

40 QUESTIONS TO ASK A MENTOR

Here are four types of questions to ask your mentor: stories, situations, self-awareness, and skill building. Take one of each type to every mentoring conversation.

Mentor Question Type 1. Stories

To kick-start the conversation, ask your mentor to tell a story from her or his own career.

- Was there a time you messed up and felt like you'd failed? What did you do to recover?
- How did you learn to embrace risk taking?
- How did you become such a polished presenter?
- Which were the leadership skills you worked hardest to develop?
- Think back to five years ago. Did you envision this is where you would be?
- Tell me about a recent business setback. How did you recover?
- Was there ever a role you applied for and landed, but weren't 100% qualified to do? How did you proceed?
- What do you wish you had known before taking your first management role?
- Can you tell me about a time when you had a difficult boss? How did you handle the situation?
- What's the most important leadership lesson you've learned and how has it proven invaluable?

Mentor Question Type 2. Situations

Now that the conversation is flowing, you can bring a specific situation to your mentor that you'd like help navigating.

- I tried to delegate a task last week, and it did not go as well as I'd expected. Can we work through what to do differently next time?
- Who are the people I need to align with in this organization to be successful?
- My boss said I need to be more strategic. What does that mean?
- How can I let my boss know that I don't need to be micromanaged?
- What should I include in a proposal to convince my manager to greenlight a stretch assignment?
- How can I stay connected to key influencers who do not work in same office or geographical area?
- When trying to gain buy-in to implement a new program, what tactics have worked for you?
- 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?

Mentor Question Type 3. Self-Awareness

Your mentor can assist by “holding up the mirror” and providing detailed feedback on how others see you.

- How am I viewed—that is, what’s my personal brand—in our organization?
- Where do you see my leadership strengths?
- What do you see as some of my blind spots?
- Do I come across as strategic or tactical in my day-to-day communication?
- How do people describe me when I’m not in the room?
- How I am viewed by leadership?
- How I am viewed by leadership?
- Am I viewed as high-maintenance when I send my boss weekly status updates?
- 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?

Mentor Question Type 4. Skill Building

Is there a skill you’re currently working to enhance? Ask your mentor for advice and resources that will help you polish that skill.

- How can I become better at influencing people who do not report to me?
- Can we role-play asking for a promotion and raise?
- Do you have any quick tips for reenergizing an overworked team?
- Can you recommend a book or resource for dealing with difficult conversations?
- Do you have a template you use for developing a long-range vision and strategic plan?
- How can I become a more assertive negotiator?
- 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?
- What new skills do I need to move ahead?

Create one question from each of the four types.
