

BNHRA

BUFFALO NIAGARA HUMAN RESOURCES ASSOCIATION

Mentoring Toolkit

A guide for mentors and mentees in the BNHRA program

2026 Edition

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Questions? Contact the College Relations Director at college@bnhra.org

NAVIGATION

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SECTION I

Program Guidelines

By applying to the program, every participant agrees to the following. These aren't onerous — they're the minimum structure that makes the relationship useful for both people.

01 Make contact within one week.

Students must reach out to their matched mentor within one week of receiving the match notification. Don't sit on it.

02 One hour a month, minimum.

Both parties commit to at least one hour per month for the duration of the program year. Face-to-face is preferred when practical, but phone and video calls count.

03 Send feedback after each meeting.

Brief, confidential notes to the College Relations Director after each meeting help us improve the program year over year. A few sentences is fine.

04 Notify us if the relationship ends.

If the mentoring relationship dissolves for any reason, please contact the College Relations Director. There may be other participants waiting for a match.

SECTION II

Why Mentoring Works

A mentoring relationship gives students something a classroom can't replicate: a working practitioner who will be honest with them. Textbooks explain theory. Mentors explain what Tuesday at 3pm actually looks like when an employee files a complaint and the manager is the problem.

For Students

- ✓ See the HR profession through the eyes of someone actively doing the work
- ✓ Get a practitioner's read on how textbook concepts play out in real workplaces
- ✓ Learn corporate culture and professional norms before you're in your first job
- ✓ Build a genuine professional relationship inside the WNY HR community
- ✓ Identify what you actually want from a career in HR — and what you don't
- ✓ Gain potential access to internship and job opportunities through your mentor's network

For Mentors

- ✓ Invest directly in the next generation of HR professionals
- ✓ Spot talented early-career candidates before they hit the job market
- ✓ Reconnect with why you got into the field in the first place
- ✓ Develop your own coaching and communication skills
- ✓ Give something back to a profession that's given you a career

SECTION III

Essentials of a Strong Partnership

A mentoring relationship works when both people want it to. Willingness matters more than credentials. Five things, specifically, make the difference between a relationship that actually helps and one that just fills a calendar slot.

Respect

The student recognizes the mentor's experience and expertise. The mentor recognizes the student's progress and potential. Neither takes the other for granted.

Trust

Built through consistent follow-through, availability, and honesty. You don't manufacture trust — you show up reliably until it exists.

Partnership

You're professional partners, not a teacher and a student. Miscommunication happens. Address it directly and move on.

Realistic Expectations

The mentor gives honest feedback — including about what the student needs to do differently. The student accepts that career development doesn't happen in a semester.

Time

The one hour per month minimum is a floor, not a target. Show up prepared. Don't cancel unless you genuinely have to.

SECTION IV

Getting Started: Your First Meetings

Initial Contact

Students make the first move. Within one week of receiving your match notification, call your mentor to introduce yourself and schedule your first meeting. If you're not sure what to say: keep it brief, state who you are, mention you're in the BNHRA mentoring program, and ask when they're available.

First Meeting

Choose a quiet setting — no distractions, no one listening over your shoulder. Use this meeting to establish the basics: how often you'll meet, preferred contact methods, what confidentiality means for both of you, and what you each hope to get out of the relationship.

Student

- ✓ Explain your interest in HR and where you are in your program
- ✓ Share your expectations for the mentoring relationship
- ✓ Ask questions — this is what the relationship is for
- ✓ Set dates for the next two or three meetings before you leave

Mentor

- ✓ Talk through your current role and how you got there
- ✓ Share what you wish you'd known when you were starting out
- ✓ Ask the student about their goals and interests
- ✓ Be honest about your time constraints from day one

Second Meeting

Focus on goals. Have the student identify short-term objectives (this semester, this year) and longer-term ones (career direction, credential plans, skill gaps). The mentor helps calibrate these against reality — not to deflate ambition, but to make the path concrete.

Keeping the Momentum

At every meeting after the second: review what's changed since last time, share what's been tried, set a clear next step before you end the meeting. Relationships that drift usually drift because neither person leaves a meeting with a specific action.

Activity Ideas

- Mentor reviews the student's resume and cover letter with honest feedback
- Student shadows the mentor during a typical workday
- Mentor walks through a real employee relations or compliance situation (anonymized)
- Student attends a BNHRA monthly meeting with the mentor

- Mentor and student practice interviewing — student as candidate, mentor as interviewer
- Mentor brings student to a professional development workshop or conference
- Student attends a staff meeting at the mentor's organization
- Mentor discusses business and professional etiquette in their industry
- Both attend a BNHRA networking event together

SECTION V

How to Be an Effective Mentee

Your mentor is giving you their time. The more you put into each meeting, the more you'll get out of it. Show up prepared. Come with questions. Don't wait for your mentor to carry the relationship.

You're also responsible for your own career. A mentor can give you perspective and open doors, but they can't want your goals more than you do.

The five traits that make mentees worth mentoring:

Eagerness to learn	Not just enthusiasm — actual curiosity. You ask follow-up questions. You read what your mentor recommends. You try things between meetings.
Ownership	You take responsibility for your career path. Your mentor advises; you decide. Don't outsource your goals.
Patience	Career development is not a sprint. Some of the most important conversations you have with your mentor will only make sense in hindsight.
Willingness to take risks	Try the project that's a stretch. Apply for the role that feels like a reach. Your mentor's job is partly to push you past what feels safe.
Positive attitude	Optimism isn't naivety. It's the belief that you can figure things out — which is exactly what HR requires.

