Mentorship is one of the most important factors ensuring student success (Lechuga, 2011). On paper, mentorship seems like an easy process: (1) identify mentor/mentee, (2) establish mentoring relationship, and (3) get career advice to land your dream job. Often, however, the process is not so straightforward and simple. Whether you are the mentor or mentee, the relationship does not usually start with a conscious decision to serve in that role. Ask yourself the following questions—Who do you go to for writing advice? When you are applying for a scholarship, who reviews your application? Do you have good connections for career success upon graduation? When you are struggling to balance school, research, and well-being, who is the first person you call? Each of these individuals are likely serving as your mentors. You probably know them from a variety of experiences, and they are likely from different backgrounds and at various career stages. Are there less experienced students in your department that come to you with these same questions? You may be serving as a mentor to them in an informal capacity.

Guidelines for Being an Effective Mentoring Partner

While every mentoring relationship looks different, you and your mentoring partner could benefit from formalizing your relationship. Once you have identified a mentor or mentee, here are some general guidelines for being an effective partner.

1. Set the goals and objectives for the program. To ensure clear and effective communication from the beginning, determine which skills should be gained from the experience, how often you will meet with your mentor, and how you will stay in touch.

2. Get to know your mentee/mentor as a unique human being. Ask him or her about passions, hobbies, etc. You can build both a strong professional and friendly relationship.

3. Lead by the example. Make sure to be always on time and well prepared before a meeting. Be professional and always act with integrity: Honesty, confidentiality, and good manners are fundamental values.

4. In the end, everything will be fine; if it is not, then it is not the end. As a mentor, share your stories of struggling (in life and academia) with your mentee, providing enough detail on how you overcame those hard times. Being a new undergraduate or graduate student can be surely one of the most challenging times in our professional life. Make sure to support your mentee during tough times.

Mentorships should always encourage both academic and personal growth. Teaching some of the leadership skills you gained in your time as a grad student (i.e., how to deliver a quick 30- to 45-second elevator speech; being intentional with the people you want to meet at a meeting; following up with your network contacts regularly; becoming involved with the different leadership opportunities available with the three Societies, etc.) will make a big difference in the professional life of your mentee.