



Australian Government

Workforce
Australia



**LEADING TO
UNLOCK POTENTIAL
Toolkit**

A resource for mentors and mentees

Career
Revive



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Introduction

While the number of female managers are on the rise, data shows that fewer females ascend to executive roles. Many women have found that mentors, role models and sponsors can be beneficial in helping them to navigate the ambiguity that comes with starting a new role or taking on a new career challenge.

TOOLKIT PURPOSE

This toolkit is a useful resource for both mentors and mentees to establish productive relationships.

Insights and observations have been drawn from the Career Revive Initiative and better practice research. Career Revive is an Australian Government Program aimed at supporting Australian businesses to attract and retain skilled women following a career break.

The toolkit is divided into the following parts:

- Definitions and key principles
- Tools for (a) mentors and (b) mentees - a set of activities for stages of a mentoring relationship
- A deep dive into principles – key information and resources for mentors and mentees



The definition of coaching is "unlocking a person's potential to maximise their own performance."

SIR JOHN WHITMORE, EXECUTIVE COACH

What and why?

WHAT IS A COACH?

A coach is an experienced specialist who supports their coachee to achieve a specific goal, to improve performance or navigate a new organisation.

Coaching returners

In the context of returners, a coach is someone who supports an individual to navigate their return to the workplace, providing guidance and social supports.

WHAT IS A MENTOR?

A mentor is someone who supports their mentee's continuous development. The relationship is driven by the mentee, and in return the mentor acts as a guide to help their mentee access and grow their network and navigate the organisation's system.

Mentoring returners

In the context of returners, a mentor is generally a dedicated supporter as a returner (the mentee) makes their transition back to the workplace. The mentor's job may be to support the returner to navigate the organisation and industry systems, and to build confidence and connections.

WHAT ARE THE BENEFITS?

For women returning to work or making a career transition, having a mentor can make a big difference. Three of the biggest benefits include:

1. **BUILDING A NETWORK:** Giving returners access to professional networks that may not have been available before increases their visibility, opens doors to more opportunity and access to new and different people.
2. **GAINING CONFIDENCE:** Leveraging the support a mentor provides can increase a returner's confidence through gaining broader skills, meeting new and different people and receiving personalised and constructive feedback.
3. **ARTICULATING AMBITION:** A mentor relationship builds a safe space for returners to openly discuss their ambitions and receive nuanced support and guidance to realise these.



[Mentoring is about] building self-confidence. It gives you the confidence that you belong at the table and that you have a right to be there.

INSIGHTS FROM HARVARD BUSINESS REVIEW ARTICLE: 'THE MEN WHO MENTOR WOMEN', INTERVIEWS BY ANNA MARIE VALERIO AND KATINA B. SAWYER

