

OFFICE OF THE GENERAL COUNSEL

MEMORANDUM GC 07-10 Revised

August 15, 2007

TO: All Division Heads, Regional Directors, Officers-in-Charge,
and Resident Officers

FROM: Ronald Meisburg, General Counsel

SUBJECT: Revisions to the General Counsel Mentoring Program's Policy
Guidelines and Best Practices Guide

On March 9, 2006, Memorandum GC 06-03 launched the Mentoring Program for all General Counsel Divisions and Offices. Your experiences with the program were captured in your responses to the Mentoring Program Surveys issued on September 16, 2006 under Memorandum GC 06-08.

The Management Diversity Committee has reviewed your suggestions and identified some additional policies and best practices for the program. Those ideas are incorporated in the attached amended Policy Guidelines and Best Practices Guide. In addition, the Committee with the assistance of the Office of Employee Development has created the attached pamphlet entitled "*Mentoring Matters – Guidelines and Tips for Successful Mentoring: A Handbook for Mentors and Mentees.*"

Thank you again for your cooperation with this important initiative.

/s/
R.M.

cc: NLRBU

Attachments

MEMORANDUM GC 07-10 Revised

MENTORING POLICY

It is the General Counsel's policy that all field offices and GC-side headquarters offices have effective mentoring programs for all nonsupervisory employees who are new to the Agency and, where appropriate, for employees who are new to their respective offices or new to their particular positions. Effective mentoring programs are an asset to the Agency and are of value as a recruitment and retention tool. Such programs present an opportunity for our offices to ensure that the staff members receive the support that they need to enter, or transition into, new positions. Mentoring programs also provide an excellent opportunity for offices to identify those employees who are most effective at developing independence in mentees and in assisting them to become acculturated to the office and to the Agency. **The mentoring program supplements, but does not substitute for, orientation and training programs provided in the office.**

Guidelines for the nationwide mentoring program are provided below. Flexibility, within those guidelines, is permitted so that mentoring programs appropriate for each office are retained or developed. Offices seeking to develop, improve, or augment mentoring programs may use the report from the Mentoring Committee and the Best Practices Guide as resources. In addition, the *Guidelines and Tips for Mentors and Mentees* pamphlet is being provided as a resource.

Policy Guidelines

1. Mentors will be provided to all nonsupervisory employees who are new to the Agency and, where appropriate, for employees who are new to their offices or new to their positions. Mentors should also be assigned Bridge Program participants, with the preference being to find mentors who are graduates of the Bridge Program. Since the Compliance Officer is the only person in an office to hold the position, a nationwide mentoring program will be established pairing a senior Compliance Officer in one office with a mentee in another to help, not with office acculturation, but act as a resource and sounding board for the mentee. It is also recommended, but left to the discretion of the Regional Director, that transferees be assigned mentors to assist in acclimating to the office culture, in socializing with the staff, and in becoming familiar with internal office procedures. Mentors for coops and interns are not mandatory because of their short period of employment with the Agency.
2. Initially, the office Mentoring Program managers should meet with the mentors and mentees to explain the program's objective. At such meetings, managers should distinguish the mentoring program from other training programs and from supervisory duties. The office Mentoring Program managers should distribute copies of the Policy Guidelines, *Best Practices Guide*, and *Guidelines and Tips for Mentors and Mentees* pamphlet to both the mentor and mentee at the beginning of the mentoring relationship.

3. The mentors should assist the mentees in becoming familiar with office practices. Mentors serve as resources to assist the mentees to understand their new responsibilities and the office culture. Mentors assist mentees to assimilate into the office, and serve as a technical resource to provide general advice or suggestions. Mentors should not serve in a supervisory capacity for their mentee(s) nor provide feedback about performance.
4. Mentors should possess these qualities: excellent technical expertise, work habits, interpersonal skills, communication skills, and knowledge of office policies and procedures. However, the assignment of a mentor does not preclude management from assigning other employees to help train the new employee on particular assignments. Supervisors should not be selected as mentors; therefore, a backup mentor should be considered in situations where the mentor is temporarily assigned to a supervisory position for an extended period of time.
5. Each office should select a local Mentoring Program manager(s) who will remain responsible for the design and implementation of programs in individual offices and will decide in what manner mentors are assigned, consistent with these policy guidelines. They will make mentoring assignments.
6. Supervisors remain the primary source of instruction, guidance, and appraisal for employees. Any performance issues should be addressed by the supervisor and not by the mentor.
7. The mentees should have access to a mentor for as long as the program provides, with an initial six month minimum.
8. An annual evaluation of the office program will be conducted by management and adjustments made to the program, as appropriate. Oversight of the program is management's responsibility.
9. Annually, a status report on each office's mentoring program will be provided to the Division Heads identifying the managers responsible for the program and describing the best practices as well as pitfalls observed in its program. In turn, each Division Head shall complete a report for the Associate General Counsel in the Division of Operations-Management. Annually, the Division Heads' report will be compiled into a final report for the General Counsel. In evaluating the overall success of the Mentoring Program, feedback on the program from mentors and mentees will be considered.
10. A Best Practices Report on the Agency's mentoring programs will be made available to all Agency offices. It will be updated periodically.

