5 Ways to Engage Your Student Mentee

1. Meet Your Mentee

The most important part of a mentor’s job is helping a less experienced person find their full potential. Establishing common passions and values through conversations with your mentee, as well as working with them collaboratively is the best way to help them grow as a student and a professional.

- Why do you both love engineering or computer science? What do you have in common outside of your academic focus? What are some relevant stories from your work or student life that the mentee might learn from?
- Be sure to ask your mentee’s opinion, as well as discussing your own to foster a collaborative environment where your mentee can feel as though the only “wrong” answer is inaction. Collaborating with a more experienced mentor can either be freeing or intimidating, and the mentor’s ability to collaborate with the mentee as a future-colleague is the best way to learn.

2. Sharpen The Mind

The largest part of your mentee’s life is most likely comprised of their studies. It is important to recognize their concerns and have them look forward to how this will impact the tools and skills they need for the future. Addressing how their studies relate to their work, what specific information you wish you had learned more thoroughly as a student, and giving them constructive feedback on what they have done are great ways to connect the material and transition to honing their skills for the real world.

- Ask for your mentee’s opinion on any constructive feedback you may give, allowing for the opportunity to ask them why they agree or disagree with you. This exercise will cement the discussion in their mind and empower their thoughts and opinions.
- Give very specific examples of times you have used what you learned in school or early in your career to accomplish something in your career.

3. Hone Their Skills

Once your mentee has amassed academic knowledge in school, they’re going to need to apply it the real world. Discussing problems your industry faces, common misconceptions of people entering the field (or even those already in the field), and the collaborative process with other departments will give mentees a window into what their job will require after graduation.

- Have conversations about how your industry is developing or the problems that your industry faces. This will open doors to conversations about future solutions and ways to make an impact.
- Talk about the misconceptions associated with the field in which you work. Encourage your mentee to investigate opportunities and find the field most suited to their interests.
• Collaborating departments are potential sources of interest to students who don’t have a professional’s understanding of the breadth of career opportunities available to them within the same general field. Discuss the importance of cross collaboration related to your team’s productivity and success.

• Note: Your mentee may ask for your input about job opportunities or internships at the company you represent or at another company. If specific job opportunities at your institution are available, you should broach this topic with your mentee as you see appropriate.

4. Share Your Journey

Being personable is important, and sharing your journey from college to career helps build your relationships with your mentee. Your mentee may hear about an opportunity from you that they may not have known about otherwise which may help them choose the career path that suits them best.

• Discuss your reason for joining the field and encourage mentees to examine their own motivations. Your professional guidance can help them identify specific ways to achieve their goals.

• Underrepresented student groups (first generation, women, historically underrepresented groups) often don’t have access to knowledge about the depth and breadth of opportunities available in a given field, and these conversations may illuminate opportunities they didn’t know existed.

5. Expand Your Network

Networking is a powerful tool for anyone at any level of their professional career. Helping your mentee introduce themselves to new people will be the most valuable single skill you can impart to them. As an additional benefit, being collaborative with your mentee throughout this process will create a future colleague and resource for both of your networks!

• Seek opportunities to break the ice between your mentee and their peers. Connect with your mentee’s network (professors, other mentors, etc). Likewise introduce your mentee to some of your network - as their networks grow, so do skills and results.

• You may even a future mentee or find a mentor of your own through this expanding your network, just like your mentee may meet another mentor amongst the group of people you introduce them to.