

It's Your Career Supplement

# NAVIGATING THE MENTOR-PROTÉGÉ RELATIONSHIP



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**\*\*Disclaimer\*\*** All information contained in this pamphlet supplement (including web and email addresses) is considered current as of the latest update, but is subject to change prior to the release of another update.

# FOREWORD

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Mentorship is an essential part of our profession, but it is not a one-way street. Done correctly, mentorship requires active participation from both the mentor and the protégé.

Mentoring is a means of forming professional relationships that foster free communication and provide an avenue for officers to share experiences and offer guidance. It enhances morale, good order and discipline, and improves operational readiness and professionalism.

Who can be a mentor? We are all mentors. Whether you are a new division officer mentoring your junior Sailors, a department head mentoring first tour division officers, or a senior officer mentoring your wardroom – we are all mentors.

What makes you a good mentor? Just like we were taught in BQC, *punch the pubs!* Know what is current, new, and changing in our community. Know what promotion boards value and what the community brief says. While there is no “one right way” to build your career, there are myriad references to help guide you. The Supply Corps promotion board Community Brief, convening orders, board precepts, *It’s Your Career* playbooks, the annual OP roadshow, the OP Monthly, and the eSUPPO app are powerful tools available to mentors and protégés. Always check your ego at the door. Your experiences will naturally guide the narrative, but should never be prescriptive.

Why do we mentor? *Ultimately, we must all be accountable for each other.* The benefits of a mentoring relationship are best achieved when both mentors and protégés are fully committed. We must recognize the importance that mentoring plays in the success of our community, and actively seek opportunities to mentor our junior officers and Sailors. Alternatively, junior officers should actively seek career advice from more senior officers, industry leaders, and senior civilians throughout their careers. Formal and informal mentoring is essential to shaping the future leaders of the Supply Corps.

What do you need to do to be mentored? Be self-aware and ready to receive honest feedback. Learn your job, learn our business, seek those you trust, seek many advisors, and *find common threads that resonate with your professional and personal goals.*

# PURPOSE

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As leaders, we plan. We look to the future and set goals for ourselves and our teams. We can read the biographies of officers filling our dream jobs and plan backwards to learn the path they chose to develop key skillsets and expertise, while maintaining perspective on how the Supply Corps is constantly evolving. While this kind of planning is important for developing career goals, there is no golden path to success. Navigating the many milestones of a successful career will not always follow a linear path. At each detailing opportunity, you will be forced to make decisions based on your career needs, professional goals, and personal desires. Life events like getting married, having kids, and caring for loved ones will influence a pre-planned path. Billet availability at the time of your detail may require you to consider other detailing options. Identifying your goals and career needs are central to the mentor-protégé relationship. Additionally, good mentorship will enable you to successfully navigate the complex challenges of balancing your personal and professional life.

The purpose of this *It's Your Career* supplement is to help mentors develop their skills and understanding of the mentoring process while helping protégés better understand their responsibilities throughout the mentoring process.

This supplement is organized to first describe key fundamentals for both the mentor and the protégé. We define levels of listening and discuss the common roles and pitfalls of being a mentor. Because the mentoring relationship is an active, two-way bond between mentor and protégé, we will also discuss the requirements of a good protégé. Finally, we discuss successful mentoring in the Supply Corps and specific tools for use while developing your mentor-protégé relationship.

## LEVELS OF LISTENING

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How often do you find yourself talking on the phone and responding to email at the same time? Or worse, listening to someone in your office talking while reading an email? Have you ever been in someone's office "listening" to them, but thinking about your next assignment or planning your weekend activities? Did you think you were multi-tasking?

As technology expands the range of activities available to us, the myth that we can multitask has never been stronger. Instead, research has proven that we don't actually do things simultaneously, but rather switch our attention

quickly between separate activities. Thoughtful listening is a skill that requires your full attention.

As a mentor or a protégé, you should focus on the art of being present and listen fully. Listen with the intent to understand, not with the intent to reply.

