

STAYING CONNECTED

Something that we've heard from both students and mentors is that it is easy to get connected, but harder to STAY CONNECTED. Here are some ideas – both tactics and attitudes - that may help.

- Set up a Regular Schedule for communicating. Even if it's just a quick email or phone call for an update. At the very least try to establish a follow-up at the end of each meeting, even if it's a couple of months out.
- "Ping" each other every once in a while just to check in.
- Practice using new tools – Text, LinkedIn, learn how to use social media better (you may have to teach your mentor these skills). Students – practice using email regularly!
- Be an active listener – take notes and ask lots of questions.
- Be flexible – Understand and respect the demands on each other's time. Get comfortable with different perspectives and approaches (don't force them to adopt yours).
- Make it social/fun – Have a "hook" or something fun to look forward to. This may be harder to do for a "distant" mentor, but challenge yourself to think of ideas. Send each other a humorous article or even a funny (business-oriented!) YouTube video to talk about. Just talking about "non-work" topics can help – sports, movies, hobbies, your family or pet, a recent trip.
- Stay current – Read about your mentor's company or industry in the business press. Talk about current business or campus news.
- Be honest – About what you want to get out of this relationship and what your expectations and constraints are.
- Be "consciously competent" – Make an investment in the relationship and take an active interest in its success. Commit to learning all you can and follow-through on your commitments.
- Don't expect your mentor to do all the "heavy lifting." Be proactive.
- Be patient and keep your sense of humor! Building a relationship takes time. Everyone makes mistakes or has a bad day. Be understanding and apologize if the situation calls for it.
- Respect each other's time and priorities.
- Be respectful that your mentor has set aside time for you. This is a great chance to develop good professional courtesies and habits for the working world.
- Be culturally sensitive and respect each other's privacy. Be aware and respectful of different backgrounds and social norms. Always respect each other's personal boundaries and let the PMP office know if you have any concerns or questions.

Challenges of Virtual or "Distance"-Mentoring

For students who have non-local mentors, there may be added challenges to staying in touch and creating a bond with your mentor. Through creative use of technology, distance mentoring partners have succeeded in building relationships across distance, time zones and cultures. Many PMP students have had successful relationships with a mentor that they have never met, or only met once. In fact, creating a bond with a distant mentor is great experience for working with colleagues in an increasingly global workplace. Some potential challenges and solutions to virtual mentoring partnerships are highlighted below.

1. Lack of visual cues. Up to 55 percent of our communication is dependent on what we observe and display in facial expressions, nonverbal behaviors and physical appearance.
 - Solutions: Use video-conferencing technology or skype, instead of the phone for at least 1 or your meetings. Listen to the tone of voice, as well as what is being said. Ask questions or for clarification if something is confusing to you.

2. Constraints of time zones. Finding a convenient time to talk may be more challenging for mentor-mentee pairs that are separated by multiple time zones.
 - Solutions: When you set expectations for communication, be clear about times that may be good or bad (i.e., early morning, dinner time, etc) for you.
3. Staying focused and committed. Although this is a challenge of any partnership, staying motivated and creating a strong connection is even more critical for distant pairs.
 - Solutions: Setting a regular communication schedule can be particularly beneficial. Use e-mail as a connection between conversations. Respond promptly to emails to create continuity and flow. Keep a journal that documents progress and that you can share and use as a spring-board for the next discussion.
4. E-mail and Phone Limitations. Good etiquette and communication skills can help to minimize the constraints of these forms of communication.
 - Solutions: Make your emails CLEAR and SUCCINCT – no more than 1 screen (25 lines). Use complete sentences, short paragraphs and bullet points to list options/ideas. PROOFREAD your messages – forward and backward. Use a clear Subject Line. Save sensitive content for voice-to-voice meeting. Be sensitive to issues of confidentiality.

Phone Etiquette

Even for students with local mentors, much of your communication may be via phone. Here are some suggestions for improving your phone etiquette and communication skills. Use these skills whenever you have a phone interview, as well.

- Posture: Sitting erect with your head up is ideal posture for both listening and speaking on the phone. Thirty percent of the energy in your voice is lost in a phone transmission. Upright posture supports better breathing, which supports a more animated voice – which encourages active learning.
- Hear: When someone says, “I hear you,” they usually mean that they really “get” what you are saying. Conversation between mentoring partners requires this intense and focused effort to really hear what the other means – beyond the words.
- Open: It’s a good idea to start the conversation by confirming that it is still a good time for both partners to talk. This courtesy underscores your commitment to focused communication. Be willing to reschedule if your partner sounds rushed or unavailable.
- Note Taking: Writing as you listen focuses your visual attention and documents your conversation for later reference. You can use the Mentoring Journal Template included in the “Tips and Tools” section of this Handbook.
- Eliminate Distractions: Find a comfortable space that is free from distractions. Resist the temptation to multitask during a conversation with your mentor. Listening efficiency drops dramatically even with small distractions.

Other Ways to Connect

As our community of students and mentors grows and becomes more far-flung, a variety of social media can provide virtual connections and allow us to share information, insights, and connect to each other’s networks.

Please join and contribute to, the PMP LinkedIn Group and Facebook Page, and check them for updates on PMP news and events.