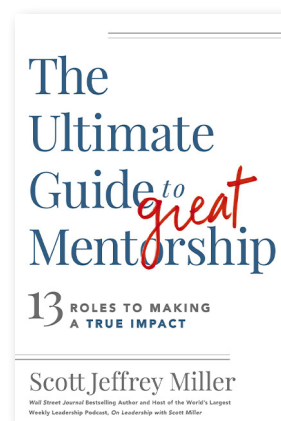


The Ultimate Guide to Great Mentorship

13 Roles to Making a True Impact

by **Scott Jeffrey Miller**



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THE SUMMARY IN BRIEF

When author Scott Jeffrey Miller's publisher approached him to write *The Ultimate Guide to Great Mentorship: 13 Roles to Making a True Impact*, he was coalescing a ten-year, ten-volume series on master mentors. In promoting the first two volumes on more than two hundred podcast episodes, television shows, and radio programs, he found that the interviewers most commonly asked him less about the mentors he featured in favor of and questions about the actual process of mentoring.

In exploring such topics as selecting or becoming a mentor, how to handle conversations that don't go as planned, and whether or not mentoring was still relevant in a post-pandemic virtual work world, Miller began outlining and codifying his point of view on mentoring. This resulted in his identification and explanation of the various roles that mentors play and how they differ based on the mentor-mentee dynamic and, eventually, the writing of this book. The intent is to provide a road map for all the roles a mentor will be asked to play, consciously or unconsciously. For each role, mentors will learn a description of the role, the goal, upsides, downsides, and the skills required to be successful.

IN THIS SUMMARY, YOU WILL LEARN:

- The thirteen roles that mentors play.
- What your goal as a mentor is in each role.
- How the execution of the role can have upsides and downsides.
- Which skills are essential for success in each role.

Role 1: The Revealer

The Revealer works like a paleontologist, delicately brushing away the metaphorical dust and debris to reveal the mentee's passions, talents, fears, and goals. They work to *uncover* so others can *discover*—all while remaining hyper aware of their own personalities.

The Goal: To lead the mentee's awareness, progress, and growth through precise exploration and discovery, and along the way, ensure their own style and approach doesn't overwhelm or distract.

The Upside

- Surfaces important facts and feelings that can help or hinder personal effectiveness and engagement
- Provides a framework for a mentor to lean into their own stylistic strengths or work through and around weaknesses
- Helps a mentee feel safe and appropriately vulnerable, so they can become “comfortable with being uncomfortable”

The Downside: A mentee can easily shut down, feel overwhelmed, or become intimidated by a heavy-handed mentoring approach. As a result, they can often pull back, obfuscate, or even abandon the relationship altogether.

Key Revealer Skills

- Know what the mentee is trying to accomplish and the environment in which they are trying to accomplish it
- Employ patience and deliberate thinking
- Remain hyper aware of your default personality style
- Explore with an inquisitive and gentle approach

Your primary job as the Revealer is to help uncover the mentee's feelings, perceptions, strengths, fears, and misconceptions about their own potential by consistently being mindful of the fact that you're not them. They may not know what they want out of life or a career—or even the mentoring relationship itself. Your role is to make them feel comfortable being uncomfortable.

Role 2: The Boundary Setter

The Boundary Setter creates the parameters of the mentoring relationship. They do this up front and as early as possible so that the proper guardrails exist and the mentor-

ing journey can be efficient, effective, and safe.

The Goal: To set clear boundaries about expectations, what the mentoring relationship is and isn't, and the roles the mentor and mentee will play and won't.

The Upside

- Both parties understand the scope of the mentoring relationship
- Saves time having to deal with issues in the moment that could have been mitigated through setting expectations early on
- Helps the mentee understand their role and expectations for the mentoring sessions themselves
- Provides an early warning for mismatched expectations between a mentor and mentee
- Offers the mentee a clear picture of what lines can be blurred, and which shouldn't be crossed

The Downside: Mentoring sessions are likely to wander off topic, be at risk for unintentional and improper requests, and become unproductive or worse.