APPENDIX A

Best Practices Guide

The following are some suggestions and best practices gleaned from the surveys submitted regarding existing GC-side mentoring programs. We will be providing updated information and additional best practices as they become available.

1. When employees are new to an office, the office should try to ensure that they all are afforded the same comfort level within the office and are exposed to a broad range of work experiences. Pairing new employees with those who are more seasoned is an excellent way to orient new hires to Agency work and new employees to office personnel and policies.
2. A good mentoring program provides new employees an opportunity to speak openly with an experienced coworker concerning his/her casework on a daily basis. At the same time, the mentor gains valuable experience. Mentors should **not** report concerns about a mentee's performance to supervisors; rather, they should encourage the mentee to speak with their supervisors about their performance. Feedback about performance should be handled only by supervisors.
3. When selecting mentors, it is important to focus on the prospective mentors' skills, knowledge, experience, willingness to serve, and positive personality traits. For some mentees, a single mentor might work better whereas with other mentees rotating mentors might be preferable.
4. During the first six months, each mentor/mentee pair will meet together at least weekly for the purpose of discussing office practice and procedure, specific case assignments and tasks, analyzing case-related experiences in the previous week and/or recommendations for future practice. After the initial 6-month period, the pair may meet less frequently and at the initiation of either party. For example, the mentor may periodically talk with the mentee to ascertain whether any undisclosed issues need airing. Likewise, the mentee may seek advice from the mentor whenever questions arise about a work assignment, office policy or procedure. Nothing described in this paragraph will affect management's ability to change mentor/mentee pairings at any time in the assignment period.
5. Those offices that create and develop expectations for their mentoring program are most successful in fully integrating new employees into the office "culture" and orienting new employees to the office, as well as to Agency policies. The expectations stated by offices with successful mentoring programs are to:
 - a. Provide technical expertise and assistance;
 - b. "Gently communicate" guidance to mentees;

- c. Afford mentees an opportunity to ask questions informally;
- d. Offer mentees exposure to different styles and skills;
- e. Enable mentees to develop own strengths; and
- f. Enhance employee career development.

6. Depending on the seniority and size of the staff, as well as the needs of the office, certain temporary additional task-specific training assignments can be made. In these assignments, the training lasts for the duration of a particular job task, e.g., processing of R cases or reviewing the investigation files of an unfair labor practice charge. In such assignments, the new employee is assigned to a more experienced employee with excellent skills in a particular area.

7. Minorities and women should be encouraged to serve as mentors but should be selected based on the same criteria as nonminority mentors. Diversity should be only one consideration in the pairing of mentors and mentees.

8. It is recommended that the Mentoring Program manager(s) hold an initial meeting with the mentors and mentees to introduce them to the program. Copies of the Policy Guidelines, *Best Practices Guide*, and *Guidelines and Tips for Mentors and Mentees* pamphlet should be distributed to the participants at that time. Thereafter, periodic meetings should be conducted by the Mentoring Program manager(s) with mentors and mentees so that managers can assess the effectiveness of the program and make any changes, as appropriate.

9. Managers should be sensitive to the need for positive interaction between the mentor and mentee and should consider reassignment when appropriate.

10. The Office should provide information to new employees about training available through the Office of Employee Development (OED), as well as Agency-wide training.

