



ALUMNI & FRIENDS  
ASSOCIATION

# Mentoring Guide

Alumni  
to  
Student

***“A mentor is more than an advisor. A mentor provides you with wisdom, technical knowledge, assistance, support, empathy and respect throughout, and often beyond ...”***

**— University of Washington Mentor Guide**

- **What is a mentor?**
- **Why is mentoring important?**
- **Who is a good candidate for mentoring?**
- **How to set up a mentoring program**
- **What career skills or knowledge should a mentor focus on?**
- **How to use your journey through SkillsUSA to help steer theirs**

## What is a Mentor?

The Oregon National Guard defines a mentor as a person or friend who guides a less experienced person by building trust and modeling positive behaviors. An effective mentor understands that his or her role is to be dependable, engaged, authentic and tuned into the needs of the student.

## Why is Mentoring Important?

Mentoring helps develop skilled talent to become the future of your industry. America is in the middle of a skills gap, which makes alumni to student mentoring that much more important. Remember, you are the ambassador to the next generation.

## Who is a Good Candidate for Mentoring?

A good student for mentoring should have the following qualities:

- Defined strengths and areas to improve
- Eagerness and desire to learn
- Shows seriousness about the mentor and student relationship
- Someone who takes the initiative in the relationship, especially in the beginning — be politely insistent about the desire for a mentor
- Flexibility and an understanding of the mentor's demanding schedule. Students should not be greedy, demanding, clingy or ungrateful
- Someone who takes responsibility for scheduling the mentoring appointments
- Promptness for all appointments
- Gives and requests feedback, even when not prompted
- Asks questions about their mentors' personal and professional lives in an effort to get to know them as a whole person. Mentors and students both have a life outside of the institution, and sharing something about it can help each communicate better
- Shows respect and never forgets the time and effort this person is taking to offer a smoother path on the way to success. The mentor is there to help the student in his or her career by pointing out the stepping stones, not being one

# How to Set Up a Mentoring Program

The key to building a successful mentoring program is to establish a partnership between a student organization or school and your place of work. A formal partnership is the best way to create a safe, comfortable and sustainable program.

## **First, get buy-in from your employer and company leadership.**

This is a very important step. When you have support from your employer and its leadership, you will have the ability to represent your company when approaching a school or student organization. This will give you the authority to help get your foot in the door with the school or student organization.

## **Next, identify key people in the student organization or school.**

Identify a key person at the school or organization who can elevate your organization's offer and help gain administration approval. This could be a SkillsUSA advisor, guidance counselor, dean of students, director of activities or the school principal. If you have trouble identifying the right people, a good resource may be your state SkillsUSA director. He or she likely already has established relationships with these individuals.

## **Form a Steering Committee**

Once you have buy-in from the school or organization, create a steering committee to help set up the parameters of the partnership. This steering committee should have student, administrator, instructor, industry and community representation. If in a high school, consider having representation from a local college or trade school that has the program the students you plan to mentor are taking. The committee must also come up with criteria of a suitable mentor and student.

## **Recruit Mentors and Students**

After the steering committee establishes the requirements for applicants and structure of the mentorship program, it is time to recruit both mentors and students. It should be the responsibility of the steering committee members to find recruits. The steering committee should create promotional material and applications to be distributed to promote the program.

## **Screen and Interview Applicants**

The steering committee should review the applications for both mentors and students. If a candidate meets the requirements set forth by the committee, an executive panel of one student leader, one school administrator and one member of industry should be selected to conduct interviews. The interviews should be a standard format for all candidates with questions created by the steering committee.

### Pairing Mentors and Students

After the executive committee has made its recommendation to determine which applicants should move forward following interviews, the steering committee can pair student applicants with mentor applicants who share similar goals and interests. A mentor should not have more than one student.

### During the Mentorship Process

The steering committee should set a schedule for obtaining feedback from both the mentor and the student at regular intervals during the mentorship. If there are any concerns or issues, the steering committee can then action to research and resolve them on a case-by-case basis.

### At the Conclusion

The steering committee should develop and administrator a survey at the end of each mentoring cycle that allows all participants to rate the quality of the program and provide useful feedback. The steering committee should review these results before each new mentorship period. Mentors with positive feedback should be invited back for the next session of the program, and necessary adjustments can be made to the program following each cycle.

## What Career Skills or Knowledge Should a Mentor Focus On?

### Trade Specific

Every trade and career path is unique, with different required knowledge and skills needed for success. What is different about what your trade? What are common mistakes that entry-level employees might make in your field? What skills can a newer employee sharpen to be successful in your trade's work environment? Is it attire, personal networking, software training and technology skills, or technical expertise and certifications? This is important information for a mentor to pass on to a student. Sharing your career path and a few tips can really help shape people's future careers and inspire them, too.

### Résumé

Because every trade is different, it is important that mentors take time to review each student's résumé. Help students see what skills to highlight and what skills are missing. Mentors should know what skills entry-level applicants should feature on their résumé to help stand them out to employers in their field.

## Interviews

Interview skills often make or break potential employment opportunities, but it is hard to practice interviewing. Help pass on the industry-specific interview process for your field by setting up a mock interview for your student. Have the student prepare specific situations to recall during the mock interview. Help the student articulate what he or she knows and can do. Video the mock interview and watch it together. Discuss the student's strengths and weaknesses. Then, have the student repeat the interview with someone else, video it again, and follow his or her progress. It gets easier with each practice opportunity.

## Professional Appearance

Never assume a student knows-trade specific professional appearance standards. Different trades have different acceptable attire for different situations, and it is important for the student to understand this. Job candidates often make the mistake of dressing too casually for an interview. Or, they dress for the work they expect to be doing. No matter what the job, the student should be taught appropriate attire for your profession. For even the most casual work environment, a polo shirt and long pants is appropriate. Mentors should talk with students about what to wear a few days before an interview. This includes neat shoes and clean clothes, plus taking a notebook and pen to all interviews.

# How to Use Your Journey Through SkillsUSA To Help Steer Theirs

Though everyone will have his or her own unique SkillsUSA journey, mentors are great resources. Preparing for SkillsUSA contests, running for office and fundraising may be new to the student. Use your past successes and failures to help steer your students during their SkillsUSA experience. You will find mentoring to be one of the most rewarding experiences you can have. It is a way to pay it forward and help your industry grow with qualified candidates. You will enjoy the relationships built through mentoring.



SkillsUSA  
14001 SkillsUSA Way  
Leesburg, VA 20176  
[www.skillsusa.org](http://www.skillsusa.org)