Key Boundary Setter Skills

- Designate duration and frequency
- Confirm the agenda
- Establish roles and responsibilities
- Set boundaries
- Call a timeout when needed
- Make and keep commitments
- Address violations
- Pull the plug if necessary

Setting boundaries for the mentoring relationship is essential. But after some work together, earned maturity, and an increasing level of trust, you can help your mentee know when the “hard and fast” line you *never* cross is actually a bit “fuzzy” and they can carefully and intentionally own the consequences for stepping over it, or even being invited by you to do so.

Role 3: The Absorber

Second in priority to The Revealer is the Absorber. The Absorber recognizes that the best mentors are active lis-

Like many virtuous habits, both the mentor and their mentee benefit when a leader can shut up and listen.

teners. They foster an environment of psychological safety where mentees feel heard, understood, and valued.

The Goal: To invest your focused time and attention into your mentee through active listening, empathy, and intentional focus.

The Upside

- Creates a high-trust environment where mentees feel safe to be vulnerable, heard, and understood
- Builds an expectation and experience that the mentee can share “unfiltered” what’s on their mind and work through it without judgment
- Helps mentees discover their unique and valuable genius

The Downside: Mentors confuse declaration with dialogue, trading short-term efficiencies for the long-term benefits that come from investing in and hearing what their mentees have to say.

Key Absorber Skills

- Get out of selling mode
- Avoid the “if I were you...” trap
- Learn your mentee’s genius and resist shaping it into yours
- Listen and absorb as an active listener
- Practice intentional focus and empathetic listening
- Stop interrupting
- Be gentle on yourself and know when to be prescriptive

This role requires patience, curiosity, and suspended judgment from mentors. Like many virtuous habits, both the mentor and their mentee benefit when a leader can shut up and listen. And if you think you’re already good at that, here’s a newsflash: You can do better. A wandering mind. An interruption. A self-serving question. A lack of empathy. It happens to us all. The key is to know when these temptations are creeping into your mentoring style and try to minimize them.

Role 4: The Questioner

The Questioner relies on their empathetic skills, relatability, common experience, and insight to help zero in on the right issues for their mentee. They are adept at employing insightful questioning and identifying and catching problems early by asking the right questions at the right time, in the right way, and with the right intent.

The Goal: Use thoughtful, relevant, and open-ended questions to help the mentee zero in on the right root cause or underlying issue that can then be worked through together.

The Upside

- Reduces risks by catching critical issues early
- Build trust by making “bad” news safe to discuss
- Helps the mentee focus on the right things at the right time
- Uncovers insecurities and misconceptions that might be getting in their way
- Surfaces other issues that may need to be addressed

The Downside: When the mentor is asking self-serving or extraneous questions based on their own agenda, experience, and timeline, the mentee can be forced into offering responses or “solutions” that have little to do with what they ultimately want to accomplish in order to satisfy the mentor’s needs.

Key Questioner Skills

- Employ a laser like focus to cut through confusion and create clarity
- Recognize that “right” is what progresses your mentees goal
- Make it safe to share bad or embarrassing news
- Guard against the “wrong” news
- Build trust and establish safety
- Avoid prosecutorial badgering

This role will likely come naturally to you. Perhaps too naturally. Like all strengths in life, when overplayed they can

become liabilities. So it's important to calibrate your questioning skills to get to the root cause as efficiently as possible without compromising a safe environment for your mentee.

Role 5: The Challenger

The Challenger tactfully pushes their mentee to confront assumptions, perspectives, mindsets, or behaviors that are impeding their performance. They determine the level of confrontation that will be helpful given the mentee and the situation as they model the critical thinking that will serve the mentee throughout their professional life.

The Goal: Use challenges to prompt critical analysis so mentees are more introspective and use sound reasoning in their decision-making.

