



ASCE eMentoring for Career Success

A Guide for **Mentors** to Develop Successful Relationships through ASCE's eCareerMentor Program.

Building one-on-one relationships to create a better work environment, enhance technical and managerial excellence, advance careers, and leverage knowledge and experience of participating engineers — online!

The American Society of Civil Engineers (ASCE) is committed to helping advance the careers of each ASCE member at every career stage. Mentoring programs provide a critical venue to nurture one-on-one learning relationships to ensure effective mentoring becomes common to the culture of our profession and is available to all interested engineers.

While all mentoring programs share similar goals and guidelines for both mentors and protégés, the relatively new and increasingly popular online mentoring relationship affords unique opportunities as well as its own challenges in forging mutually beneficial relationships. ASCE is proud to offer our members a new Web-enabled mentoring opportunity through the **eCareerMentor** program now available at careers.asce.org/eMentor.

This innovative new mentoring initiative provides civil engineers in all stages of their careers with a software tool to seek and be matched with others in the profession interested in sharing ideas and exchanging career guidance and advice through a mentoring relationship. While the eCareerMentor program is specifically a "matching" vehicle for our members and NOT the means through which the mentoring actually takes place, we encourage participants to forge relationships on the eCareerMentor site to be conducted via the most mutually beneficial method including e-mail, phone and face-to-face.

To help new mentors gain an early advantage in the online mentoring experience, ASCE has developed this short guide to jumpstart what we hope will be a mutually beneficial and successful relationship between our member mentors and protégés. As an ASCE Mentor, we thank you for your participation in our eCareerMentor program. We welcome your input, ideas, and feedback as you and your protégés gain insight and experience in mentoring.

The "E" stands for Effective ... Exciting ... and, of course, Electronic!

There are a number of clear advantages to mentoring via the Internet. Electronic messages can eliminate barriers imposed by time, location, and disability that often occur in face-to-face mentoring. Furthermore, body language, tone of voice and other elements of verbal communication are absent, or limited, in e-mail. However, it's also easy to make e-mail gaffes, so caution and care in clear communications must be a mentor's top priority. Whether communicating with a protégé on e-mail, in person, or over the telephone, the mentor must be prepared for a question or comment that might be considered elementary or naive — your job is to respect the protégé at all times and respond with an appropriately respectful answer. Avoid laughing or writing anything that could hurt the protégé's feelings or discourage them from asking questions in the future.

10 Tips for Successful eMentoring

- 1. Be realistic about what you can achieve online.** Because there is not always (or even usually) a face-to-face component to eMentoring, many relationships do not evolve into the intense relationships characteristic of “traditional” in-person mentoring. To get started on the right road, we encourage you to set goals you believe are achievable on when and how often you and your protégé(s) will connect online to share ideas and discuss topics of interest. To build a strong early bond, ASCE recommends you try to contact your protégé(s) at least once a week. While the eCareerMentor program assumes you’ll interact electronically with your protégé(s), personal face-to-face mentoring and telephone discussions are neither discouraged nor disallowed. If you and your protégé(s) are close in geographic proximity or happen to be in the same location for any reason, such as an ASCE conference, we hope you’ll both be motivated and excited to spend some “quality face time” with one another.
- 2. Tell about yourself first.** Tell your protégé(s) about your present position. Describe what you do on your job. Talk positively about what you like about your work and your own career path. By sharing information about yourself, you are giving your protégé(s) insight into what kinds of questions to ask.
- 3. Listen carefully.** You want to get a clear understanding of your protégés’ challenges so you can help your protégé(s) make the most of their growth opportunities. Ask questions about their current work environment, interpersonal communications and what they have enjoyed most to date in their civil engineering careers. When communicating with protégés, it is important to read through their entire message or listen to their entire question over the phone or during a face meeting. Once hearing them out, ask questions about anything you don’t understand. Encourage your protégés to approach issues from all angles, thinking of various possibilities, before they choose how to proceed. Finally, it may be appropriate to provide a few recommended approaches if your protégés are accepting.
- 4. Be responsive and clear in your communications.** Quality distance mentoring requires a timely response. Mentors and protégés must develop reasonable and practical communication plans and must be flexible and understanding. It can be very damaging to a mentoring relationship if a reply is late in coming as it communicates, accurately or not, that the replier is not fully committed or interested in nurturing the mentoring relationship. A major reason that eMentoring matches fail or deliver less value than hoped for is that both partners simply stop e-mailing or respond erratically. If you don’t have time to write a comprehensive response to a question, send your protégé(s) a quick note letting them know that you will get back to them within a specific time. And, of course, then meet your own deadline to follow-up. Or, if you feel e-mail communication is not effective in building this relationship, you might want to suggest a weekly telephone call instead.
- 5. Communicate E-motions carefully.** For better and worse, the obvious lack of nonverbal cues such as facial expressions, eye contact, intonation, posture, and gestures is an intrinsic component of the eMentoring experience — and to a lesser, but still significant degree, mentoring sessions conducted by telephone. Without these cues, mentors and protégés are equally at risk of improperly interpreting the feelings and subtle meaning behind e-mailed words and “emoticons.” To make sure the meaning behind the words in your messages is clear, you need to know some of the “unspoken” but common “rules” of e-mail etiquette and humor. Always start your message with a friendly greeting (“Hi,” “Hello,” “Hey there”). Avoid the use of all capital letters in a message. One word in capital letters communicates an emphasis on that word. Capitalizing the entire e-mail is like yelling at someone in person. When talking on the phone, remember that a smile on your face translates through the intonation of your voice.

