

## Mastering Mentoring 13 When to Take a Mentoring Break

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Sometimes it is a helpful strategy to create a break in the action during a mentoring series. If the two people are meeting every week or two over an extended period of time, the process may start to become a chore for one or both of the participants. This can happen for a number of reasons.

### Change in the Pattern of Work

There are natural cycles in any work setting. A relationship that called for one hour per week in March, when not much is going on, might be highly taxing during budget time in November. There can be a special project or other time-consuming issues that make the meetings difficult to conduct.

Be on the alert for these natural situations. One way to tell if it's time for a break in the action is if one party has to cancel two or three meetings in a row. You can ask the question if the two of you should create a temporary hiatus until the peak period is over.

Another way to tell if you should take a break is the body language of the other person. If you see signs of impatience or time anxiety, you can ask the question if you should schedule a break in the action.

### Repetitive Discussions

If the material you cover in a mentoring meeting sounds similar to what you have covered in the past, it may be time to take a break. Retracing steps that have been taken before gets old eventually. Be alert for conversations that seem familiar. For some topics, a reminder discussion is helpful to “set the hook deeper,” but if there are several of these, one of the participants needs to call the question.

### Running Out of Fresh Material to Discuss

Sometimes you can reach a point where all the vital material has been shared and you are struggling to think of new topics to discuss. That is a clear sign that you should create a break in the action for a while to let both parties rest up and come back later with fresh eyes.

## **Chemistry Going Away**

There is a kind of chemistry going on in any mentoring relationship. Each party needs to be gaining from the effort in order to be willing to continue. Something may have happened that changed the relationship to be less friendly.

For example, suppose the protégé has had a problem with an ethics violation. The mentor could have a difficult time because he no longer has the highest respect for the protégé. Conversely, the mentor may have made a bad judgment call in a discipline situation and the protégé found out about it.

Any mentoring relationship is based on trust and respect. If these elements have been compromised in any way, it may be a good idea to discuss taking a break.

## **Conclusion**

To be sustained, a mentor relationship must maintain its vitality. Be alert for some change in the situation so that you can suggest a different pattern of meeting to keep things fresh.

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