The Upside

- Provides additional clarity for both the mentor and the mentee
- Surfaces bias, misunderstandings, faulty assumptions, flawed perspectives, and errant information
- Separates feelings from facts
- Assumes the “right” intervention is not simply what worked for the mentor in the past
- Teaches mentee to employ critical thinking and challenge their own suppositions before taking action

The Downside: Without the due diligence of critical analysis, mentees are left to execute against untested assumptions and flawed perspectives, wasting time, energy, and separating them even further from achieving the goals that matter most to them.

Key Challenger Skills

- Know *when* to challenge
- Ensure your mindset is focused on the mentee's goals and skills, not your own
- Allow the mentee space to share
- Plot the appropriate challenge level for the situation

As a mentor, it can be dangerously tempting to force your mentee into your formula for success based on your own career trajectory. Likewise, it might be tempting to merely accept whatever goal a mentee offers, assuming they've thought it through adequately. Both scenarios can be disastrous. And so, The Challenger pushes back, offering

alternatives when appropriate.

Role 6: The Validator

The Validator strengthens the relationship by recognizing, accepting, and communicating that the thoughts, feelings, emotions, perceptions, and beliefs of their mentee, whatever they may be, are valid and worthy. The Validator may not agree with the mentee's conclusion about such experiences, but they recognize you don't have to agree with someone to validate them. The Validator simply wants to affirm their mentee's emotions, state of mind, and ability to accomplish their own expressed goals, while ensuring they feel seen and understood.

The Goal: To strengthen the mentoring relationship and progress their journey by strategically validating a mentee's confidence, competence, fears, and anxieties.

The Upside

- Communicates acceptance
- Calms intense emotions so mentoring can be more effective
- Expresses that internal experiences do not have to be the same for everyone
- Acknowledges the inherent value of the mentee
- Affirms that the mentee is being listened to and understood and not being judged
- Builds trust and rapport in the mentoring relationship
- Reinforces a mentee's strengths and unique gifts

The Downside: When a mentee does not feel accepted and understood by their mentor, they can feel rejected, ignored, judged, and even worthless.

Key Validator Skills

- Focus on the relationship, not the ISS
- Find affirming language that resonates with your mentee
- Praise and validate effort
- Actively listen
- Recognize that “validate” doesn't mean “agreeing with”

We all benefit from sincere, well-timed validation, as two of our greatest human needs are to be seen and to be heard.

There is hard-won wisdom that comes from having traveled the path before.

Ensure that your mentee feels heard and seen by you. The Validator makes those important relationship investments while increasing trust, respect, and even love.

Role 7: The Navigator

The Navigator leverages their knowledge and expertise to chart a new way forward for their mentees. Whether having walked the path themselves or gained wisdom from the journey of others, they stay at least “a day ahead.” The Navigator maps out the relevant opportunities, costs, best practices, regulations, processes, guidelines, and even laws that define, restrict, or serve as the guideposts along the way.

The Goal: To draw on the mentor’s wisdom and experience to guide the mentee away from potential pitfalls and toward their intended destination. Also sometimes known as protecting people from themselves.

The Upside

Provides an opportunity to share the various insights gained by a mentor over their career

- Helps mitigate against career pitfalls and offers shortcuts along the mentee’s journey
- Connects decision-making to governing principles
- Surfaces best practices
- Serves as a buffer against unconscious incompetence
- Provides focus and necessary guardrails to keep things on track and build momentum

The Downside: The mentee can become a “wanderer,” tempted to identify too many goals and quickly lose their focus on their unique path—one where the mentor’s own life experience, institutional and industry knowledge, and hindsight could have proven valuable.

Key Navigator Skills

- Stay a day ahead
- Connect to governing principles

- Understand the situational rules of the road
- Minimize unconscious incompetence
- Keep perspective

There is hard-won wisdom that comes from having traveled the path before. As a mentor, your experiences can provide the practical knowledge to keep your mentee from having to recreate the wheel. Your “been there done that wisdom” is a massive gift you can offer. But you must do so sparingly, to avoid falling into the self-referenced narrative you’ve been previously warned against.