Much has been written on the levels of listening, but none is as cited as the acclaimed author on leadership, Stephen R. Covey. He describes five levels of listening, which we will briefly explain below:

Level 1 (Ignoring). Some may argue that this is not listening; to someone being ignored, it is clear that the other's attention is elsewhere. Ignoring can cause anger and distrust and will likely result in disastrous effects to the mentoring relationship.

Level 2 (Pretend Listening). Someone who is pretending to listen may nod their head and say "uh huh" or "I see", but they are not "present". This is a superficial form of listening and does not result in any meaningful dialogue between a mentor and protégé.

Level 3 (Selective Listening). In the high tempo environment many of us find ourselves on a daily basis, we are often too quick to say "what's your point?" or to try and get the other person to finish their thought before they can do it themselves. Someone who is selectively listening is only listening to part of the message and will often interrupt to speed up the dialogue.

Level 4 (Attentive Listening). When you attentively listen, you are free from the distractions around you. You observe the other person, their body movements, hand gestures, while listening to their words without interruption. However, attentive listeners still hear the other person's message filtered through their own frame of reference, through their own perspectives, experiences, and values.

Level 5 (Empathic Listening). The highest level of listening requires intentional effort by the listener to see yourself in the other person's shoes, from their frame of reference, using their experiences and values to understand the full meaning of the message. Empathetic listeners pay attention to tone of voice, pace of speech, word emphasis, body language, facial expressions, and cultural and ethnic differences. Empathetic listeners often take notes while listening to ensure a full understanding of the message.

Empathetic listening is a skill that must be developed. It takes time and energy. It will drain you. Here are some quick tips to remember:

- Stop talking.
- Imagine the other person's point of view.
- Look, act, and be interested.

- Observe non-verbal behavior.
- Don't interrupt.
- Don't speak just to fill space. Try to sit still past your comfort level before speaking.
- Listen for implicit meaning.
- Paraphrase key points.
- Stop talking.

## FUNDAMENTALS FOR MENTORS

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### *Common Mentor Roles*

Each mentor is different – not only in style and personality, but also the role that they play for the protégé. Some mentors will play several roles, but no single person can play all roles. Because of this point, the importance of seeking multiple perspectives as a protégé cannot be overstated.

Cynthia McCauley and Jennifer Martineau describe three possible roles that mentors can play to build their protégé's competence, confidence, and professional development in their article "Reaching Your Development Goals".

"The Assessor." In this role, a mentor provides valuable feedback, initial reactions, and helps provide insights to the protégé through careful assessment and evaluation. The mentor acts as a sounding board and guides the protégé to discover deeper understanding of their situation.

"The Challenger." Have you ever had a coach or mentor who constantly pushed you beyond your comfort zone? Mentors filling this role utilize a questioning attitude, hold protégés accountable to their goals, and act as role models.

"The Supporter." As the name implies, these mentors provide encouragement by empathizing, rewarding, and supporting their protégé's development.

### *The Power of Feedback*

Feedback is information provided to confirm, add to, or overwrite learning and behavior. Feedback can be accepted, modified, or rejected by the receiver. The main purpose of feedback should be to reduce discrepancies between someone's understanding and performance and a detailed goal. Effective feedback should answer three questions:

1. What are the goals?
2. What progress has been made toward the goals?
3. What activities need to happen next to make better progress?

Mentors should help protégés clarify their goals. Additionally, feedback from mentors can be used to enhance a protégé's commitment to their goals or drive increased effort towards reaching those goals. Protégés and mentors should actively seek feedback regarding their performance and goal attainment.

Many people have heard the old adage, "Praise in public, punish in private." While praise and punishment are types of feedback, it is important to note that praise or punishment must relate directly to a task, specific performance, or a detailed goal in order for the feedback to be effective. Regardless of whether or not feedback is positive or negative, it must focus on providing concrete information that is helpful in motivating someone to reassess behavior in light of this information.

Criticism, on the other hand, is judgmental and accusatory – often involving labeling, lecturing, moralizing, blaming, and disparaging language. Feedback avoids speculating on the other person's intentions and instead focuses on the actual impact of the behavior. Alternatively, criticism traffics in negative assumptions about the other person's motives. Being conscious of the difference between effective feedback and criticism is critical to building a strong trust bond between mentor and protégé.

