

INNOVATION TABLE

The Mentor/Protégé Relationship

WHAT MAKES AN EXCEPTIONAL MENTOR?

Industry Depth with Practical Experience

A great mentor brings real-world experience in food processing, value-added agriculture, scaling operations, financing, and navigating regulatory frameworks. They provide grounded, practical insight, not just theory.

Active Listening & Thoughtful Questioning

Strong mentors listen more than they speak. They ask strategic questions that help protégés think critically, uncover blind spots, and clarify priorities rather than simply giving directives.

Commitment to Knowledge Transfer

Exceptional mentors are willing to openly share lessons learned, including failures. They intentionally pass on business fundamentals alongside sector-specific insights that shorten a protégé's learning curve.

Strategic Perspective & Systems Thinking

Food and beverage businesses operate within complex supply chains. Great mentors understand the full value chain, from farm inputs to distribution, and help protégés see the bigger ecosystem picture.

Integrity, Patience & Accountability

Trust is foundational. Effective mentors demonstrate confidentiality, professionalism, and reliability while holding protégés accountable to goals and growth milestones.

WHAT MAKES AN EXCEPTIONAL PROTÉGÉ?

Coachability & Openness to Feedback

A great protégé actively seeks input and is willing to reflect, adjust, and improve. They understand that constructive feedback, especially in scaling food businesses, is an asset, not criticism.

Preparedness & Professionalism

Successful protégés come to meetings prepared with clear questions, updated metrics, and defined challenges. They respect their mentor's time and treat the relationship as a strategic investment.

Accountability & Follow-Through

Mentorship works when action follows insight. Strong protégés implement agreed-upon steps, report back on outcomes, and demonstrate measurable progress.

Clarity of Goals & Growth Mindset

They are intentional about what they want to achieve, whether market expansion, operational efficiency, financing readiness, or leadership development, and remain adaptable as the business evolves.

Commitment to Sector Contribution

Great protégés view mentorship as more than personal gain. They engage in the broader food and beverage ecosystem, contribute to peer learning, and prepare to one day mentor others.

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Innovation Table is a collaboration between the Raj Manek Mentorship Program and Prairie Food Link.