

**NDSU**

COLLEGE OF  
BUSINESS

# **BUSINESS CONNECTIONS MENTORING PROGRAM**



## **MENTORSHIP GUIDE FOR TOPICS & ACTIVITIES**

**Follow the Business Connections Program:**

**[linkedin.com/company/business-connections-ndsu-college-of-business](https://www.linkedin.com/company/business-connections-ndsu-college-of-business)**

**Instagram: @ndsubusinessconnections**

**Website: [ndsubusiness.xinspire.com](https://ndsubusiness.xinspire.com)**

**TOPICS & ACTIVITIES TO CONSIDER FOR  
MENTOR/MENTEE MEETINGS:**

**Sharing backgrounds (personal, educational, professional) pg. 3**

**Understanding Career Paths pg. 4**

**Understanding Industries & Companies pg. 4**

**Leadership Characteristics pg. 5**

**Extracurricular Involvement pg. 5**

**Cover Letter & Resume Review pg. 6**

**Identifying Internship & Full Time Job Opportunities pg. 7**

**Building a Professional Network pg. 8**

**Researching Companies for an Interview pg. 8 & 9**

**Interview Preparation pg. 10**

**Accepting or Negotiating Internship or Full Time Job Offers pg. 11**

**Transitioning to the Workplace pg. 11**

**MENTORSHIP ACTIVITY IDEAS pg. 12 & 13**

## **MENTOR/MENTEE CONVERSATION STARTERS & TOPICS**

### **Sharing backgrounds, consider topics such as:**

Mentor: Discuss your college major – how it helped you in your career and/or why you decided to change your area of focus after joining the business world.

Mentor: Discuss your career path – changes in roles, locations, responsibilities, or companies.

Mentor: Discuss things that went well in your career and lessons learned including any ethical dilemmas encountered in your career. Site an example or two. This will set-up your mentee to be thinking about the importance of ethical behavior and social responsibility.

Extracurricular activities

Where you are from, where you have lived, etc.

Hobbies

Family & Friends

### **Discussing educational background, major choice, etc.**

#### **Consider topics such as:**

What are key factors to consider when deciding a major?

How did the mentor's academic major influence his/her career path?

Mentee: Discuss classes taken thus far – what have you enjoyed or disliked?

Visit about possible internships or part-time jobs to learn more about career areas in a hands-on setting.

Mentors: Explain the benefit of talking to professionals in career fields of interest; help them locate such individuals. For example, the Business Connections website offers a way for current mentors to connect with the other mentors. On your personal profile page, use the “Find” link on the top left-hand corner, and then can “Browse” all the current mentor's profiles with a function to initiate contact.

## **Understanding Career Paths: Mentee can share their career aspirations**

### **Possible discussion topics**

Mentor: Discuss your career path

- How much went as planned and what was unexpected?
- How did you proactively advance your career?
- What career advice do you wish you had received when you were in college?

Mentor: Encourage your mentee to continue “informational interviews” during their career. Consider aspects of your role(s) that are very enjoyable and the elements that limit your enthusiasm. Encourage mentee to learn as much as possible in each future position and demonstrate to their employer their ability to work hard and achieve results.

Mentor: Articulate how skills and approaches learned and demonstrated in one place could be applied/transferred to another area (“transferable skills”).

## **Understanding Industries & Companies: Mentees can share industries and companies they’re interested in.**

### **Possible discussion topics**

#### **Mentor can provide information about:**

What are the current opportunities, challenges, and trends in your industry/ company/professional area?

Are there central locations for this industry (for example, in Fargo? Minneapolis? Elsewhere?)

What positive and negative experiences have you had in your industry?

How long have you been with your company? What is the culture like?

Do you have any tips for how to learn about a company’s culture before accepting the job?

What qualifications and expectations are required for an entry-level position in this industry/company? Versus your (mentor’s) position?

Share your experiences working with different industries and companies. Point out positive and negative aspects and items you learned or were unexpected.

### **Leadership Characteristics:**

#### **Possible discussion topics**

What steps to take to develop leadership skills.

Leadership roles the mentor held as a student or new professional.

Mentee: Describe activities you've been (or are) involved in, your role and contributions. Clarify how you contributed to shape progress and outcomes.

Mentor: Use your mentee's answers and insights to help frame responses to future interview questions and identify ways to bolster leadership experiences.

Mentor: Help mentees broaden their view of leadership.

\*\*Visit about how leadership can be demonstrated in many ways through interaction with others – not all leadership comes from being the official leader of a group, club or team.

### **Extracurricular Involvement: Mentees can share extracurricular activities they might be involved in.**

#### **Possible discussion topics**

Possible activities that might help gain exposure to the business world.

Mentor: Encourage your mentee to select extracurricular activities for a specific purpose that provides a meaningful experience, demonstrates their abilities, and supplements academic performance.

These activities can help build skills, offer opportunities to engage, develop teamwork skills, and demonstrate commitment. Advise your mentee that recruiters will look for candidates who demonstrate a broader experience beyond academics.

Mentors: Use your mentee's experiences in extracurricular activities to help frame responses to future interview questions.