Role 8: The Visionary

The Visionary paints a picture of the future to inspire their mentee to take on new challenges, see themselves as more capable, or envision an expanded outcome. The Visionary artfully tempers such a vision, however, so it remains motivating and achievable, not so grandiose as to be unactionable, or reflective of what the mentor values, and not the mentee.

The Goal: To provide a vision of a future state that stretches the mentee to do and become more, yet remain grounded within their motivations and present, or reasonably acquire, necessary skills.

The Upside

- Creates a motivating picture of what the mentee can achieve
- Anchors day-to-day work to something bigger
- Helps a mentee reach their full potential
- Sets the stage for moving the conceptual into concrete actions

The Downside

Decouples a mentee’s day-to-day work from a vision of what they’re working toward, making it less likely they’ll offer discretionary effort or make any real progress toward their articulated goals.

Key Visionary Skills

- Speak your future
- Be thoughtful about what's realistically possible
- Find a new level of achievement to reach for
- Ensure it's the mentee's vision and not yours
- Calibrate your conversation to present circumstances

There may be perfect circumstances when the benefit of your creativity and vision as a mentor is exactly what's needed. Perhaps someone is on the cusp of a massive pivot in their already successful career or conversely their success is being crushed and your mentee needs a major lifeline. Pull out all the stops and offer them your finest vision of what could be. This may be your finest day as a mentor: the culmination of all your battles and wars cast into a vision of what's possible.

Role 9: The Flagger

The Flagger works like their namesake on a construction site, intervening as necessary, with highly distinctive signs, such as “stop” or “caution,” to protect their mentees from potential danger.

The Goal: To appropriately intervene when it's necessary to slow down or stop a mentee and provide clarity around the potential pitfalls ahead.

The Upside

- Stops a mentee from going down a path that could be dangerous, illegal, risky, or unsafe
- Slows a mentee down so the mentor can offer feedback and allow the mentee to course correct
- Benefits from and helps build trust that the mentor is looking out for the mentee
- Prevents accidents before they happen
- Reinforces the parameters set by The Boundary Setter

The Downside: Allows the mentee's ignorance or even arrogance to land them in metaphorical potholes.

Key Flagger Skills

- Raise the red “Stop” sign when the mentee is in danger
- Raise the yellow “Caution” sign when the mentee should slow down and think

- Choose your words carefully, so as not to turn off the mentee
- Declare your intent, indicating you have the mentee's best interest at heart

As The Flagger, you know that laws and policies are not generally open to much interpretation. Be concerned with slowing things down enough so the mentee knows what those laws and policies are. Only then can the mentee decide if they want to follow or break them.

Role 10: The Distiller

The Distiller role is focused on deciding together which strategies, projects, and decisions warrant continued focus and execution. The Distiller collects and prioritizes the insights and passions gained over the mentoring journey and processes the opportunities into an actionable offering for the mentee to choose to adopt or not.

The Goal: To leverage the insights and learnings that come after a series of mentoring sessions, then refine and reduce the options into a focused opportunity for the mentee to consider.

The Upside

- Combines the strengths of several roles and focuses them on a specific solution
- Filters through an overabundance of potential choices to help the mentee decide where to invest their time and energy
- Allows the mentor to apply an artful combination of roles, goals, and objectives for their mentees to digest and make their own

The Downside: The mentee can feel lost and even paralyzed because of the plenitude of choices, options, and paths that have surfaced through previous mentoring sessions.

Key Distiller Skills

- Pull different ideas together to create something
- Bottle mentoring experiences into a unique offering
- Filter out what's helpful and what's not
- Create and archive potential future strategies to consider later

The Distiller role allows you to creatively co-produce, co-prioritize, and even co-capture a blend of mentee “in-

redients” both built on a shared history and also distilled into an actionable plan of current and future strategies.

