

# ASCEND MENTORSHIP PROGRAM

2026

## Mentor Handbook

You were selected as a mentor in the ASCEND Mentorship Program because PSA believes in your leadership and your ability to invest in others. This handbook is your quick reference for showing up as the mentor your mentee needs — not just in the first meeting, but across all eight months.

### What mentoring is — and is not

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Mentoring is a guided, human relationship. Your role is not to have all the answers. It is to create the conditions for your mentee to find their own. The most effective mentors shift between several modes depending on what their mentee needs:

| Mode             | What it looks like                                                              |
|------------------|---------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| <b>Teacher</b>   | Sharing knowledge, experience, and hard-won lessons from your own career.       |
| <b>Coach</b>     | Asking questions that help your mentee think through challenges themselves.     |
| <b>Advisor</b>   | Offering perspective and options — not directives.                              |
| <b>Sponsor</b>   | Opening doors, making introductions, and advocating where you can.              |
| <b>Motivator</b> | Acknowledging progress, celebrating wins, and re-energizing when momentum dips. |

#### A note on mentoring in today's workplace

- We are living through a period of rapid change — AI, organizational shifts, and constant uncertainty are reshaping what it means to lead. Your mentee is navigating this in real time.
- The most valuable thing you can offer is not a roadmap. It is your presence, your honesty, and your commitment to keeping this relationship genuinely human. That is what H.U.M.A.N. First™ leadership looks like in practice.

## What great mentors do

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### Show up prepared

- Review the monthly agenda before each meeting.
- Reflect on what came up last time and follow up on any commitments you made.
- Come with something to share — a story, a lesson, a resource, a question.

### Listen more than you speak

- Resist the urge to jump straight to solutions. Ask what the mentee thinks first.
- Notice what is not being said. Sometimes the real issue is underneath the surface question.
- Let silence do some of the work — it is not your job to fill every gap.

### Give feedback with care

- Be honest. Mentees need real feedback, not just encouragement.
- Frame feedback around behavior and impact, not character.
- When you do not know something, say so. Modeling intellectual honesty is its own form of teaching.

### Hold appropriate boundaries

- Your role is to support your mentee's development — not to manage their career or solve their problems for them.
- Keep conversations confidential. Trust is the foundation of this relationship.
- If personal topics come up that go beyond your role, acknowledge them with care and gently redirect.

### Track progress over time

- Revisit your mentee's ASCEND goal regularly — not just in November.
- Name growth when you see it. Mentees often can't see their own progress.
- Adjust your approach as the relationship evolves. What your mentee needs in April is not what they will need in September.

## Common mentor pitfalls

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Even the most experienced leaders can fall into these patterns. Awareness is the first step.

| Avoid this                                                                                                                                   | And this                                                                                             |
|----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| Doing instead of developing — solving the problem yourself rather than helping your mentee build the skill to solve it.                      | Waiting for the mentee to lead everything — great mentors bring energy and initiative too.           |
| Projecting your path — assuming your career journey is the right template for theirs.                                                        | Avoiding hard conversations — if something is not working, name it. Silence does not help.           |
| Over-scheduling the conversation — coming with so much prepared content that there is no room for what the mentee actually needs to discuss. | Giving vague feedback — "you're doing great" is kind but not useful. Be specific.                    |
| Disappearing between sessions — going weeks without any contact and expecting to pick up where you left off.                                 | Letting the relationship go through the motions — showing up physically but not being fully present. |
| Making it about you — turning too many conversations toward your own experiences rather than staying curious about theirs.                   | Forgetting to celebrate — progress deserves acknowledgment, however small.                           |

### When things feel off

- If your mentee seems disengaged, overwhelmed, or the relationship feels stuck — say something. A simple "I want to make sure our time together is useful for you — what would help most right now?" can reset the dynamic.
- If you have a concern that goes beyond mentoring, contact the Piercing Strategies team. We are here to support you throughout the program.

## Your commitments as a mentor

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### By participating in ASCEND, you are committing to:

- Meeting with your mentee monthly from April through November.
- Reviewing the monthly agenda and training module before each session.
- Being present, prepared, and honest in every conversation.
- Keeping all mentee discussions confidential.
- Attending the group sessions: H.U.M.A.N. First™ Leadership Lab (Apr 29), Midpoint Session (Jul 23), and Closing Session & Graduation (Nov 19).
- Reaching out to the Piercing Strategies team if you have concerns or need support.

## Getting support

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You are not in this alone. The Piercing Strategies team is available throughout the program for questions, guidance, or a quick check-in. If something comes up between sessions — a concern about your mentee, a challenging conversation you want to debrief, or just a question about the program — reach out.

|                             |                                                                                         |
|-----------------------------|-----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| <b>Monthly office hours</b> | Available throughout the program — check the Participant Vault for scheduling.          |
| <b>Direct contact</b>       | <a href="mailto:arika@piercingstrategies.com">arika@piercingstrategies.com</a>          |
| <b>Participant Vault</b>    | <a href="https://piercingstrategies.com/psaascend">piercingstrategies.com/psaascend</a> |

## A final word

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Mentoring is one of the most generous things a leader can do. You are giving someone access to what took you years to learn — your experience, your perspective, and your honest counsel.

The mentees in this program were selected because PSA sees potential in them. Your job is to help them see it in themselves.

Show up. Be real. Stay curious. The rest will follow.

### **ASCEND Mentorship Program 2026**

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