



Mentoring Toward Self-Actualization

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Whether you have already established a mentor connection or are seeking a mentor, you likely have some thoughts as to what you hope to accomplish with this relationship. If you are a mentor and are seeking ways to truly make a difference with your mentee, this discussion may add value to your mentoring experience.

I will begin by sharing why individuals choose mentors, define the term self-actualization, and discuss strategies for the mentee to assess their needs. In addition, how the mentor may assist in helping their mentee realize their path toward self-actualization will also be discussed.

Why a mentor?

When individuals are seeking a mentor, they are typically seeking someone who is:

- A professional who can assist with feedback and direction
- Someone who has met some of the goals the mentee hopes to achieve one day
- An expert in a specific area or discipline
- Known for their positive reputation

Quite often we are looking for individuals who are open and approachable. Mentees must be very conscious of what they need from the mentoring relationship and be specific with their mentor prospect as to what they hope to learn. It is unlikely a mentee will be able to articulate that they hope to achieve self-actualization.

Self-Actualization

You have likely been exposed to Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs. As a refresher, (outside of PSY 101) there are five human needs.

The first is physiological and speaks to our needs for air, water, food, shelter, sleep and clothing. Once those are established we have to have our safety needs met, such as personal security, employment,



resources, health and property. Love and belonging are next, with the need for friendship, intimacy, family and a sense of connecting. Esteem speaks to respect, self-esteem, status, recognition, strength and freedom. At the top of the hierarchy is self-actualization, which is the desire to become the most that someone can be and to realize their true selves.

“Maslow (1962) believed self-actualization could be measured through the concept of peak experiences. This occurs when a person experiences the world totally for what it is, and there are feelings of euphoria, joy, and wonder. It is important to note that self-actualization is a continual process of becoming rather than a perfect state one reaches of a 'happy ever after' (Hoffman, 1988 as cited in McLeod, 2018).”

Mentee’s role in the journey toward Self-Actualization:

Prior to meeting with a mentor, it is helpful to think through what you feel you may need to become self-actualized. Of course, the hierarchy is not one of “arriving” at your destination. As life happens to us, we may slip down a stair or two to belonging or stumble back into safety; however, to have been in the self-actualized space you will recover quickly from any set-backs and begin your ascent back.

Consider the following questions as you prepare to discuss your goals with your mentor.

- Are you doing all that you believe you are capable of doing?
- Do you **want** to feel fulfilled personally and professionally?
- If yes, do you have a plan for how to get there? (or at least given it some intentional thought?)
- Are you able to enjoy the humor in situations? Laugh at yourself, or do you make jokes at that may be at the expense of others?
- Do you ask for help and guidance when you need it? (Are you truly open to being mentored?)
- Do you listen thoughtfully and open mindedly to advice when it’s given?

These questions are designed to help you understand your needs and if answered truthfully, will assist you in discussing your goals and aspirations more precisely with your mentor.



If you answered “not always”, to the last question, you may wish to revisit your intent for having a mentor. Good mentors will give you sage advice or ask difficult questions so that they have a better sense of how to assist you in meeting your goals. If you are one to ask for advice and not seriously consider the input of others, then you may not be ready for a mentor. Remember, their time is precious.

Mentor’s role in self-actualization

If your mentee is not able to articulate their needs, consider asking them the questions above to see if they can provide you with some direction as to what they may need and how you can make your time with them more meaningful. Mentoring should not be all consuming. Several touch -points a year should be sufficient, and most often initiated by the mentee. The goal is to see progress each time you touch base.

These questions are excellent conversation starters to gauge where your mentee is in terms of their won personal growth and their self-awareness. Self-actualized individuals find happiness despite the things that may be attempting to derail them. Understanding how your mentee handles set-backs, challenges, the unexpected events in life, will assist you in helping them to find that appropriate level of humor in situations of challenge and failure. This is a process, not a flicking on of a switch.

Remember that mentees need to be conscious of what their needs are, and be able to articulate them to their mentor. Mentors must be aware of what self-actualization is, or at least understanding of this higher- level need for success and happiness. At the end of the mentoring process, the ideal situation is that both individuals benefit from the peace that self-actualization can bring.