

Cultivating Supervisor Relationships

The quality of the supervisor-intern relationship is – by far – the most critical element for success, professional gain and personal satisfaction. Internships happen one-on-one. There's often an inherent expectation that the supervisor is mostly responsible for the quality of the relationship. Then again, the inherent purpose of the arrangement is mostly to benefit the intern. The fact of the matter is that – by its very nature - a mutually rewarding experience requires equal contributions. Here are a few things to consider about what you can do to do your part.

Make the best first impression. Be it your interview, your follow through or your first week on the job, these are the most important opportunities to set the tone for the relationship and foundation for your experience.

Do your part. Refer to your conduct and performance guide and tips about interpersonal communication. It's simple. Do your best. You'll gain greater satisfaction and benefit from your work, earn your supervisor's trust and help the organization achieve its goals.

Size them up. Make a conscious effort to observe their management style, personality traits, and daily demands. Everyone's different. Chances are, your supervisor may not be perfect. Make up the difference.

Empathize. It's possible that they may get too busy at times to work as closely with you as they should. They may also lack the mentoring capabilities you probably want and need. You may not be able to change that behavior, but it is within your control to cultivate mentoring relationships, for example, to fill that void.

Take the lead. Take steps to nurture the quality of the relationship and attempt to build a relationship with him or her. How? By asking intelligent questions, showing genuine interest in the work your supervisor is doing, and telling your supervisor that you're willing and able to take on additional tasks.

Fear Not. Don't be afraid of your boss. Some supervisors can be intimidating without even realizing it, but you may notice all too well that you're feeling intimidated. Don't sell yourself short. Keep in mind how valuable your performance is to make their job easier. Don't hesitate if you need to ask for help, no matter how busy they may be.

Give honest feedback. Just as you'd hope your supervisor would provide meaningful feedback, so too must you. Like any relationship, yours is about two-way communication, so keep the channels open.

Maintain your boundaries. Most students get to make a lot of friends. You don't need another. What you need is a boss and a mentor. So even if your supervisor tries to develop a friendly rapport, bear in mind that business relationships are about business.

Say thanks for recognition. If your supervisor tells you that you're good at something or have done an excellent job on a project, thank him or her and take it to heart. They will gain their own sense of satisfaction knowing how good they've made you feel, and will be inclined to do more of it.