11. At the conclusion of each fiscal year, all participants in the mentoring program, including mentors, mentees, and Mentoring Program managers, should be surveyed on a voluntary basis for feedback concerning their experiences in the program. Written surveys should solicit demographic information regarding each participant's gender, race and/or ethnic identity, age range and disability status. The survey should clearly state that individual responses will be treated confidentially. To ensure that demographic identifiers cannot be associated with any particular survey response, all completed surveys should be faxed to the Agency's Office of Equal Employment Opportunity at (202) 273-4473. The submission of a voluntary survey by the office Mentoring Program manager(s) does not replace the annual report due to the Division Head.

National Labor Relations Board
MENTORING PROGRAM
FOR
GENERAL COUNSEL NONSUPERVISORY EMPLOYEES

Guidelines and Tips
For
Successful Mentoring:
A Handbook for Mentors and Mentees

Prepared by the General Counsel Management Diversity Committee
and the Office of Employee Development

Guidelines and Tips
for
Successful Mentoring:
A Handbook for Mentors and Mentees

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1. Overview

It is the General Counsel's policy that all field offices and General Counsel Headquarters offices have effective mentoring programs for all nonsupervisory employees who are new to the Agency, and where appropriate, for employees who are new to their respective offices or new to their particular positions.

An effective mentoring program for employees new to their office or position presents an opportunity for the General Counsel's offices to ensure that these staff members receive the support that they need to enter or to transition into a new office and/or position.

The goal of this Mentoring Program is to help new employees become acquainted with the office and/or position culture, processes, protocol and procedures.

Often, employees new to an office or position are confronted with a variety of concerns including:

- Meeting new peers and managers;
- Learning different work styles, processes, protocol and procedures;
- Handling new performance expectations; and
- Transitioning into the NLRB culture, as well as into the culture of a particular office.

Any new employee facing these challenges can learn from a more experienced employee. As one new employee put it, "There's real value in drawing on the experiences of someone who's already gone through what you're going through."

This guide provides practical suggestions on how to get the most out of the mentoring relationship. A few sections are geared specifically to either the mentor or the one being mentored ("mentee" will be used hereafter), but both parties will benefit by reading all of the sections.

2. How Mentoring Works

A mentor acts primarily as a resource providing insight into the protocol, processes and procedures to an employee new to the office and/or position. A mentor's main job is to listen, to offer his or her own experiences (good or bad), and to share what's been learned from them.

For reasons discussed below, we believe that mentoring by an experienced nonsupervisory employee provides a valuable source of support for the new employees. It offers another perspective to help them transition into the office's culture, protocol, processes, and procedures.

The Mentee's Supervisor

A mentor is not intended to perform the role of the mentee's supervisor. For example, a mentor does not:

- instruct the mentee on how to complete specific assignments;
- oversee, review, or evaluate the mentee's day-to-day work; or
- give specific guidance on cases, briefs, or other technical products.

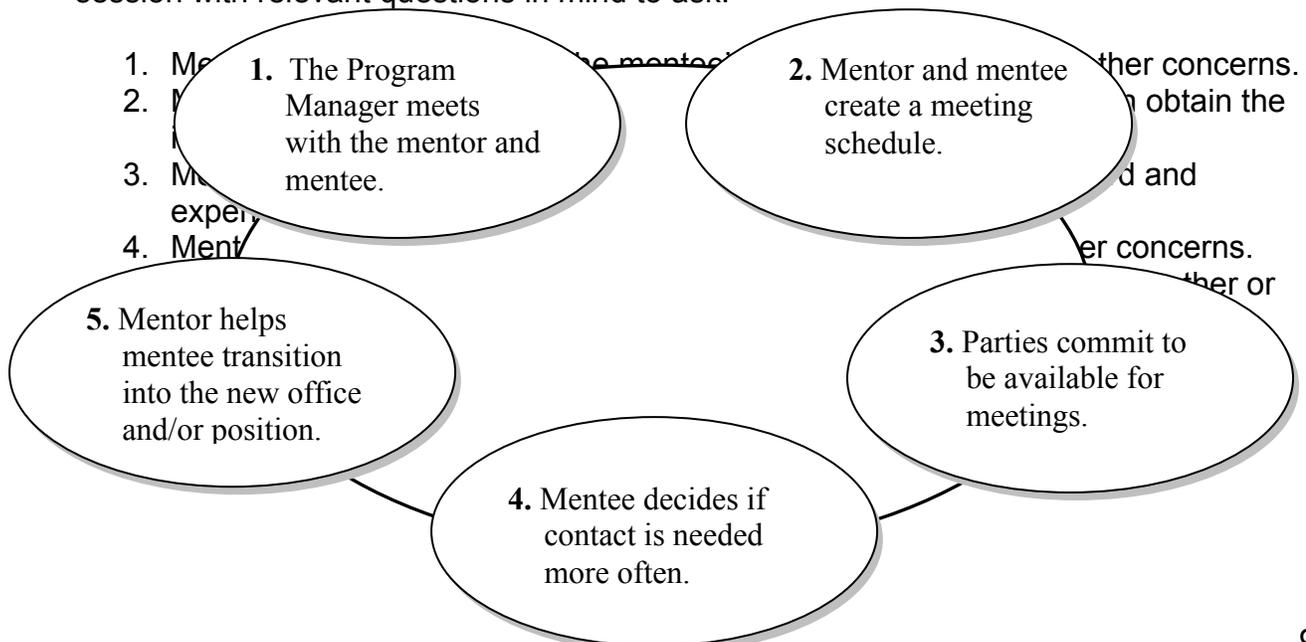
We realize that many mentees will receive valuable guidance from their direct supervisor or manager. While this is also a form of mentoring and all good supervisors mentor their new employees to a degree, there are some benefits to seeking advice from an experienced outside source.

