

# Supervisor Apprentice Program Mentor Guide

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## PROGRAM GUIDE



## Program Overview

In the past decade, the traditional workplace has shifted dramatically to become mobile, global, and constantly evolving. To stay competitive, an individual's success depends on how well they pursue the goal of increasing their contribution to an organization. Having a mentor can be an instrumental tool in achieving the goal of becoming a meaningful contributor to the USPS.

Mentoring will be conducted simultaneously during the six-month duration of the Supervisor Apprenticeship Program. Mentoring offers access to wise advice and guidance from a mentor who can help employees learn how to handle various situations, enhance their development, and avoid pitfalls that can cause mistakes, ruin a career, or delay a promotion. The Supervisor Apprenticeship Program mentor offers participants the opportunity to have access to the knowledge, skills, and best practices of more experienced colleagues. Mentors gain the inner satisfaction of sharing their experiences and institutional knowledge to shape the next USPS leaders.

## Mentor Requirements

Mentors are selected by the Postmaster, MCSO, or Plant Manager.

**Mentors must complete the following two courses in the learning portal for professional development in the area of mentorship:**

- Fostering Mentoring Relationships.
- Building Career Development Programs and Succession Planning.

Training Development has established requirements for mentors participating in the Supervisor Apprenticeship Program. Additional requirements may be added as appropriate.

<p><b>USPS-Specific</b></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Demonstrates consistent, superior performance in a supervisory or managerial position.</li> <li>• Has considerable experience and knowledge of the supervisor’s role and responsibilities.</li> <li>• Demonstrates follow-through and commitment.</li> <li>• Willing to commit to the responsibilities of mentoring.</li> <li>• Solid institutional knowledge of the Postal Service.</li> </ul>
<p><b>Role Model</b></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Demonstrates high-performance in current role.</li> <li>• Demonstrates initiative and intellectual curiosity.</li> <li>• Exemplifies firm values and conducts themselves professionally and ethically.</li> <li>• Demonstrates “big-picture” thinking.</li> <li>• Exhibits empathy and understanding.</li> </ul>
<p><b>Development Partner</b></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Willing to assist in building the skills and knowledge of others by advising on the development of specific skills.</li> <li>• Able to act as a sounding board.</li> <li>• Confident enough to challenge apprentice to move beyond comfort level.</li> <li>• Open to and able to help apprentice explore potential career options and development opportunities.</li> </ul>
<p><b>Broker for Resources</b></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Recognizes that they may not always have the answer.</li> <li>• Suggests resources that could assist the apprentice.</li> <li>• Identifies other individuals that the apprentice could network with.</li> </ul>
<p><b>Mentor “Citizenship”</b></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Leverages available learning opportunities to improve mentoring abilities.</li> <li>• Maintains privacy/confidentiality of conversations but recognizes when professional help is needed.</li> <li>• Supports and provides inputs to improve the mentoring relationship.</li> </ul>

## Mentor Responsibilities

The mentor is the apprentice's sounding board, source of support, and a resource as they continue to grow and prepare for the EAS-17 supervisor role. As a mentor, they may also recommend the development of certain areas that may help support the supervisor apprentice's career goals.

Mentors must:

- Listen actively and encourage open communication.
- Maintain ongoing twice-per-month contact with apprentice.
- Create a safe, risk-taking environment.
- Refrain from passing judgment on the apprentices' ideas, questions, and actions.
- Schedule meetings twice-per-month on your calendar for tracking.
- Respect the apprentice's right to make their own decisions.
- Treat the apprentice with respect and honesty.

Mentoring begins with an initial meeting. This meeting can take place face-to-face, through Zoom, or by phone. The mentor should discuss with the apprentice any specific preferences. Subsequent meetings/calls are to be conducted twice-per-month. Apprentices should share their experiences and take the lead on what they want the meeting to cover, with prompting by the mentor when necessary.

Before the first meeting, the mentor provides the pre-meeting document to the apprentice to complete to help structure discussions.

The successful mentor-apprentice relationship displays the following qualities:

- Lasts for a specific period or can continue indefinitely.
- Takes place outside of a line manager-employee relationship.
- Is career-focused or focused on professional development that may be outside of the apprentice's area of work.
- Focuses on engaging in dialogue by asking questions and listening.
- Focuses on helping others solve problems and make decisions.

