

## Avoid Negative Mentoring Relationships

Negative mentoring experiences reduce job satisfaction and increase turnover intentions and stress (Eby and Allen 2002). Dysfunctional mentoring relationships occur when needs are not being met, costs outweigh the benefits, and distress occurs within one or both partners (Lunnsford et al. 2013). Be aware of these potential negative behaviors. Following the research-based tips throughout the toolkit should minimize negative mentoring experiences, but a mentoring relationship should be severed if it becomes primarily negative and the costs outweigh the benefits.

From the perspective of the mentee, the most common problems include (Clark et al. 2000):

- Mentor unavailability
- Exploitation
- Feeling unable to meet the mentor's expectations
- Negative personalities and behaviors

From the perspective of the mentor, common problems include (Eby et al. 2008):

- Mentee underperformance
- Interpersonal problems
- Destructive relational patterns

For mentors, mentoring can also be costly. There may be psychosocial costs, such as exhaustion with the demands of mentoring, frustration with mentees who deal poorly with feedback, and grief when a mentoring relationship ends. There may also be career costs, such as reputational costs if the mentee underperforms, potential productivity costs, and the risk of violating the mentee's confidentiality (Lunnsford et al. 2013).

Using a content analysis of mentors' and mentees' experiences, Eby et al. (2000) identified five factors of negative mentoring. One or more of these factors may be present in negative mentoring relationships.

### **Five Factors of Negative Mentoring (Eby et al. 2000)**

*Poor match within the dyad*: different values, work-styles, personalities

*Distancing behavior*: neglect (no feedback), self-absorption (e.g., actions were self-serving)

*Manipulative behavior*: uses position of authority negatively (e.g., taking credit)

*Lack of mentor expertise*: interpersonal incompetency (e.g., poor communication skills) or technical incompetency (e.g., unfamiliar with latest research methods and conventions)

*General dysfunctionality*: bad attitudes or personal problems that interfered with work

Use the tips throughout this toolkit to avoid negative mentoring experiences. Perhaps most importantly, respectfully terminate negative mentoring relationships since they can be so detrimental.