Today's managers and supervisors are often heavily tasked and may be focused on helping the new employee accomplish technical tasks. An experienced nonsupervisory employee serving as a mentor can help the new employee understand the professional and social culture of the office.

In addition, most new employees may feel more comfortable being mentored by a person who does not prepare their performance appraisal. The mentee may feel reluctant to bring up areas of personal concerns or lack of confidence in handling certain office situations.

The Mentoring Process

This shows the process flow of a typical mentoring session. Note that the initiative belongs to both the mentor and the mentee initially, and each should arrive at the first session with relevant questions in mind to ask.



3. Preparing for the First Meeting

A. Mentor

Before your first meeting, think about:

- 1) your biggest challenges as a new employee, and
- 2) what would have assisted your transition when you were new to the office and/or position

These ideas should be written down as tentative discussion topics that you'll bring to your first meeting.

At this point, don't worry too much about the exact items to be discussed. In your first meeting with your mentee, these items will provide a starting point for discussion. Once you start talking, you may want to add to or adjust your discussion topics with your mentee.

If you are struggling with ideas, it may be helpful to think in terms of daily office interactions, which can be expanded further during early meetings with your mentee. Topics should not be overly technical; for example, "how to handle an investigation"; these should be handled by the mentee's supervisor. (An exception to this: if the mentee is new to working with the public or finds speaking with unknown persons a huge personal stumbling block.)

The topics you identify should open the discussion and the mentee's questions should help you to clarify potential areas to be addressed.

You may also want to get help from the Office Mentoring Program Manager in suggesting areas of potential discussion for your particular mentee. This is entirely your option; it's not required.

B. Mentee

Before your first meeting, think about:

- 1) the concerns you have about the new office and/or position and
- 2) your priority as to the least and most important issues about the new office and/or position which you desire to discuss with the mentor.

You do not have to list every concern or issue you have for your first meeting. The list is simply a starting point. It is suggested that you consider this as an opportunity for you to discuss openly your questions, concerns, and issues with an experienced nonsupervisory employee who will not appraise or evaluate your performance.

You may wish to allow the mentor to initiate the discussion. The mentor's discussion of his/her background may provide answers to some of your concerns or issues. However, do not hesitate to ask the mentor to focus the discussion toward concerns or issues important to you. As you start your discussion, other topics will arise.

Listed below are suggested topics for your initial discussions.

4. The First Meeting

Before your first mentoring meeting, the Office Mentoring Program Manager will meet with both parties to discuss the program, to distribute these guidelines and tips and the General Counsel's Policy and Best Practices Guidelines, and to answer any initial questions. After this meeting, the mentor and mentee may want to note scheduling preferences and general questions you have for each other.

You will want to allow 1 to 1-1/2 hours for the first meeting – enough time to have an introductory discussion to assist in the development of the mentoring relationship.

To begin, we recommend spending time getting to know each other if you have not had much personal contact up to this point. For example, it is helpful to start by each of you sharing your career experience:

- How did you come to work for the NLRB?
- What type of work is most/least enjoyable to you?
- Has anyone ever mentored you; and if so, how?