How to “Kill” a Conversation:

A few tips on what NOT to do on e-mail, over the phone or in person:

- Tell a protégé that the way he or she feels is “wrong” or “silly” — or worst of all — “stupid”.
- Form your response to a question or comment in your head while your protégé is speaking to you. It’s not possible to concentrate on your words and their words simultaneously.
- Ask judgmental or unproductively challenging questions such as “Why would you possibly think that”
- Interrupt your protégés conversation or jump in to finish his or her sentences and thoughts.
- Remain totally silent (on the phone or in person) for extended periods of time. Nods of your head, or short responses such as “I see” or “OK” are not interruptive but, rather, encouragements to continue their discussion on the topic.
- Multi-task during a mentoring session — whether it’s reading e-mails, typing on your computer, driving or eating.

6. Open up the dialog. As a mentor, you have the primary responsibility of engaging protégés in conversations that promote growth and build trust. Devise structured activities and discussion topics that encourage protégés to open up and write more, such as establishing a “top 10” list of goals for the next five years of the protégés career or conducting a web search for civil engineering projects that the protégé finds particularly interesting. These activities give you insight into what truly interests your protégé and gives you a launching pad for future discussions. When e-mailing or talking on the phone or in person, try to ask open-ended questions rather than questions that can be answered with a “yes” or “no.” Avoid any tendency to lecture or pass judgment. Because most eMentors and e-protégés will only meet through e-mail, it is essential that both parties practice opening up and feeling comfortable in written communications. Professional mentoring discussions and activities should be grounded in helping to meet specific goals. The most successful mentors, whether working online or face-to-face, encourage the protégé to acquire the skills and tools they need to attain their goals. A good mentor doesn’t force feed (or spoon feed) information and answers, but, rather, makes their protégé think and assess on their own.

7. Establish the information boundaries. Understand that a protégé’s view of the world or the civil engineering profession may be different from your own and remember that everyone is entitled to his or her opinions and beliefs. Offer and respect everyone’s privacy and confidentiality. We recommend that you do NOT share your home address or phone number, unless you’re extremely comfortable with your protégé(s) and have discussed it with your family or people you share your home with. It’s acceptable — even encouraged — to e-mail or tell information about your family, peers, education, and other interests, both related and unrelated to civil engineering. Share humorous experiences. Such communications help protégés relate to you and demonstrate that you value their company. However, always be professional in your e-communications — this is a business relationship first and foremost, although it can also be extremely personal given its intrinsic “person helping person” nature. Some enjoyable online “business” activities include talking about your personal experiences in college and at work, recommending interesting online resources, talking about current events and community service opportunities of particular relevance to civil engineers, and your own personal goals. However, only share information you are comfortable offering and ask your protégé(s) to only do the same.

8. Spark conversations. There will be times when your eMentoring conversations become less frequent simply because people are busy. Be proactive in reaching out to your protégé(s) and don’t feel rejected or annoyed if you don’t get immediate responses. However, if you are frustrated by a lack of response, we encourage you to e-mail ASCE at careers@asce.org and our eCareerMentor liaison will try to contact your protégé(s) to help restart the conversation.

9. Offer positive reinforcement. Find ways to express confidence and encouragement when e-mailing with your protégé(s). There are many techniques to convey approval and positivity online. Simple responses such as “great idea” or “great job” speak volumes online.

10. Be open and honest. If a protégé is behaving in a way that bothers you, such as e-mailing too frequently or using offensive language, mention it. Address your concerns in respectful and clear language. Don’t overreact, but do not ignore issues either.

If you have any questions regarding your ASCE mentoring experience, or have feedback on the program, contact us at: careers@asce.org.

Good luck forming worthwhile and fulfilling relationships and thank you for your dedication in enriching the lives of your civil engineering protégé(s).

Activities and Ideas for Building Effective Mentoring Relationships with Student Protégés.

- Develop a book or reading list on topics of interest to the protégés’ engineering goals and career.
- Create both short-term and long-term academic and continuing education goals.
- Discuss the history of the civil engineering profession.
- Discuss specific ASCE benefits and opportunities, such as volunteering, honors and awards programs, Younger Member initiatives, and many others.
- Talk about what happened during that specific day or week at work or school.
- Discuss strategies for test taking and effective study habits.
- Talk about civil engineering’s important future in improving global infrastructure.
- Research some different or unusual careers available to civil engineers.
- Learn about parts of the country or world your protégés would like to visit and possibly work in one day.
- Write a letter to the ASCE Membership Team on an idea or recommendation on a new or improved member benefit you both think other civil engineers would value.
- Devise a list of the top ten greatest civil engineering challenges for the next 5 or 10 years and discuss ideas on how to best meet them.
- Visit a local engineering university program together.
- Do a job shadow with your protégé if he or she is close enough to travel to your workplace, or visit a civil engineering job site.