SECTION VI

How to Be an Effective Mentor

Good mentoring is coaching, not lecturing. Your job is not to hand your mentee a career blueprint — it's to help them develop their own. That means asking good questions as often as you give advice, and being honest even when honest is uncomfortable.

What effective mentors do:

- ✓ Committed to your student's growth, not just your own schedule
- ✓ Honest about your time limits from the beginning — and reliable within them
- ✓ Willing to share experiences that didn't go well, not just the highlights
- ✓ Patient enough to let the student develop at their own pace
- ✓ Comfortable giving direct feedback on behavior, performance, and direction
- ✓ Invested in helping the student set goals and build action plans
- ✓ Good at listening without jumping to fix things
- ✓ Confident enough to encourage risk-taking and support the outcome either way

The three stages of mentoring:

0 Laying the Foundation

1 The first phase is about establishing mutual understanding. Both people are figuring out each other's communication styles, expectations, and boundaries. Focus here on building trust, not on solving anything yet.

0 Helping the Student Grow

2 This is the most active phase. You're coaching the student to explore options, take risks, try new strategies. Suggest reading, projects, events, or experiences that will stretch them. Give praise generously when it's earned — it builds the foundation for harder conversations later.

0 Moving Toward Independence

3 A good mentoring relationship eventually makes itself less necessary. The student becomes more self-directed, less reliant on your guidance for every decision. This is the goal, not a sign the relationship has failed.

SECTION VII

Mentoring Skills

Communication

The most common reason mentoring relationships stall is communication — specifically, the absence of it. Both parties have to be willing to say what's working and what isn't. That requires two things: the ability to give feedback clearly, and the ability to listen without getting defensive.

Listening

There are two modes of listening. Passive listening means you're present and absorbing but not verbally responding — useful when someone needs to vent or think out loud. Active listening involves verbal feedback: asking clarifying questions, paraphrasing to confirm understanding, and signaling that you're engaged.

Active listening is a skill, not a personality trait. It gets better with deliberate practice.

Active listening checklist:

- ✓ Stop talking when the other person is speaking
- ✓ Ask questions to clarify, not to redirect
- ✓ Resist the urge to solve the problem before they finish describing it
- ✓ Pay attention to how something is said, not just what is said
- ✓ Don't pre-plan your response while the other person is still talking
- ✓ Notice emotional undercurrents — what's being implied, not just stated

Giving Feedback

Feedback is the most direct form of help you can give a mentee. It only works when it's specific, timely, and focused on behavior rather than character. "That answer in the mock interview was vague and didn't address the actual question" is useful. "You need to be more confident" is not.

Effective feedback is:

- ✓ **Specific:** Describe the exact behavior, not a generalization.
- ✓ **Timely:** Given close to the event, while both people remember the details.
- ✓ **Direct:** Said to the person, not around them.
- ✓ **Non-judgmental:** About what happened, not about who they are.
- ✓ **Actionable:** Points toward something the person can actually change.
- ✓ **Motivated by helpfulness:** If you're giving feedback to feel superior, don't.

SECTION VIII

Frequently Asked Questions

Do I have to be a BNHRA member to participate?

Yes. Both the mentor and mentee must hold active BNHRA membership. Student membership is available at a reduced rate for enrolled students.

Do I have to be a current student?

Mentees must be enrolled part-time or full-time in a degree program, carrying at least six credit hours per term, with coursework that demonstrates a focus on Human Resources. Recent graduates are not eligible.

How does matching work?

The College Relations Director matches applicants based on HR interests, location, and availability. The more specific you are on your application, the better the match. Matches are not guaranteed in all cases.

Do we have to meet in person?

No. Phone, video calls, and email all count. Face-to-face is encouraged when practical because it tends to be the most productive, but the program accommodates different schedules and circumstances.

Is there a required meeting format or agenda?

No required agenda — but both parties should come prepared with something to discuss. Meetings that drift because neither person prepared tend to feel like a waste of time.

What do I do if I haven't heard from my mentor/mentee in a long time?

Contact the College Relations Director. Don't just wait. If the relationship has stalled, the sooner it's addressed the better.

Can I end the relationship if it's not working?

Yes, but give it at least three meetings before you decide it's not working. Mentoring relationships take time to find their footing. If you've done that and it's still not working, contact the College Relations Director.

Can I continue the relationship after the program year ends?

Absolutely. BNHRA encourages it. The program provides the structure to get started — what you do after is up to both of you.

Can I participate in future program years?

Yes. At the end of each program year, participants are asked whether they'd like to continue with their current match, be re-matched, or step away from the program.

How do I give feedback to BNHRA about the program?

A brief email to the College Relations Director after each meeting is ideal. All feedback is confidential. The College Relations Director will also reach out periodically to check in.

SECTION IX

Summary & Contact

The BNHRA Mentoring Program pairs HR students with working practitioners for one reason: the things that make someone good at this profession are learned from people, not textbooks. If you're a mentor, your experience is the resource. If you're a mentee, your questions are the work.

The program runs on a minimum of one hour per month and a willingness to be honest. Everything else follows from those two things.

College Relations Director	Questions about the program, matching, or participation: college@bnhra.org bnhra.org/Student_Mentorship_Program
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Acknowledgments

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