## ***Competence & Character***

Effective mentors inspire trust and motivate their protégé to become the best they can be. Key to this ability is having the requisite competence and character as a mentor and officer. Ask yourself these questions:

1. Do I have the relevant knowledge and required skills?
2. Will my abilities and actions inspire trust and confidence?
3. Are my values clear to myself and to others?
4. Do I live my espoused values? Navy's Core Values?

The cognitive dissonance created because of misaligned values and behaviors can erode trust between mentors and protégés. Professional competence and strong personal character, on the other hand, build your reputation as a role model and increase your efficacy as a mentor – earning you credibility and influence as a leader to be sought out and emulated.

## ***The Socratic Method***

The key to being a great mentor is asking great questions. Knowing the right questions to ask (the Socratic Method) a protégé is as important as knowing the right answers (Punching the Pubs) to a protégé's questions. By asking probing questions, a mentor can stimulate critical thinking and draw out ideas and underlying assumptions held by the protégé.

The Socratic Method seeks to uncover contradictions and develop stronger beliefs through maintaining a “questioning attitude” – always scrutinizing the common truth to find inconsistencies. Used correctly by mentors, the Socratic Method forces a protégé to discover their own truths and solutions instead of a mentor “spoon-feeding” problem resolutions based on their knowledge and experience. However, a mentor's knowledge and experience should inform their line of questioning and is essential to helping the protégé gain valuable insight.

The right question can provide clarification and reduce confusion. The right questions help a mentor gain a deeper understanding of a protégé's skillsets, goals, and values while providing information on what the protégé hopes to get out of the mentor-protégé relationship. Managing the balance between asking open-ended questions that seek to generate conversation and asking closed questions that elicit short answers is important to making the Socratic Method work within your mentoring relationship. Too many open-ended questions can frustrate a protégé, while too few will limit the depth of discovery and development.

## ***Connecting People***

One of the most powerful benefits a mentor can provide to their protégé is the ability to help build professional and personal networks. Mentors should look for opportunities to connect their protégé with others that have similar interests and goals. Protégés should seek multiple perspectives to enhance their understanding and expand their awareness of “the realm of the possible.”

Mentors should see themselves as “connectors.” No single person has the strengths and abilities to accomplish everything on their own. By definition, as leaders, we are all building teams that combine different individual strengths to create something greater in combination than the individual parts. Likewise, mentors who connect protégés with valuable resources build stronger leaders and ensure the future of the Supply Corps.

Finally, it is important for mentors to know their limitations. There are times when a protégé may ask for guidance in areas about which you know little to

nothing at all. Temptation may lead you to provide guidance just to not lose face or seem weak. However, acknowledging your lack of expertise while utilizing your network to connect your protégé with a more experienced and knowledgeable resource will strengthen the mentor-protégé relationship.

## ***Common Pitfalls***

Whether you are a seasoned officer with years of experience mentoring junior officers and enlisted or just starting out on your career journey, there are three main hazards to beware of when embarking on a mentor-protégé relationship.

- Do not tell your protégé to be just like you. As history has proven, there are many different ways to achieve success. As a mentor you need to be current on what the community values. These values are reviewed and published annually to help guide mentoring, selection boards, and supply officers. You need to know the right questions to ask to get to know the other person's goals, strengths, and weaknesses in order to build their competence, confidence, and professional development.
- Do not tell your protégé what to do. A common mistake many mentors make is thinking that the only way to be a good mentor is to provide lots of advice and guidance about what their protégé should be doing or thinking or feeling.
- Do not try to solve the protégé's problem – enable them to solve their own. This essentially summarizes the first two hazards. Each individual must determine their own path. Mentors provide the feedback and support to help them achieve the insight to see their path clearly with defined goals.

# **FUNDAMENTALS FOR PROTÉGÉS**

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## ***Goal Setting***

The mentor-protégé relationship is a two-way street that requires active participation and commitment from both parties. An important piece of being mentored is to do your own homework. Learn your job. Learn the Supply Corps business. Finally, develop and set your own personal and professional goals. Having both short and long-term goals defined will help you engage with your mentors with a focused purpose and help mentors ask the right questions and provide the appropriate feedback and support.