Take time to share backgrounds, interests and challenges in blending into a new office.

Second, you will want to clarify expectations for the relationship in three areas:

- mentoring topics;
- scheduling meetings,
- confidentiality and boundaries: what is and isn't appropriate for mentoring discussions

Mentoring Topics

Mentors and mentees should share their lists of draft discussion topics and together hone these further. Mentees can consider asking questions such as:

- Can you give me an example of whom I should go to for advice in a given situation?
- What areas of the city will be a challenge at night?
- Is there a way I can measure how well I am doing?
- Is there an Agency organization chart?
- Will I be contacted by other offices within the Agency?

Once the topics are clarified, brainstorm for which topics the mentee should seek information from others and which should be discussed with the mentor.

Note: It may not be possible to finish this discussion at the first meeting. Thus, it is important to have a meeting at least once a week early in the mentoring relationship. But, sometimes having an interim period to reflect on the items discussed makes it easier to come up with new questions, as well as allows the mentee to explore the suggested ideas.

Scheduling Meetings

Also at your first meeting, discuss a schedule for when and how you will meet. We ask that mentors meet with their mentees at least twice a month, perhaps for an hour. It is strongly suggested that the pair meet more often (weekly) during the early months, while rapport is being established.

Within these guidelines, each pair sets their own schedule of meetings.

After initial ideas have been discussed and questions are well on the way to being answered, there may be times when you meet less often. The mentor may simply stop by and check in and see how things are going for the mentee. After the formal six-month mentoring program ends, a once-a-month meeting or check-in is recommended to keep the mentoring relationship alive.

Other points on meetings to keep in mind:

- Face-to-face meetings are most effective, but, if a mentee is mentored by someone who is not on site, email or telephone communications can be used.
- Plan to commit to a six-month partnership. It takes a while to establish the trust and rapport for truly effective mentoring.
- Discuss how to handle things if one person needs to reschedule or if the mentor should prove to be unavailable much of the time. (Tip – if one party needs to cancel a meeting, he or she should immediately suggest an alternate time. Do not let things drift by saying, “I will get back to you when things calm down here.”)

- Hold each other accountable! For example, the mentor can say, “If I start to miss meetings or I am too busy, bring it to my attention, so that we can discuss ways to improve the situation.”

Confidentiality and Boundaries: What Is and Is not Appropriate for Mentoring Discussions

The mentoring relationship is confidential. The mentor will not report back to the mentee’s supervisor or to any other NLRB employee concerning what was discussed during mentoring sessions. The mentee should also respect the confidentiality of any information shared by the mentor. However, if either party mentions information about sexual harassment; fraud, waste, and abuse; or another situation requiring action, it is appropriate to take these concerns to management.

It should be clearly understood by both parties that mentoring is geared toward assisting the mentee to successfully adapt to the new office or position.

The mentor should not attempt to provide counseling or advice if the mentee is experiencing marital or family difficulties, financial pressures, depression, or other psychological problems. All mentors will have referral information to share with their mentees if the situation warrants. (See Section 9: Additional Resources, for NLRB’s Employee Assistance Program Hotline.)

The mentor must remember that an employee new to his or her position may have performance concerns. If the mentor - believes that the mentee may need assistance in performing the duties of his or her position, the mentor should suggest to the mentee that the mentee meet with the mentee’s supervisor and discuss the mentee’s performance.

In turn, mentees should avoid asking mentors to review and/or comment on the quality of the mentee’s work product or performance.

If a mentoring session starts to become a discussion of personal problems, mentors may want to say something like the following:

“I am glad you felt comfortable enough to mention _____. But as we discussed in our first meeting, there are some areas that simply are not appropriate for me to help you with and I believe this is one of those areas. I want to refer you to _____, so you can begin to get the assistance you need.”

or

“I do not wish to engage in office gossip.”

The same format and resources can be used by the mentee if the situation is reversed.

5. Making Mentoring Effective

Future meetings will be more effective if after the first meeting, the mentee takes the initiative to bring in additional specific topics to reflect on and discuss. This provides a focus for the meeting rather than a vague, "How's it going?" from the mentor.

Mentors may want to ask their mentees to email questions or topics they would like to discuss before each meeting. This will give the mentor time to think about strategies or resources to share.

