

**EPFL**

# Alumni

## Mentees Guidebook

Suggestions for topics to discuss with your mentor

Tips for giving feedback

## GETTING TO KNOW EACH OTHER

- Where are you from originally?
- What is your family like?
- Why did you decide to study at EPFL? Why in this field?
- Who was/were your favorite teacher/s at EPFL and why?
- What do you do for fun?
- What are your core values?
- What motivates you to work hard?
- What is your favorite thing about your career?
- What is your proudest accomplishment?
- What is your favorite game or sport to watch and play?
- Where do you see yourself in five years?
- What is the most daring thing you have ever done?
- What is your favorite movie?
- Is your glass half full or half empty?

## ESTABLISHING EXPECTATIONS

- Have you been a mentor in the past? What was that experience like?
- What inspired you to be a mentor in the first place?
- What expectations do you have for time and communication boundaries?
- What can I do to make this a positive experience for you?
- How much time are you willing to invest per month?

## EDUCATION/TRAINING

- I am considering doing a PhD: what are the pros? The cons? What types of professional opportunities does it give access to? How to choose a thesis topic? How to apply for a PhD? Is the topic more important than the teacher or the other way round?
- I am considering doing a MBA/similar management degree: what are the pros? The cons? What types of professional opportunities does it give access to? Which schools would you recommend and why?
- I do not know which minor/specialization to choose for next year: how important is this choice? What would be the real impact if I choose “wrong” for the continuation of my career? Which one would you recommend and why?
- Do you think your education prepared you for your job?
- What is the best degree to get for this field?
- Should I have a broad profile (take general courses) or should I specialize myself in a topic?

## YOUR MENTOR'S CAREER PATH / EXPERIENCE

- How did you get to where you are today?
- Did you always want to work in this field?
- How did you land your current role?
- Why do you do what you do?
- What surprised you about this line of work that you did not anticipate?
- What skills are the most important for your job?
- What do you know now that you wish you knew when you started?
- What mistakes have you made?
- What does a typical week in your work look like?
- What is the best part of your job?
- What do you wish you could change about your job?
- How many hours do you usually work for a week?
- Do you have a lot of autonomy in your position?
- What do you spend most of your time at work doing?
- What is the one thing you would have done differently?
- What factors do you consider most often when planning for the future?
- Was there ever a role you applied for and landed, but were not 100% qualified to do? How did you proceed?
- Can you tell me about a time when you had a difficult boss? How did you handle the situation?
- How has your mindset and values changed over the years? What caused these changes?
- How did you develop the skill of speaking so engagingly in front of groups?
- What have you done that has helped advance your career?
- How do you balance work and personal life? What boundaries do you set?
- I am interested in switching toward a more managerial or strategic position. What would be your advice to succeed in this transition?
- What sort of projects are you working on right now?
- Do you have a lot of variety in your day?
- What is the company culture like?
- What kind of difficulties are related to being a woman into STEM disciplines? What advice would you give to overcome these challenges?
- How do you let your boss know that you do not need to be micromanaged?
- What language have you found to be the most effective when it comes to handling conflict?
- What practices can you recommend for dealing with nervousness when speaking to groups?
- How did you learn to embrace risk-taking?

## YOUR ORIENTATION

- What domains/type of positions could be interesting for me?
- How to choose between an academic/research career or a career in a company?
- What are the pros/cons of working in: a start-up, a SME, a multinational, a consulting firm?
- Which factors should I consider to help me choose a career path (team, manager, salary, work environment, location, interest, etc.)? Which ones do you think are the most important?

## CONNECTIONS/NETWORK

- What is your biggest advice for networking in this field?
- What is necessary to forge and maintain a strong relationship?
- Are there any people you think I should reach out to?
- What connections have you made in your life that helped you?
- How to use social networks (e.g. LinkedIn) to network?

## JOB HUNTING / JOB MARKET

- Can you give me a feedback on my CV and cover letter?
- Could we do a mock interview for this position/internship I am really interested in?
- How to best prepare for that kind of interview?
- How do you build a strong LinkedIn profile? Is it something you feel comfortable to help me with?
- How do you think the industry will be different in five years?
- Where can I find information about: companies, key actors, industry?
- What has changed the most about the field since you started?
- What are your top resources for this industry?
- What skills should someone new to the field develop to be successful in the future?
- Can we role play this or that kind of situation?

## EXPATRIATION / INTERNATIONAL EXPERIENCE

- What is the application process to get a permit to work in Switzerland for non-UE candidates? Can you guide me through it?
- How to best orchestrate experience internationally (for travel or work)?
- What should I consider before deciding to work/study abroad?
- What has been the impact on your career of working abroad? Did it boost your career? In contrast, what would be the possible obstacles/challenges to consider?
- What are your tips for a successful return to work in Switzerland after an experience abroad?

## ENTREPRENEURSHIP/START-UP

- I am considering launching a start-up. What should I know before I start?
- What are the main steps in creating a start-up?
- How do you build a business plan? A SWOT analysis?
- How to evaluate if there is a real need on the market?
- What are the best practices for fundraising and searching for investors?
- Can we train my pitch together?
- How to be successful in the customers prospection and acquisition?
- How to search and select suppliers?

## ASK FOR FEEDBACK / SELF-AWARENESS

- What do I do now that I can and should do better?
- How do you think others perceive me?
- Where do you see my strengths? my weaknesses?
- What do you see as some of my blind spots and how can I improve?
- What new skills do I need to move ahead?
- What are some of the behaviors or attitudes that might hold me back?
- What have you learned about me that surprised you?

## AT THE END OF THE PROGRAM

- In what ways have you seen me grow the most?
- What do you think I still need to work on?

## GIVING FEEDBACK

**Objective:** support you in preparing relevant feedback, knowing what to put in and how to build the message.

Definition of the feedback: Feedback is an exchange between 2 people on a past event with a view to positively and constructively influencing the future. We recognize two types of feedback, the Recognition feedback, positive and the Development feedback, constructive.

The posture to hold is a matter of giving and receiving feedback as if one were offering or receiving a gift, as if we wanted to show the other something he is not yet aware of:

- “I” formula: when I formulate my sentence with the “I”, I speak about my viewpoint of the situation
- Respectful: be careful and respectful in your wording
- Valuing: it is not the value of the person as such that you question, it is their behavior
- Relevant and useful: it is of interest only if the other learns something that can make him/her evolve or strengthen his self-confidence
- Sincere-authentic: there is no use to receive unauthentic feedback!
- Positive intention: Ask yourself what is your intention in giving this feedback. If your intention is not positive, avoid giving it
- Be positive and solution oriented, replace “but” by “and”
- Be trustful: trust yourself, and trust that your mentor is capable of progressing
- Be courageous: Feedback must be given quickly after the event has taken place, otherwise it no longer has an impact

To prepare a feedback, answer the following questions:

- Which situation am I referring to?
- What did I observe?
- What was the impact on me / on others? How did I interpret it?
- What are the elements I would like to see continuing or to change?
- What is my proposal to move forward?

And then use a feedback model, like

Steps:	Example
1. Situation	“When I saw you... When I heard you ... When you gave me...”
2. Observation	“I observed...”
3. Impact, interpretation	“This had the following impact on me...”, “I felt...”
4. >Make a pause<	
5. Reaction/ questioning	“Do you agree? Can you tell me about it? ...”
6. Way forward (positive or constructive)	“I would like this to continue / to change ....” “What do you think?” “What’s your view?”