To illustrate the point, let's say your long-term goal is to be selected for major command. What are the steps and short-term goals that you must accomplish in order to achieve your end goal of major command? Within the Supply Corps, there are myriad resources to help you develop your goals and reduce the confusion around what is important. The Community Brief, OP Roadshow, OP Monthly, *It's Your Career* playbooks, Supply Corps Newsletter, eSUPPO app, and Board Precepts and Convening Orders are powerful references that protégés should review and reference before meeting with mentors.

Additionally, remember to include your family / significant other when developing your goals. Life events will undoubtedly affect your career at some point and you will have to constantly reassess what is important.

So how do you reach your goals?

1. Seek challenging assignments that build your skillsets and behaviors required to reach your goal.
2. Seek training and education for required skills to achieve your goal.
3. Seek developmental relationships = mentors! You will increase your chances of reaching your goal if you don't try to do it alone.

## ***The Importance of Self-reflection***

By taking the time to self-reflect, you can clarify your progress toward your goals and identify areas where you might need to make adjustments. Try to take time to self-reflect on a recurring basis. Keeping a journal is a useful way of recording and developing your ability to reflect and learn from your experiences. Don't put pressure on yourself to write the poetic, deep thoughts...just write. You'll be surprised to find that the act of writing can help you become aware of thoughts that you did not previously consider. You might use some of these questions to begin your process of reflection:

- How would I describe the experience I just had?
- What are my reactions to this experience? What went well? What do I wish I had done differently?
- What do my reactions tell me? What can I learn from these reactions?

## **MENTORING IN THE SUPPLY CORPS**

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Throughout your career, you will develop mentor-protégé relationships that fall within one of three categories.

The first category is the simplest mentoring relationship and is typically referred to as an “office call”. As a benefit of a tight-knit community that values cooperative relationships, the Supply Corps is full of senior leaders with “open doors”. You are encouraged to reach out to senior leaders for informal and formal mentoring sessions. Be prepared to discuss future goals, be open to honest feedback regarding your record, and come prepared with your ODC, OSR, and PSR (consider sending a read ahead copy as well).

Another type of mentor-protégé relationship common within the Supply Corps is one that is formed and developed during a specific tour of duty. These command relationships can benefit both mentor and protégé because they are informed by daily performance which allows for real-time feedback and deeper relationships. Trust is built through shared performance and team spirit; mentors and protégés develop an invested interest in seeing one another succeed, further growing the relationship. These relationships can often be described as “peer-like mentoring” where you learn from officers no more than two ranks higher than yourself. These officers have proximity of experience and can relate to your specific challenges.

Depending upon the level of compatibility and trust between mentor and protégé that is developed during a command mentoring relationship, some of these relationships will endure throughout your career. Career-long mentoring relationships are characterized by deep trust, shared interests, sincere friendship, and honesty.

Additionally, Supply Corps Community of Interest (COI) leads are available as resources to answer specific career development questions (listed under the “References and Useful Links” section).

# TOOLS FOR MENTOR-PROTÉGÉ RELATIONSHIPS

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As we have discussed, it is vital for mentors to be aware of their protégé's background and future goals, just as it is important for the protégé to be aware of community doctrine to develop educated questions and enable constructive dialogue between mentor and protégé.

Absolutely essential to every mentoring discussion, the **Community Brief** and the accompanying **Career Progression** and **Length of Service** slides (available in eSUPPO):

- are prepared annually by the Officer Community Manager and staffed through the Supply Corps flag community for buy-in before being routed to the Secretary of the Navy for approval;
- inform the Supply Corps community and the rest of the Navy what accomplishments, milestones, and performance indicators the Supply Corps community values;
- are briefed prior to every statutory (promotion) board; and
- are the basis for drafting promotion board Convening Orders

Sustained Superior Performance is often talked about as a requirement for promotion within the Navy, but what does it mean? In fact, it is quite multi-faceted:

- Competitive breakouts on your fitness reports. Whether a soft breakout or a hard breakout against other Supply Corps officers, it tells the board that you are performing above your peers.
- Earning a warfare qualification when it is available. Does this mean that you should try to accumulate every warfare device? Absolutely not. It doesn't matter how many warfare pins you amass, your professional reputation is the difference maker.
- Being above the Reporting Senior cumulative average more times than not.
- Maintaining your physical fitness. PFA failures are easy to prevent, so make time to work-out.

