

10 KILLER QUESTIONS TO MAKE THE MOST OF YOUR MENTOR MEETING

So you finally mustered the nerve to ask a mentor for a cup of coffee. You're sweating. You can feel pressure mounting. She strolls through the Starbucks door holding an Americano with two pumps of hazelnut in one hand and years of experience in the other.

Here are 10 questions you can ask her to take the pressure off you and make the most of your meeting:

1. How do you spend most of your time?

Ask this question for one reason only — digging. Does your mentor have children, a favorite charity she supports, or an addiction to a particular Mediterranean cuisine? Most people who ask for advice never take the time to build an authentic connection. Gathering these answers will allow you to follow up with relevant articles, magazine clippings for passion projects, or recipes for your mentor, who will appreciate hearing from you. Givers gain.

2. What would you do if you were me?

Don't waste your time looking to impress your mentor with how smart you are. Tell them about your specific challenges, and ask for their recommendations.

3. How can I help you?

This is a killer question that catches most mentors off guard. Most mentees are only concerned about what they can take from a mentor. When you communicate that you are genuinely willing to give, you will set yourself miles apart from everyone else. Who doesn't like a win/win relationship?

4. Is this where you thought you would end up?

This question usually draws out a hearty laugh, as few people shoot from point A to point B. Most experienced professionals take the scenic route in their career. How they got there is usually an interesting tale with mistakes and revelations. Learn from them.

5. What used to be your biggest weaknesses?

This whopper of a question will tell you right away if someone will make a good mentor. A good answer reveals the number one trait of a great mentor — self-awareness. If you feel this question is too intense, try softening it by asking, "What did you learn about yourself in the last six months?"

6. Who else would you recommend I connect with?

This question might be better served for later meetings when there is more trust. It can exponentially expand your network. Sometimes the best source for other mentors is your existing one.

7. What are you most proud of?

Give your mentor a chance to shine. He/she will love you for it.

8. What professional organizations are you associated with and in what ways?

No one becomes a rising star in any industry without going to the right conferences and trade associations. A good mentor can help you filter out the best ones, and if you're lucky, get you access to coveted "invite only" insider groups.

9. Anything FORM.

Form is an acronym for family, occupation, recreation, and motivation, and it represents four universal rapport-builders. For example, you might find out that you have a location-based connection with your mentor after asking about his family or birthplace. Connection made!

10. If a specific question comes up, can I follow up with you?

This is your Holy Grail question. Have you ever met someone who has mastered the dating scene? You'll notice they never leave the first date without the promise of a second one — ever. Never leave a mentor meeting without the promise of a future encounter. You are also communicating that you will only reach out with a relevant and specific question. Most people will agree to that. When the time does come up, simply refer back to the email chain.

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