

# VIRTUAL MENTORING.

## What is Virtual Mentoring?

Virtual mentoring is any type of mentoring session that takes place over the phone or video call.

As a result of the Covid-19 global pandemic, many mentoring sessions had to transition to the online space along with various aspects of our daily lives. The pandemic not only impacted how mentoring sessions were carried out, but also how mentors were trained, how team meetings were to be

held and even the promotion of mentoring programs. This transition required a high level of creativity and adaptability as professionals were forced to reconceptualize how mentoring sessions were to be conducted.

It has been discovered that virtual mentoring can be just as impactful, as long as it's well planned, managed, and both the mentor and mentee establish a partnership that values open communication.

## What are the Benefits of Virtual Mentoring?

### Unrestricted by location

The virtual space makes it possible to create connections worldwide. Mentors and mentees who may have never crossed paths in person have the opportunity to maintain mentoring relationships even if living in different time zones. Mentees are able to expand their pool of potential mentors to form global connections. This global freedom has the potential to enhance mentoring relationships.

### Multiple mentors

Mentoring online offers the flexibility that mentoring in person does not. Mentoring in person with multiple mentors requires extensive scheduling and planning in order to ensure the logistics of the mentoring program are understood. Online, less planning is involved in the process, removing some of the barriers mentees and mentors face when working with multiple mentors.

### **More time efficient**

Mentoring online removes the time required to travel when meeting in person. This extra time can lead to a plethora of benefits including more people willing to act as mentors, longer mentoring sessions, and reallocating time to effectively prepare for sessions and programs in order to exceed original expectations. This can further lead to generating more meaningful and impactful relationships.

### **Diversity and Inclusion**

Face to face meetings in person can be a difficult and stressful experience for some. Mentoring in an online format may remove the social and behavioural pressure that some may encounter when mentoring in person. Mentoring online increases access and inclusion and has the potential to bring together a diverse range of folks from various locations and backgrounds. Another benefit as it relates to accessibility is that fact that creating space for folks who feel social and behavioural pressure can encourage them to work on these skills in the online setting.

## **What are the Challenges of Virtual Mentoring?**

### **Inaccessible for some**

Although mentoring online has the potential to be more accessible for some, it can also be limiting for others. If mentoring programs are solely offered online, then folks with little/no internet access or the technology required to participate in an online mentorship, then they could face exclusion.

### **Feelings of isolation, lack of community and connection**

Many types of mentoring rely on a sense of community, if that be a group mentoring program or a community of mentors or even a community of mentees, creating this same sense of community online is difficult to achieve.

### **Technical difficulties**

The online space can act as a barrier when it comes to communication. A large aspect of communication is being able to read body language and provide non-verbal or verbal feedback in real time. Technology can be limiting this way because many times the only part of the body that is shown online is a person's face, if they choose to turn on their camera or if they have a camera at all (virtual mentoring can also be carried out through a phone call). This is also important to consider when it comes to non-verbal or verbal feedback. If there is no camera the mentor cannot give non-verbal feedback and even if there is a camera, sometimes reactions are delayed. Additionally, when providing verbal feedback such as "I see" or "I understand", as good as modern technology is, there may be some audio discrepancies which could disrupt the speaker's flow when sharing. Further, with virtual mentoring there is always the possibility of technical difficulties either freezing, ending calls or platforms being down for maintenance.

## Overcoming Challenges

### Making connections

- If possible, encourage folks to be on a video call and turn their camera on.
- Implement icebreakers! A great resource to check out is [gatheround.com](https://gatheround.com)
- Check in. After the first couple of sessions you should make sure that you are setting aside time to check in with your mentees. This will encourage a more comfortable environment.

### Creating a sense of community

- Create space for discussion. A way to do this could be to schedule monthly meetings with groups of mentees (or mentors) to connect and reflect. This could also be done through an informal chat (Facebook group, Discord, BAND group, etc.).
- Schedule events to celebrate milestones such as a beginning of the program networking event, a middle of the program connect and an end of the program appreciation event. Events could also be scheduled around major holidays or other significant dates such as the beginning of a new year, end of the semester or first day of summer.

### Trouble-shooting technical difficulties

- Prepare/check beforehand that all systems, applications and wifi connections are functioning properly.
- Communicate and share any concerns that may arise when it comes to technology and what actions are to take place if technology fails. This could be a phone call or follow up email.

Adapted from [\*Virtual Mentoring: How to Make It Work\*](#) created by [Guider](#).