### **Cover Letter & Resume Review:**

#### **Possible discussion topics**

**Resource to review:** <https://career-advising.ndsu.edu/resumes/>

#### **Assist mentee in considering these aspects:**

What does my cover letter convey about my interest in a company and the position I am applying for?

What does my resume convey about my skills, strengths, and accomplishments?

Is there anything that could be clearer?

What do you think sets apart one resume from another?

How do I modify or "tailor" my resume for specific positions?

Does the resume format conform to existing technologies that "read" or scan the resumes with emphasis on certain key words?

#### **Mentor--Provide a review of mentee's documents and consider:**

- What do the resume and/or cover letter communicate about the mentee?
- Are strengths portrayed and obvious?
- Do these documents invite questions that the mentee wants to talk more about or not?
- Are the documents succinct and focused?
- Remind them to be honest and accurate in their resume and cover letter.
- Remind them to communicate results and achievements.
- Focus on items that best demonstrate their capabilities and strengths.
- Focus on action verbs & words. Formatting, spelling, and grammar are also critical.

- Encourage them to tailor their cover letter and resume to each company and position being pursued.
- \*\*If a hiring professional in the mentor's Human Resources office has time to meet with a mentee for review of professional documents, that would be a valuable experience.

**Identifying Internship & Full Time Job Opportunities: Mentees can share past or present job or internship experiences.**

**Possible discussion topics**

When to begin an internship or full-time job search.

Ways to identify potential opportunities.

Remind mentees to use NDSU's resources to search for internships & jobs. The NDSU College of Business Career Coach in Barry Hall can assist, as well as the NDSU Career & Advising Center on main campus.

Encourage mentees to attend as many career fairs as possible. The dates of all career fairs hosted by NDSU are listed on the NDSU Career and Advising Center's website and also through the "Handshake" platform. All students should create a profile on Handshake through NDSU. Students can apply for many internships, jobs and stay up-to-date about all career events through a Handshake account. Again, all information can be found on the NDSU Career and Advising Center's website at: [career-advising.ndsu.edu](http://career-advising.ndsu.edu)

Mentor: Help your mentee to recognize the importance of understanding a company and position before sending a cover letter, resume, and participating in an interview. Help mentee to develop questions to demonstrate interest in the position and prepare examples that prove qualifications as noted in the internship or job description.

**Building a Professional Network: Mentees can share their LinkedIn profile if they have one.**

**Possible discussion topics**

Mentor: At the beginning of your career, how did you build your professional network?

Mentor: What networking techniques have proved to be most effective?

Discuss social networking etiquette and social media professionalism, especially in the workplace (for example, does your company have social media policies, etc.)

Mentor: If you are familiar with LinkedIn, provide an overview of this professional networking site. Encourage your mentee to build a LinkedIn profile with a professional focus that is simple, clean and organized. Explain the benefit of accepting only people that they know to their network versus anyone. Again, the NDSU College of Business Career Coach in Barry Hall, or the NDSU Career and Advising Center on main campus are great resources to also assist with LinkedIn profile creation.

Mentor: Encourage mentees to attend professional events to practice networking and meet new people. Communicate the value of getting to know people they meet, particularly those who have specific knowledge of the mentee's area of interest or that are in leadership positions or at jobs/companies of interest (this could include summer jobs, part-time jobs, internships, and full-time positions).

**Researching Companies for an Interview:**

**Possible discussion topics**

Techniques to research a company.

Aspects of a company that are best to research.

Benefits of spending time to research a company. Mentors can share how research made a difference in an interview or selecting a job they've held.

Mentors: Are there resources/websites you can share? Are there company profiles sites, industry resources, or professional organizations that might be helpful to your mentee?



**Consider sharing these techniques when researching a company:**

- Talk with professionals in companies and industries of interest via an “informational interview.” Other mentors in the Business Connections program can be great resources. Mentors: Use the “Find” and “Browse” function on the top left-hand side of your personal profile page of the Business Connections website. This function is specifically for mentors to browse & reach out to other mentors.
- Research on the internet – visit company and industry organization websites. Read sections such as, “About Us”, “Home”, “News”, “Our Products”, “Industries Served”, and related areas of their websites.
- Learn more about a company’s mission, integrity and social responsibility efforts. Does the company have a corporate code of conduct or other formal business conduct guidelines? Do the company values line up with the mentee’s values?
- Look for articles in the company website’s “News” or “Investor Relations” sections.
- Perform general internet searches on recent company activity, deals, mergers, earnings reports, and other news.
- Mentor: Help your mentee to reflect on their research and how it will help in an interview.

## **Interview Preparation:**

### **Possible discussion topics**

Specific interview questions that might be asked.

Mentors: What are some traditional and unusual questions you have been asked in an interview?

Preparing for competency or situational based interviews.

Types of questions a mentee should ask the employers at the end of an interview.

Questions should pertain to the job role and responsibilities, the company, or recent company news, etc.

Steps a mentee should take to follow up on an interview. For example, remind your mentee to send a thank you note (hand-written is best, but email is fine – especially when the timing is critical); be personal and professional; a “one size fits all” thank you note is not recommended.