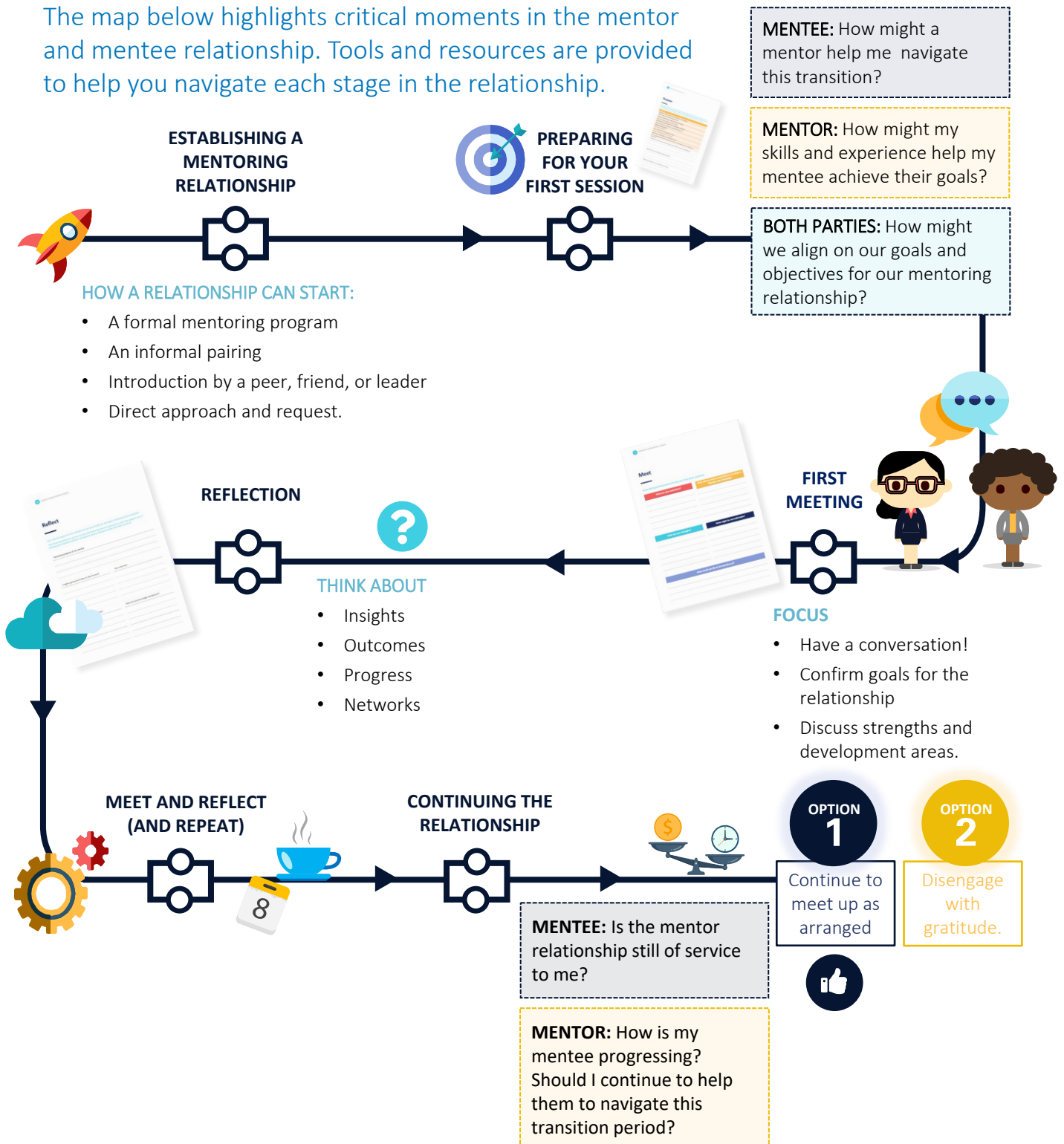
The three principles

An effective mentoring relationship requires both the mentor and mentee to understand themselves, build effective relationships and focus on outcomes of the mentoring relationship. The foundations for a solid mentor and mentee relationship are outlined below.

KNOW YOURSELF	BUILD THE RELATIONSHIP	FOCUS ON OUTCOMES
5 TOP TIPS	5 TOP TIPS	5 TOP TIPS
<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Notice your feelings and reactions e.g. "I'm really stressed and have 1 million things on my list." 2. Be aware of your own beliefs and how they might impact a conversation. 3. Recognise your own motivation and style, and how this may differ from others. 4. Be present in the conversation. Clear all distractions and put devices away. 5. Be aware of when you're talking too much or too little. As a guide for mentors, speak 10% of the time and allow your mentee to take up 90% of the space. 	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. As a mentee, understand and express emotions if you feel them. For mentors, pick up and validate these i.e. "it sounds like you are feeling overwhelmed, and that's ok". 2. Hold space for silence. Don't feel confronted or awkward about it. 3. Give each other time and space to think about what is to be said next. 4. Avoid telling each other what to do. If you think it is necessary, ask permission first. 5. Set, agree to, and respect clear guidelines and boundaries for your interactions. 	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Articulate goals of the mentor / mentee relationship early. 2. Assume good intent and know that you both are there trying your best. 3. Be open to new ways of thinking. Be prepared to put learnings into action. 4. Don't avoid difficult conversations. These are important for growth. 5. Acknowledge the possibility that the relationship isn't working for you – it may be time to move on.
DEEP DIVE <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Understanding my approach (page 16) • Listening (page 17) 	DEEP DIVE <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Building Trust (page 18) • Questioning (page 19) • Conveying empathy (page 20) 	DEEP DIVE <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Encouraging open exchanges (page 21) • Disengaging with gratitude (page 22)

The mentoring journey

The map below highlights critical moments in the mentor and mentee relationship. Tools and resources are provided to help you navigate each stage in the relationship.





TOOLS FOR MENTORS

Prepare, meet, reflect



Prepare

The list below highlights some of the reasons an individual may seek to enter a mentoring relationship. Before you meet with your mentee, consider the objectives and respond to the prompts.