Role 11: The Activator

The Activator is concerned with finding the right moment where their mentee would benefit from a carefully worded statement of encouragement and belief, lighting a spark to push harder, set even more ambitious goals, or stretch themselves in new and exciting ways.

The Goal: To ignite new levels of motivation and momentum at an intentionally impactful moment, reinforcing the mentor’s faith and what their mentee can achieve.

The Upside

- Infuses newfound drive and motivation
- Helps close the gap between a mentee wanting to do something new and actually accomplishing it
- Shows the mentor’s faith in the mentee’s capabilities

The Downside

Misses the crucial moment when a mentee is poised to take on something more but lacks the simple spark to see it come to life.

Key Activator Skills

- Know which message to ignite
- Look for signals that your mentee is ready to “strike the match”
- Use your power carefully, as our words and energy have consequential impact
- Avoid serving as a green-lighter for passions and projects, rather letting the decision lie with the mentee

The Activator can light a spark that changes a mentee’s career, and perhaps more importantly, infuse a level of joy, purpose, and momentum the mentee doesn’t even know they need. This is what The Activator does—they boldly strike the match at the exact right moment.

Role 12: The Connector

The Connector is an optional role where the mentor considers if, when, and how they may want to connect their mentee to their personal and professional network.

The Goal: To determine if and when a mentor will choose to provide connections to their mentee, enabling them to experience new growth, opportunities, and personal and professional development.

The Upside

- Creates additional opportunities for the mentee
- Leverages the mentor’s network of contacts to help expedite the mentee into a new role or responsibility
- Can create a win-win for the mentee and the new mentor, coach, employer, or client
- The mentee shows great respect for and provides great value to the mentor’s network

The Downside: The mentee misses out on what could be a shortcut to the next stage of their personal or professional development and career.

Key Connector Skills

- Recognize the role is optional
- Share the importance of your network
- If desired, make the connection

The Connector role can provide a great opportunity for a mentee to further learn, grow, and contribute in new ways. But such a tacit endorsement comes with a certain amount of risk. After all, the mentee would be leveraging your reputation and relationship. Their success or failure will reflect on you. Make no mistake, once you’ve made the connection, you’re in the middle of the mix. So be thoughtful about whether The Connector role is a good fit for your current mentee and list of contacts.

Role 13: The Closer

The Closer is the last role a mentor plays, celebrating the mentoring journey with their mentee as they formally bring the mentoring relationship to a close and point to what’s next.

The Goal: Create a celebratory capstone event that closes out your mentor-mentee relationship and helps them prepare for the next part of their journey.

The Upside

- Follows the formal close-out process established by the sponsoring organization, if one exists
- Establishes an important milestone representing the

mentee's accomplishments

- Offers a chance to celebrate
- Creates a bridge to what's next for the mentee

The Downside

The mentee misses out on a chance to reflect on their progress, celebrate their wins, and turn the page on the next chapter of their journey.

Key Closer Skills

- Focus on the present, and the potential future
- If there is not a formal closeout process established by the sponsoring organization, use the six steps outlined below

6-Step Close Out Process

1. Revisit where your mentee started.
2. Share funny or tender learnings about their growth.
3. Re-identify and communicate your commitments to the mentee moving forward.
4. Resurface worthy concepts that were closed or tabled
5. Celebrate the wins and learn from the losses.
6. Recap your confidence in them and outline any areas of potential support.

Mentoring truly is a privilege, and your influence on your mentee's life can be incalculable. Adopting the 13 roles presented can help you lift another human being and help them achieve their goals. And as a bonus, you will find yourself lifted, too.



Capping a twenty-five-year career in which he served as chief marketing officer and executive vice president, Scott Miller is currently FranklinCovey's senior advisor on thought leadership, spearheading the strategy, development, and publication of the firm's bestselling books on this topic. Miller hosts the FranklinCovey-sponsored On Leadership with Scott Miller, the world's largest and fastest-growing weekly leadership podcast. Miller also authors a leadership column for Inc.com, and hosted the weekly iHeart Radio show Great Life, Great Career.

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