Before jumping into a professional interview situation, a student/mentee can schedule a mock interview with either the NDSU College of Business Career Coach in Barry Hall, or at the NDSU Career & Advising Center on main campus.

Mentor: If it’s possible, consider having a Human Resources representative at your business visit with your mentee about the company’s interview process.

Mentee: Explain to your mentor your specific role and responsibilities of any jobs, internships and activities highlighted on your resume.

Mentor/Mentee discuss tips for greeting the interviewer, dress code/appearance, body language, professional language, and focus & eye contact with the interviewer(s).

Mentors: Assist mentees with self-reflecting on strengths (those items they do well and with ease) and weaknesses/development areas (those areas they should be working to improve or become more comfortable with) and how to appropriately answer related interview questions.

## **Accepting & Negotiating Internship or Full-Time Job Offers:**

### **Possible discussion topics**

How to approach requesting adjustments to an initial job offer. Mentors can share with mentees that it is okay to request adjustments to an offer. The worst outcome might be the company does not support the request. Discuss appropriate/professional way to decline an offer as to not “burn any bridges”.

Encourage your mentee to become comfortable advocating for themselves. For example, not asking someone (parent, friend, or advisor) to intervene on your behalf. This will indicate to the hiring entity an inability to self-manage responsibilities.

## **Transitioning to the Workplace:**

### **Possible discussion topics**

Mentors: What experiences stood out from your college-to-career transition?

Attributes of someone who shows success in the workplace, in general, and when they start as a new professional.

Tips or experiences to share about managing relationships with co-workers. Remind your mentee they will likely encounter difficult personalities and work situations throughout their career. Talk through examples of how to handle conflict in a healthy and professional manner.

Mentors: Share memories of adjusting to “work life” as a new professional, living on your own and how to maintain a healthy “work/life” balance.

Mentors: Share experiences that went well or maybe not so well. What happened & what did you learn? This could include interviews, presentations, negotiations, projects, interactions with colleagues or customers, etc.

Visit about professionalism in workplace communication. Talking in-person, via the phone, or professionally written emails (in full sentences) is important. Texting & instant messaging, etc., is not the most professional manner to communicate, and abbreviated messages sometimes can be negatively misinterpreted.

## **MENTORSHIP ACTIVITY IDEAS**

**Attend professional workplace meetings, presentations or a conference together:** Mentoring an employee through meetings, presentations or conferences has many advantages. Mentees may benefit from well-connected mentors in their respective fields of expertise. Attending together provides an excellent opportunity for the mentor and mentee to interact and discuss their personal opinions.

**Company Tours & Informational Materials:** Mentor or appropriate colleague can provide the mentee a detailed tour of the full organization, along with giving the mentee all promotional materials/brochures/company websites to review & research, etc. Plan to meet after the tour to answer questions and find out what stood out most to the mentee, etc.

**Job Shadowing:** Having the mentee shadow the mentor or other appropriate colleagues at the worksite is a valuable learning experience. After the job shadow, the mentee will need to reflect and ask questions of the mentor. This mentoring idea is one of the most effective methods of learning new skills and job responsibilities.

**Practice presentations or mock interviews with mentor and/or connect with the company's Human Resources Office:** In some mentoring partnerships, the mentee has a particular goal in mind, such as improving their presentation or interview skills. Having the mentee practice an upcoming academic presentation while the mentor provides constructive criticism is a beneficial mentoring exercise. Or, setting up a practice/mock interview experience with either the mentor or a colleague in the Human Resources area is also a VERY valuable mentee experience. Here they can also learn more from the HR Office about your organizational employment opportunities, policies and processes, etc. By practicing presentation and interview skills, the mentees can develop interpersonal and professional skills essential to their success at any business level.

**Reading & discussion:** The mentor and the mentee can read different articles, documents, reports or books relevant to the business field or worksite, and discuss their opinions. The

conversations that ensue throughout this learning option are important for developing the mentee's business acumen.

**Volunteering together:** Many companies provide volunteering opportunities probably through a conference, fundraisers, or other events. Mentors and mentees can learn more about each other in this setting, and it's also great for networking. Mentors and mentees may also participate in volunteering for causes that are not related to work—such as a social cause, a charity event, or a community event.

**Networking Meetings & Meetings/Lunches with Colleagues:** Mentors may help their mentees by introducing them to professionals who can help advance their future career growth. The mentor, the mentee, and a third party may all benefit from networking encounters to help the mentee build a strong professional network. Networking presents a chance to engage and learn from industry professionals. These events also allow mentees to meet other business people searching for collaboration opportunities or future interns or employees, etc. Or, just having a lunch with other colleagues from your workplace and inviting your mentee to attend. This is also a great experience for a mentee to meet others in your organization to observe company culture and ask questions in a setting outside of the worksite.

**Contact the Business Connections Program if we can be of further assistance. Thank you for being a valuable part of our program!**

**Email: [nds.businessmentor@nds.edu](mailto:nds.businessmentor@nds.edu)**