OBJECTIVES

Learn from another person's vision, experience, and knowledge

Obtain career advice and planning assistance

Get more involved in things inside my organisation/industry

Learn more about myself and develop my skills

Gain assistance solving problems and challenging my perspective

Explore new ways to contribute to my organisation and team

Build my self-confidence

Have a 'safe' space to bounce ideas and ideate

Increase my energy and interest in my work

Become more comfortable in my organisation/industry

Gain an understanding about the organisational culture, appropriate behaviours, attitudes and procedures.

What strengths, skills and relationships can you bring to your role as mentor?

What biases or preconceptions might you need to be aware of?

What information do you need to obtain to prepare yourself for your first meeting?

Meet

In your first meeting with your mentee, it is important to come to a common understanding about how you will work together. Use the prompt questions below to reflect on your role as mentor.

What are the outcomes or goals for your mentoring relationship?

What are the strengths you will lean on to support your mentee?

What might you need to be aware of as you continue to engage with your mentee?

What would you like to do more/less of to better support your mentee?

What are the next steps?

Reflect

As a mentor it is important that you have regular check ins with your mentee. Often, the cadence of your catch ups will be set by your mentee, but it is important that you as a mentor keep track of the conversations you have had and can help to establish a sense of momentum. The worksheet below may help you with this task.

Reviewing progress of my mentee

Insights gained and ideas to take forward

Key outcomes

People in my network to support

How can you maintain momentum?



TOOLS FOR MENTEES

Prepare, meet, reflect



Prepare

Before entering the mentor/ mentee relationship, it is important to be clear on objectives and how you will work together. The list below cites some of the benefits of engaging a mentor. Think about what you want out of the mentoring relationship. The checklist below might help you to focus your efforts.

OBJECTIVE	Not at all important	Somewhat important	Very important
Learn from another person's vision, experience, and knowledge			
Obtain career advice and planning assistance			
Get more involved in things inside my organisation/industry			
Learn more about myself and develop my skills			
Gain assistance solving problems and challenging my perspective			
Explore new ways to contribute to my organisation and team			
Build my self-confidence			
Have a 'safe' place to bounce ideas off			
Increase my energy and interest in my work			
Become more comfortable in my organisation/industry			
Gain an understanding about the organisational culture, appropriate behaviours, attitudes and procedures.			

Looking at the objectives you rated as "very important," reflect on what aspirations you might have for a mentoring relationship?

Think about some questions you may have for your mentor. What would you like to ask or clarify during your first meeting?

Meet

When you first meet your mentor, it is important to come to a common understanding about how you will work together. Use the prompt questions below to navigate this conversation.

What are your aspirations for the mentoring relationship?

What are the strengths will you leverage to make progress?

What might you need to be aware of that could hinder your progress?

What would you like to do more/less of as part of your mentoring experience?

What are you taking away from your conversation? What are your next steps?
How frequently would you like to meet to maintain momentum?

Reflect

It is unlikely that your goals will remain static. These should be revisited often as you gain confidence and learn more about the organisation.

You may wish to use the guidance below to reflect after each mentor session. Continuous reflection will help you stay focused and maintain momentum.

Reviewing progress

Insights gained and ideas to take forward

Key outcomes

New people in my network

How can you maintain momentum?



RESOURCES FOR MENTORS & MENTEES



Know yourself

Understanding my approach

Our upbringing, values and experiences shape how we interact with others. They influence our understanding and perception, our motivation, our strengths and the way we interpret others.

BEING AWARE OF OUR OWN TENDENCIES

MOTIVATIONS: We are all motivated by different things, whether its outcomes, process, or people.

STRENGTHS: We draw on a different set of strengths to achieve our goals. While some may draw on their strengths of analysis, others are ambitious, social or considered. Everyone has unique strengths and it is important that these are surfaced and honoured.

OVERDOING IT: We might lean too heavily on a strength at times. Although this can look and feel like a weakness, it's not – we're all trying to use our strengths.

Strength based relationships:

- As a mentor or mentee, the way we approach a situation, why we do what we do, and the strengths we draw on will likely be different! And that's ok!
- Acknowledge that your approach might not be the best way for everyone. Be open to different ways of doing things – have an open mind and prepare to be challenged.
- Assume positive intent, we're all doing things for the right reasons (in most cases).

WE'RE BIASED!

