



Distance mentoring

How to mentor effectively when face to face meetings are not possible

In difficult times such as these, a strong mentoring relationship can be invaluable. As we all adjust to conducting more of our professional lives online, we take a look at some of the ways distance mentoring can benefit both mentee and mentor, and offer suggestions to help you make the most of your distance mentoring relationship.

Managing long-distance mentoring arrangements:

One of the key issues we hear about with regard to distance mentoring is building rapport. This can be particularly challenging for new pairings where the relationship is virtual from the outset, as opposed to for established pairings who have already had an opportunity to establish a connection. It can be useful to establish shared interests. These could be professional or personal; something as simple as a book you've both read or a shared hobby can offer a useful starting point. We also recommend that the mentee shares a short agenda prior to the meeting, to help frame the discussions and establish a sense of direction to the meetings.

At the outset of the mentoring arrangement, establish a framework for communication:

- What media will you use – Video calls? Phone? Email? Instant messaging? Or a combination?
- How often will you meet? How long for?
- We usually suggest the mentee drives the relationship; however it can be useful to establish who has what responsibilities.

Method Choices

Method	Pros	Cons
All methods	Make long-distance mentoring possible	<p>Lack of face-to-face contact: it takes longer to build rapport and establish an effective mentoring relationship</p> <p>Distractions from the mentee or mentor's direct environment can mean sessions are cut short</p> <p>Poor communication and lack of face-to-face contact create difficulties with long-distance arrangements</p>
Video calls	<p>For most this is a very good option for remote mentoring due to similarities with a face-to-face meeting</p> <p>Many people now used to this mode of communication</p> <p>Possible to infer body language and verbal cues</p>	<p>Can be more time intensive; requires more preparation in advance</p> <p>May feel more formal.</p> <p>Confidentiality: some platforms are more secure than others</p>
Telephone mentoring	<p>Verbal clues can be picked up (these do require concentration, and it's advisable to confirm them)</p> <p>It's possible to infer emotions</p>	<p>Lack of body language and facial expression</p> <p>Confidentiality: who can hear the call?</p>
Emails and instant messaging	<p>Good for short exchanges and practical information</p> <p>Good for reflection, as some time can be spent thinking over responses</p>	<p>Lack of verbal clues and body language</p> <p>Hard to build rapport and trust if used exclusively</p> <p>Confidentiality: issues with email content</p>