Conversely, minimum accomplishments do not make you competitive for promotion. You should not have unrealistic expectations either. For instance, the Navy does not need DAWIA level III lieutenants in the Fleet....there are no billets that require it; the knowledge and skill will waste away before you have a chance to use it.

The following information is provided to assist you with developing and benefitting from your mentor-protégé relationship. While a formal contract is not necessary to establish a mentor-protégé relationship, a written agreement can help to define the relationship, focus the goals of the relationship and the protégé, and provide boundaries to reduce anticipation and uncertainty in the relationship.

## ***Optional Mentor-Protégé Agreement***

A mentor-protégé agreement should include the following information:

- Protégé and mentor rate/rank and contact information
- Terms of agreement to include:
  - **Confidentiality.** The mentor and protégé should identify how information shared between them should be treated. For example, should all or just some of the information between them be treated as confidential?
  - **Expectations.** The mentor and protégé should identify the general expectations of what the mentor will provide, such as long-range personal, professional, and educational advice and guidance; personal contacts and networking connections; and short-term specific goals.
  - **Meetings.** The protégé and mentor should identify expectations regarding the frequency and place of meetings with mentor.
  - **Other.** The protégé and mentor should identify any other expectation from their relationship.
- Example disclaimer: This document reflects the mentor-protégé commitments agreed upon at this point in time. We understand that the terms of this agreement may be changed at any time. We understand that either has the option of discontinuing the relationship for any reason providing that the terminating party notifies the other.
- Date and sign the agreement

## ***Developing Goals***

Practice S.M.A.R.T. (Specific, Measurable, Achievable, Realistic, Time bound) Goals

- Goal title
- Objective (What do you want to achieve? How will you know you achieved it? By when?)
- Action Steps (What will I do to achieve my objectives?)

- Measure of Progress (How will I know I'm making progress?)
- Review Dates (When will I review my progress?)
- Potential Obstacles or Problems (What might interfere with taking action and achieving my objective? How will I overcome this?)
- Sources of Help (Who or what will assist me in taking action?)
- Date and sign S.M.A.R.T. goals

## ***Career Development Goals***

Short range, mid-range (1-5 yrs.) and long-range goals (>5 yrs.):

- Goal title
- Brief description of goal
- Target completion date
- Objectives (knowledge, skills, or ability needed to meet goal)
- Measure of progress (how do I know I'm making progress?)
- Formal training (course title, location, dates)
- Alternative training (OJT, self-study, e-learning, etc.)
- Date and sign goal agreement

# REFERENCES AND USEFUL LINKS

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## eSUPPO app:

- [The Community Brief](#)
- Annual OP Roadshow Brief
- *It's Your Career* playbooks
  - *It's Your Career*
  - *It's Your Record*
  - *It's Your Detail*
  - *It's Your Education*
  - *It's Your Experience*
  - *It's Your Board*
  - *A Navigation Guide to Business School (supplement)*

## Links:

- [Career Counselor](#) on NPC
- [Board Information](#) on NPC
- [Convening Orders and Board Precepts](#)

## Community of Interest (COI) Leads:

- Contracting (NACO)
- Supply Chain Management (ILS)
- Business Financial Management (BFM)
- Business Enterprise Management (BEM/LOG IT)
- Transportation Logistics (TRANS)
- Joint Planner (PLAN)
- Petroleum Management (POL)
- Joint Operational Logistics (JOL)
- Naval Special Warfare (NSW)

\*\* Names and contact information for current COI leads can be obtained by contacting the Supply Corps Career Counselor at [supplycorpscareercounselor@navy.mil](mailto:supplycorpscareercounselor@navy.mil) or (901) 874-4611.

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Last Updated: June 2018



<http://www.public.navy.mil/bupers-npc/officer/Detailing/rlstaffcorps/supply/Pages/CareerCounselor.aspx>