obvious question: ***“How do you think others perceive me?”*** become more specific, so your mentor can assist by *‘holding up the mirror’* and providing detailed feedback on how your actions and communication are impacting the way others see you.

*Ask questions such as:*

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- Where do you see my strengths?
- What do you see as some of my blind spots and how can I improve?
- How I am viewed by leadership?
- How could I have communicated my idea more clearly?
- When I presented at the last meeting, how did I do? Did my communication style support the message I intended to deliver?

### 4. SKILL-BUILDING

*Ask questions such as:*

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- What practices can you recommend for dealing with nervousness when speaking to groups?
- I have been asked to facilitate a team-building activity at a staff retreat. What are some keys to success?
- What's a good methodology or tool for project management and tracking team commitments?
  - How can I become a more assertive negotiator?
- Can you recommend a book or resource for dealing with difficult conversations?

Is there a skill you're currently working to enhance, such as project management, long-term strategic planning, delegating, or public speaking? Use questions like these to ask your mentor for advice and resources to help you polish that skill.