Consider a Variety of Mentoring Activities

Although dialogue is probably the most common form of mentoring, consider other activities that would keep up momentum and help the mentee learn:

- **Discussions with others.** In addition to talking with you, could your mentee benefit by talking to another NLRB employee who has particular experience in an area of interest to the mentee? For example, there may be someone known for his/her outstanding relationship with the mentee's supervisor.
- **Shadowing.** If you are active in Agency programs, i.e. Outreach, Training Tuesdays, or Special Emphasis Programs, invite your mentee to shadow you while you make a presentation or to join you at a preparatory meeting or luncheon with the permission of the mentee's supervisor.

6. Tips for Success for Mentors and Mentees

Tips for Mentors

- Be flexible and ready to discuss situations which may appear to be common knowledge. Realize that your mentee may have a different personality style and may approach situations differently than you would.
- Do not try to fix work performance issues with the mentee, for example, by intervening with the supervisor or reviewing and editing work products.
- Keep appointments and respond to emails as soon as possible. Check in between appointments.
- Build in time at the end of each meeting for the mentee to summarize how he or she is adapting to the office or new position.

Tips for Mentees

- Attend your meetings. The more initiative you take, the more you will get out of the relationship.

- Ask for necessary information to understand the office protocol, processes and procedures— try to have specific questions. Ask your mentor: Where you can get answers to your questions, if she or he is unable to provide answers.
- Keep your Mentoring Program Manager informed of your satisfaction with the mentoring relationship.
- Keep a log of the topics discussed in each meeting and develop a running list of questions for future sessions.
- If you have suggestions on how to improve the mentoring process, share them with your mentor and the Mentoring Program Manager.

Tips for Both

- Set aside time to meet.
- Maintain a regular meeting schedule. Do not change times unless absolutely necessary.
- Stay focused on office processes, procedures and protocol during your meetings so the discussion doesn't wander off track.
- Control interruptions during meetings.
- Between meetings, check in with each other. This helps maintain momentum and provides ongoing support for the mentee.

7. Listening and Questioning Skills (Mentors)

Avoid the temptation to do all the talking. Encourage the mentee to share his or her questions. Your first task is to listen. Your second task is to ask clarifying questions that help mentees understand the office and/or position processes, protocol and procedures.

You might also wish to share some of your own experiences. What do you wish someone had shared with you about office processes, procedures and protocol when you began your first position or were new to the office?

The mentor will want to remember that his or her mentee may bring his or her previous employment experiences with him/her. Mentors should appreciate that the mentee may be of a different generation that does not see the workplace exactly the way the mentor might have when he or she began his/her career. The goal in mentoring is to develop the mentee's awareness of the office procedures, protocol and processes, not to critique individual work ethics.

Other Suggestions

- Listen without distractions. It goes without saying that the mentor cannot listen effectively while reading emails, answering phone calls, drafting papers, etc.

- Try to keep the discussion interactive. If you have war stories to share, make sure they are relevant to the issue at hand. Remember the value is in sharing not only the experience, but what you learned from it.
- Mentors should not be talking most of the time. Because you are the more experienced employee, your mentee may defer to you and be reluctant to cut you off. Be aware of how the airtime is used.

8. Ending the Relationship

As stated earlier, we expect both parties to commit to a six-month mentoring relationship.

We ask that mentor and mentee together evaluate the effectiveness of the relationship at three months. Is it still working for both parties? Are any adjustments needed, for example, in the way that meetings are handled? At this time, the Office Mentoring Program Manager will meet with the mentor and mentee, separately, as well as jointly, to assess the success of the mentoring relationship.

Either party may contact the Office Mentoring Program Manager for assistance if mentoring is not working well because of availability problems, personality differences, or other factors. The Office Mentoring Program Manager can help the mentee find another mentor.

At the end of the six-month relationship, there will also be a confidential survey form for each party to independently evaluate the effectiveness of the mentoring program. This is strictly for the General Counsel Management Diversity Committee's use to improve the program.

9. Additional Resources

GC Memorandum 06-03 – Mentoring Program Policy and Guidelines

Employee Assistance Program – refer individuals to the NLRB EAP Hotline, 1-800-222-0364

As part of getting to know each other, mentors and mentees may want to learn about and compare their individual communication styles. For a quick look at personality differences, click on either one of these web sites: www.personalitytype.com or <http://keirse.com>.