Without realising, we make assumptions about people and situations. It's inherently human and how we make sense of the world. Knowing this, there are some assumptions (biases) we need to be aware of in your mentoring relationship.

Did you know:

- We listen out for information that confirms our own beliefs.
- We prefer information that we already know over new information. This means we are less likely to change our opinions when new information comes our way.
- We expect a person to have certain qualities without information to support that belief.
- We are drawn to, and prefer people who remind us of ourselves.
- We place too much emphasis on experiences that are fresher in our memory.

HERE ARE SOME TIPS TO CONFRONT BIAS

- Accept that its happening whether we like it or not.
- Challenge your own assumptions. Try asking yourself – what might I not be seeing?
- Reframe, reframe, reframe. Always offer or consider more than one perspective.



Are We Biased? Exploring Biases in Coaching Practice | Institute of Coaching



Go Put Your Strengths to Work by Marcus Buckingham

Know yourself

Listening

One of the most important skills in a mentoring relationship is listening. This may seem easy, but too often we default to imagining our responses to situations rather than listening to understand one another. The tips below might help to build and maintain connection.

LISTENING FOR UNDERSTANDING

P - Paraphrase and acknowledge the words and feelings.

“What I hear you saying is...”

A - Ask for more information by using direct questions.

“Can you give me an example of...”

C - Check your understanding of what the other person means by giving an example of your own.

“... would that be an example of what you are saying?”

R - Respond with your own point of view.

“Well I see things slightly differently...”

- Remember, it isn't really listening if you are thinking about your reply
- Remove distractions if possible – turn the phone on silent and put on your do not disturb
- Be comfortable in silence to allow yourself time to think about your response
- Harness your curiosity – you are both here to learn!



The Advice Trap by Michael
Bungay-Stanier



[Box of Crayons Homepage](#) –
The Power of Curiosity

Build the relationship

Building trust

Effective mentor and mentee relationships are built on foundations of trust.

Trust is built on two foundations:

- The **character** of the individual and;
- Their perceived **competence**.

A person has good **character** if they demonstrate **integrity** and have clarified their **intent**.

HOW TO SHOW INTEGRITY	HOW TO COMMUNICATE INTENT
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Make and keep commitments • Give your honest account • Disclose all relevant information 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Be clear with your agenda • Show generosity • Demonstrate respect

A person is deemed **competent** if they prove they are **capable** and deliver **results**.

HOW TO SHOW CAPABILITY	HOW TO DELIVER RESULTS
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Know your purpose • Use your strengths • Know where you're going 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Take responsibility for outcomes • Deliver on your promises • Make an effort to right any wrongs

In what ways do you feel you show good moral character or competence?

What might you need to be mindful of to ensure you can actively build trust in your mentoring relationship?



The Speed of Trust by Stephen M. R. Covey



[SCARF Model Influencing Others with Dr David Rock](#)



[Trust: Building, Maintaining, and Restoring It - Brené Brown – Dare to Lead Podcast \(brenebrown.com\)](#)

Build the relationship

Questioning

During mentoring conversations, it's best to keep focus on the mentee. The proven way of doing this is by **asking open-ended questions**.

MENTORS	MENTEES
<p>Asking Questions</p> <p>A rule of thumb for mentors is to try to talk 10% of the time and prompt the mentee the remaining 90%.</p> <p>Thoughtful questions, like those highlighted below, may help to focus the conversation.</p> <p>What do you want? This helps to define the outcomes and goals for the relationship.</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Where are you now? This helps to deepen understanding of the current state. 2. What could you do? This question helps the individual to explore options and possibilities. 3. What will you do? This helps the individual to commit to specific actions, supports and next steps. 	<p>Answering Questions</p> <p>The tips below may help mentees to prepare for a conversation primarily based around questioning.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Forget about the idea of 'always having to know the answer' - this process is often one of discovery. • It may feel uncomfortable with the focus solely on you at first - you'll get used to it. • Be prepared for your thinking to be challenged, and to think outside the box. <p>Your conversations will likely take the following structure:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Talk broadly about what you want to achieve and issues to focus on. 2. Identify obstacles in your path and strengths to leverage. 3. Brainstorm all options available to you (unrealistic and realistic). 4. Act! Think about taking this reflection forward.

EXAMPLES FOR MENTORS

01

"What other things concern you at the moment?"

02

"What is working at the moment? What is not working?"

03

"Who is someone you trust? What would be their suggestion?"