The mentoring relationship is a combination of **listening**, **coaching**, and **mentoring**. There are distinct differences between each of them. Below are characteristics of each.

**Listening:**

- Being attentive.
- Hearing both content and feeling.
- Paying attention to non-verbal communication.
- Withholding judgment.
- Allowing others to discover their own solutions.
- Being curious.
- Being okay with not having all the answers.

**Coaching:**

- An interactive discussion.
- Involves the belief that the individual has the answers to their own problem within them.
- Comprised of asking thought-provoking questions to help with self-discovery.
- Seeks to improve an individuals' performance in a particular area.
- Concentrates on identified issues with clear goals to develop specific skills and behaviors.
- Sets a time-bound relationship defined to meet specific goals and objectives.

**Mentoring:**

- A mutual agreement to help someone to learn or develop faster than they may have done alone.
- Focused on facilitating a culture of growth and development within the organization.
- Concentrating on the apprentice's development needs and goals based on their aspirations.
- Builds a long-term relationship dependent upon the participants' performance through various stages.

When mentoring, remember that meetings are not complaint sessions, but rather an opportunity to explore solutions through guided questions. Listen for themes that may reoccur as meetings are held over time. The apprentice is responsible for their own growth, mentors are there as a sounding board, guide, and resource.

### **Ethics of Mentoring**

Good mentoring has a strong ethical component. The issue of confidentiality may turn out to be difficult if, for example, the apprentice reveals behavior that is not aligned with postal policy or is illegal. Additionally, the apprentice may disclose that they do not feel like they are being properly trained by their coach. Make sure that the terms of the relationship are clear at the start and there will be fewer problems later.

### **Apprentice Responsibilities**

Mentors serve as a sounding board, guide, and resource and may also recommend development of certain areas that may help support the supervisor apprentice's career goals.

Before the first meeting, the mentor provides the apprentice pre-meeting document to the supervisor apprentice to complete to help structure discussions.

The initial meeting may be via face-to-face, Zoom, or phone call. Subsequent meetings/calls are to be conducted weekly. Meetings are not complaint sessions, but rather an opportunity to explore solutions.

The apprentice should consider sharing what went well for the week, opportunities for improvement, and any unanswered questions on the weekly activities.

This process provides the mentor with insight into areas where the apprentice needs encouragement, information, and constructive feedback.

The apprentice is responsible for taking advantage of every learning opportunity available. Apprentices must communicate with their assigned mentors as prescribed; identify areas to improve or discuss and be open to feedback to learn and grow.



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# Supervisor Apprentice Program

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## Mentor Forms



## Mentor Conversation Guide

In order to build a strong foundation for a mentoring relationship, it is critical to build trust and clearly establish expectations at the beginning of the partnership.

Use the following questions to guide your first mentoring conversation, which will help you get to know one another and establish mutual expectations and goals. Both parties should record responses for future reference.

### Personal and Professional Background

- What is your educational and professional background (including how long you have been with the organization)?
- What are your greatest strengths? Greatest weaknesses?
- What are your short-term career goals? Long-term career goals?

### Expectations

- What do you see as my role as your mentor?
- What ground rules should we set (e.g., openness, candor)?
- What topics are off limits (e.g., performance reviews, personal lives)?
- What do you think will be challenging about this relationship?
- Are there any topics of urgent interests?
- What topics do you want to cover in our conversations?
- What do you hope to gain from this relationship?
- How do you prefer to communicate between meetings?
- When is the best time for you to meet twice-per-month?

## RELATIONSHIP PROJECT PLAN

Build an effective mentoring relationship, build trust with your mentor, define an action plan, and then meet consistently twice-per-month. The initial meetings are critical in setting a strong foundation on which to build the relationship. Document information that should be covered before, during, and after these initial meetings as identified on this chart.

