

**Continuum of Mentor Involvement**

	Work Only “I stick to business. I teach my intern how to work well.”	Work and Some Personal “I try to help my intern become an adult as well as a worker.”	No Limits “I try to help my intern in any way I can. S/he is like a son/daughter to me.”
Career Planning			
Financial Matters			
Ethical Questions			
Personal Relationships			

Cornell University is an equal opportunity, affirmative action educator and employer.  
 Produced by Media and Technology Services at Cornell University.  
[www.mediasrv.cornell.edu](http://www.mediasrv.cornell.edu)  
 Printed on recycled paper.  
 5/01 120 GC MTS00598

# Boundaries to the Mentoring Relationship

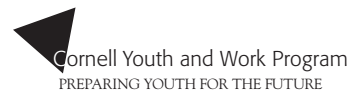
**Read two scenarios.**

**Mentor 1**

“Sharon’s parent is an alcoholic. I mean, this was a kid that dyed her hair blue and shaved it all off. The hospital told her, ‘You have the summer to grow your hair out and get a professional image,’ and lo and behold she did it. I grew up in a very similar environment that Sharon is in. So I really can relate to where she’s at in life, and there have been many nights after work I’ve stayed and talked to her out in the parking lot.

“We’ve talked about a lot of personal things in her life, because she doesn’t feel like she can do that with her parents. She calls me at home when anything is bothering her. She called me last night as a matter of fact. My husband even jokes with her: ‘What are you, our adopted kid?’ I mean, she brings her report card in to me like I’m her parent. Her own parents don’t even go to her conferences at school. I go in their place.

“Mentoring her at work has actually been very easy because I’m very open to listening to her. So it’s been a combination of both, and I think that’s why it’s worked so well. I worked really hard with her the last year and a half to take criticism. Being a teenager in high school, that’s really a challenge because they right away see that as negative, negative, negative. I’ve never given her a perfect grade because I tell her, ‘Sharon, you know it’s the criticism thing that you have a real tough time with.’ She’s getting better with that



**Mentoring Youth at Work:  
Mentor and Youth Voices**



because she sees how I may get yelled at or how I have to take criticism in my career, and I keep telling her, 'Don't take it as a negative. Look at it as a learning tool.'

"I just think the biggest thing is, you have to be willing to take time. You have to be willing to give some personal attention, off to the side of the professional. It's a fine line, too, that you have to walk between the two. It's been easy for me to do. Actually, it works better that I have closer ties."

## Mentor 2

"I tell the interns there is a difference between being a good mentor and being a family figure. Because you do have kids that come from not-great families, and so they look at you as being also a mother. And you have to teach them what your relationship is and how far you can actually take some of the responsibilities of being a good mentor. I tell them I don't want to hear that they went and got drunk last night or they got their girlfriend pregnant. Definitely you care. You show them that you care, but you need to keep it on a professional level as well and teach them that fine line. Like, I wouldn't go to my boss and say, 'Guess what, I'm pregnant.' And so you teach them the fine line about how much you share and how much you don't share and when to share.

"Because they need care. The youth are really not any different than adults. We need to know that somebody really cares about us, that my hands are going numb because of the computer and I want my co-workers to say, 'Are you okay?' But it's a really hard line to draw. You come in from a hard day at school and I'm very busy too, and for me to always have to listen to you complain before you even start work doesn't work for me, because I've got a job to do here and so do you. We start to work on asking them, 'When do you think it's appropriate? Should we take five minutes every day before you start? If you are really having a hard day at school, call me up and I'll have you come in another day.' Now we work out an agreement that works for both, but you can't always call in and say, 'I had a bad day at school,' or, 'My mother threw me out of the house last night.' And I say, 'I'm sorry but you're here to do a job and you can get fired for not showing up to do this job.' You go back to communication: 'Every day you've come in this week you've been late or you've been exhausted.' And then you sit down with him and say, 'OK, what's going on?' 'Well, I'm flunking out of school.' Then you talk about it and say, 'You know what, right now

let's put the internship on hold, focus on your school work, come back and talk about it.'

"I guess my blessing is that I've become friends with some of these younger interns, and they look at me as not only a mentor in business but as a friend. And so I have to be very clear: 'Yes, you and I are friends, but my first job is to coach you on professionalism and career. That's where the priority has to lie.'"

## Activity

(Allow five minutes.)

- ◀ Where on the continuum of mentor involvement (see wall chart or reverse side) are you comfortable in a mentoring relationship?
- ◀ Place stickers on the wall chart to indicate where you see yourself in each of the four areas: career planning, financial matters, ethical questions, personal relationships.

## What Do You Think?

(Discuss for 10 minutes.)

- ◀ Why did some of you place stickers in "Work Only?"
- ◀ What situations would call for some of you to place "No Limits" on your mentoring relationship? Why?
- ◀ When would you feel comfortable with a "Work and Some Personal" mentoring relationship? Why?
- ◀ Read Urie Bronfenbrenner's definition of a mentor.
- ◀ Mentors must make a decision personally. Decisions will vary by mentor and by youth. Workplace mentors need not see themselves as substitute parents to be good mentors.
- ◀ Mentoring and values mentoring are moral acts. People do it because they care. Mentors can help young people engage in moral issues.
- ◀ When is it appropriate to talk about values to youth?
- ◀ How do you do that without imposing your values on a youth?
- ◀ What is the proper role of a mentor in relation to parents regarding values?