04

"Which way forward is the most exciting?"



What is the GROW Coaching Model? (incl. Questions + Examples)
(positivepsychology.com)



These Coaching Questions Get Results – Coaching for Leaders

Build the relationship

Conveying empathy

As mentoring conversations unfold, past experience and challenges invariably come to the surface. Having awareness and understanding of the emotions and feelings of the other person is critical. Displaying empathy builds trust and shows the mentee or mentor that the bounds of your interactions are a safe space.

It is not uncommon for returners to feel self-doubting or apprehensive when they re-enter the workforce. They may feel embarrassed or ashamed to admit their true feelings. Conveying empathy can be the antidote to shame, encouraging openness and allowing both the mentor and mentee to think creatively about solutions and outcomes.

MENTORS

Showing empathy to your mentee conveys the message:

- I am listening
- I seek to understand
- I validate your feelings
- I want to support you
- I offer patience and acceptance.

TOP TIPS TO CONVEY EMPATHY

- 'Sit in the mud' – hold the space and let your mentee command it. Avoid offering solutions or providing a silver lining.
- Listen without judgement. You might not personally agree with your mentee or approve of their actions. Your role is not to agree.
- Validate the feelings that arose for your mentee by reflecting back i.e. 'it sounds like your time away from the workforce really challenged your sense of self and belonging'.



[How Great Coaches Ask, Listen, and Empathize \(hbr.org\)](https://hbr.org)



[Brené Brown on Empathy - YouTube](#)



[Shame and Accountability - Brené Brown \(brenebrown.com\)](https://brenebrown.com)

Focus on outcomes

Encouraging open exchanges

Feedback is the backbone of constructive mentoring and mentee relationship. Giving and receiving feedback can be challenging and may feel uncomfortable. The tips below may support more positive interaction and strengthen learning opportunities for the mentor and mentee alike.

MENTORS	MENTEES
<p>DELIVERING FEEDBACK</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Consider feedback as a conversation with a two way dialogue. • Establish yourself as a listener and allow space for your mentee’s self-assessment. • Use questions to encourage your mentee to think outside the box, consider alternative options (ideal state/best possible outcome) and make their own decisions. • Be clear with your mentee as to whether you are providing objective information or giving your opinion. • AVOID: criticising, providing unsolicited advice or rescuing your mentee. • Convey empathy by showing interest, reassurance and acceptance. 	<p>RECEIVING FEEDBACK</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • You and your mentor are partners in this process – you are allowed to agree, disagree and provide your own point of view • Acknowledge that your mentor has distance and experience that you do not. Their point of view may not be popular, but it might be valid • Focus on your next steps and consider small ways that you might take on board the feedback.

Sounds like:

"That's interesting, tell me more."

"Why do you think that might be the case?"

"My intent when completing that was..."

"Understanding this now, I think a better approach could be..."



[Why Feedback Rarely Does What It’s Meant To – HBR](#)



[The Joy of Getting Feedback | Joe Hirsch | TEDxTarrytown - YouTube](#)



[What Managers Get Wrong About Feedback \(hbr.org\)](#)

Focus on outcomes

Disengaging with gratitude

Even the most effective mentor or coaching relationships can run its course. For various reasons, you may realise you are no longer serving your mentee, or you might feel like you are not getting what you need from your mentor. Knowing when it's time to move on in a considered and considerate way is also an important part of the mentoring and mentee relationship.

MENTORS	MENTEES
It's time to end the mentoring relationship – how do we know?	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • I no longer have capacity to support my mentee • I don't have the right expertise or skills to support my mentee to achieve their goals • They are seeking to grow in a new direction • I have helped them to achieve their objectives 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • I am no longer learning from my mentor or coach • There is no chemistry or connection • My mentor is not a good match • I have achieved my objectives
The art of disengaging – ending things professionally	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Consider whether the relationship can be recharged. Give each other an opportunity to adapt with you • If you don't think it's working, don't let the other party invest their time and energy to be polite – it wastes your time and theirs • Disengage with gratitude. Thank each other for the time and attention, share what you have learned from working with one another and how this is likely to help you in future • Be positive, honest and transparent and leave the door open to the possibility of future collaborations. 	

Sounds like:

"Given my change in focus, I wonder if getting together regularly is the best use of your time."

"Thank you for investing in me with your time and your knowledge."

"I've had time to reflect on my own style, and I think I need a mentor who has a similar approach."