Action Items	Target Date	Completion Date
<b>Receive Match and Establish Goals and Expectations</b>	Prior to first meeting	
Identify your expectations for the mentoring relationship.		
Define your objectives and goals of the mentoring relationship.		
<b>Hold Introductory Meeting Face-to-Face</b>	First meeting	
Clarify roles and responsibilities.		
Share each of your objectives, goals, and expectations of the mentoring.		
Discuss action items to be completed before the next meeting.		
<b>Create an Action Plan</b>	Second meeting	
Discuss your strengths and identify short- and long-term development needs.		
Discuss action items to be completed before the next meeting.		
<b>Act on and Revise the Action Plan</b>	Subsequent meetings	
Review progress on action items determined at the end of the last meeting.		
Discuss items of interest, current challenges, recent successes, etc.		
Discuss action items to be completed before the next meeting.		

## APPRENTICE PRE-MEETING DOCUMENTS

Apprentices must use the form below to establish expectations of the relationship prior to meeting with their mentor. Be sure that the apprentice brings this information with them to their initial meeting to discuss their responses with their mentor. It is the apprentice's responsibility to keep the form and review or update it, as necessary.

QUESTIONS TO CONSIDER	NOTES
Where do you hope to be in five years?	
What do you hope to gain from this relationship?	
What role do you expect your mentor to play?	
Are there any ground rules you would like to set (e.g., openness, and candor)?	
What are your greatest strengths?	
What are your greatest weaknesses?	
How would you like to go about achieving your learning goals?	

<p><b>What items would you like to discuss in these meetings?</b></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li><input type="checkbox"/> Managing a work-life balance.</li> <li><input type="checkbox"/> The organization's vision and strategy.</li> <li><input type="checkbox"/> Competency development.</li> <li><input type="checkbox"/> Short-term career goals and values.</li> <li><input type="checkbox"/> Long-term career goals and values.</li> <li><input type="checkbox"/> Career-pathing within the organization.</li> <li><input type="checkbox"/> Educational opportunities.</li> <li><input type="checkbox"/> Other: _____</li> </ul>
<p><b>Are there any topics of urgent interests?</b></p>	
<p><b>Are any topics off limits?</b></p>	
<p><b>What do you think will be challenging about this relationship?</b></p>	
<p><b>What would you like the regular meeting schedule to be (length, time, frequency, and format)?</b></p>	
<p><b>What criteria would you like to use to evaluate the success of the relationship?</b></p>	
<p><b>Have you been an acting supervisor in the past? How long? Why do you want to be a supervisor?</b></p>	

**EVALUATE THE SUCCESS OF THE MENTOR-APPRENTICE RELATIONSHIP**

To ensure that the mentoring relationship remains mutually beneficial, use the form below to facilitate a conversation at the **2-month**, **4-month** and **6-month** mark of your mentorship relationship:

QUESTIONS TO ASK	NOTES
Are you following-up on action items coming out of each meeting?	
What do you like most about your mentoring relationship?	
What do you like least about your mentoring relationship?	
Are you learning from this relationship?	
What skills are you building as a result of this relationship?	
What could be done differently to help you get more out of this relationship?	
Are goals and objectives you set at the beginning of the relationship being met?	

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## Frequently Asked Questions

**How long is the Supervisor Apprentice Program?**

- The Supervisor Apprentice Program requires a six-month commitment.

**Will the mentors need to be at a certain EAS level? For example, EAS-20 and above?**

- Criteria for mentors are based on specific qualities, experience, and performance.

**Is there an interviewing process for mentors? Will the prospective mentors respond to KSAs?**

- Potential mentors will be selected by the Postmaster, MCSO, or Plant Manager.
- The selecting officials will select or decline mentor candidates based on the program and their manager's recommendation.
- The final decision is left to the Postmaster, MCSO, or Plant Manager's discretion.

**Will the apprentice have a way to provide feedback or report if their mentor is not fulfilling their responsibilities? Vice Versa**

- Yes, within the mentoring program guide, there are evaluation forms that can be completed by the apprentice and/or the mentor.
- Evaluation forms are expected to be sent to the Manager, Employee Development at designated time periods.

**How often are mentors and apprentices expected to meet?**

- Mentors and apprentices are expected to meet at least twice per month.

**What happens if the mentor leaves? Is a new one assigned?**

- Mentors are selected by the Postmaster, MCSO, or Plant Manager, who will be responsible for a replacement if a mentor leaves prior to their assigned apprentice's outplacement from the program.