

How to Find Your First Career Mentor

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ABSTRACT (ENGLISH)

[...]more than 4 in 10 U.S. workers (44 percent) reported that they have never had a mentor, according to a survey by Olivet Nazarene University. "A mentor outside of the organization can be an objective sounding board and provide a wide scope of support, experience and perspective on your goals," she says. Express that you're interested in learning how the person built a career and a differentiated professional brand, says Chip Espinoza, author of *Millennials@Work: The 7 Skills Every TwentySomething (and Their Manager) Needs to Overcome Roadblocks and Achieve Greatness*(Franklin Covey, 2014).

FULL TEXT

Headnote

A great mentor can help you kick-start your career, build your skill set and define your professional brand. Here's how to find yours.

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A mentor can be a great asset in helping you launch and maintain a successful professional career. But not everybody has one.

In fact, more than 4 in 10 U.S. workers (44 percent) reported that they have never had a mentor, according to a survey by Olivet Nazarene University.

That's a missed opportunity, notes Courtney Templin, president of JB Training Solutions, a professional development firm in Chicago. "A mentor is truly priceless," she says.

Employees who have a mentor are more likely than those who don't to say they're well-paid and to believe their contributions are valued by their colleagues, according to a study by CNBC and SurveyMonkey.

"When getting started with their career, people typically have a lot of questions that they are unsure who to ask or how to ask," Templin says. "A mentor can provide that focused and individualized support on your goals and opportunity areas and be a sounding board for you."

That individual can also provide organizational insight that comes with experience. "Every company has its own unwritten rules," says Hannah Morgan, a Rochester, N.Y.-based job coach, "and a seasoned career professional can show them to you."

These steps will help you find the right early-career mentor.

Cast a Wide Net

Don't limit your search for a mentor to just immediate co-workers, Morgan says. A senior executive or midlevel manager in another department can provide a fresh perspective on how your organization operates.

She also recommends tapping multiple advisors. "You're entitled to as many mentors as you want," she says. "I have about five mentors that I go to when I encounter different problems."

Templin suggests seeking an individual at a different employer. "A mentor outside of the organization can be an objective sounding board and provide a wide scope of support, experience and perspective on your goals," she says.

Individuals from other fields may also be helpful. "It's not necessary that a mentor be in the same industry as you because mentors serve a variety of purposes, from imparting leadership skills and confidence building to providing very specific career advice," says Jan Melnik, a career coach based in Sarasota, Fla. "Some of the best

mentor/mentee relationships that I know of are between professionals who work in different industries."

Morgan adds that some universities have alumni mentorship programs through which you can find someone to offer career guidance.

Do a Little Digging

Find out as much as possible about your prospective mentor to uncover talking points you can use to initiate a conversation. Don't stop at reading a person's LinkedIn profile.

"I wouldn't just learn surface-level details, like where they went to college, and call it a day," Melnik says. "See what the person has shared on other social media to get an idea of what their values are."

Donna Schilder, a career coach based in Long Beach, Calif., recommends conducting a Google search to see if the person has been quoted in the press or has received any professional awards.

Talk to any mutual connections about the potential mentor's professional background, personality and work style.

Make Your Intentions Clear

Once you've done your homework and are initiating contact with the person, be upfront to a degree -about why you'd like to meet. You don't want to come straight out and say you're looking for a mentor, Melnik cautions.

The best approach? "Send the person an e-mail or a message on LinkedIn saying that you want to set up a short meeting to pick their brain," Melnik says. "Tell them that you're networking and looking to learn more about your company if they work at your organization or to learn more about your industry as a whole, depending on who the person is."

Express that you're interested in learning how the person built a career and a differentiated professional brand, says Chip Espinoza, author of *Millennials@Work: The 7 Skills Every TwentySomething (and Their Manager) Needs to Overcome Roadblocks and Achieve Greatness* (Franklin Covey, 2014). "You will never lose when you take an interest in someone," he adds.

Ask your boss or someone else to introduce you to potential mentors you haven't met who work at your company, Morgan suggests.

Play the Field

"Finding a mentor is like dating," Melnik says. "You don't know if you're going to be a match right out of the gate."

Translation: It's OK to meet with several people before choosing a mentor (or mentors).

And don't be afraid to change mentors as your career goals change.

Build Rapport Over Time

It takes time to build trust with a mentor.

Authenticity is key, Melnik notes. "You have to be willing to be vulnerable and talk about your fears and concerns," she says. "A good mentor will help to reshape your viewpoint and offer support."

The mentee is responsible for keeping up the relationship. "Take the initiative with reaching out, setting up meetings and staying in touch," Templin says. "Be prepared for your meetings with specific questions or focus areas."

Templin adds that respecting boundaries is critical. Be professional and optimistic. Don't complain or expect that answers to questions will be given to you. Be solutions-oriented.

Mentors want to see that they are having a positive impact on your career. "Incorporate and try out the insights and ideas gained from your meetings, and share that follow-up with your mentor," Templin says. She also suggests asking if there is anything your mentor would like to change, add or improve about the relationship.

Show Gratitude

Thanking your mentor for the time he or she spends with you is a given, but you may also want to go the extra mile. Melnik suggests writing a letter to your mentor to express your deep appreciation for the insight and help you've been given along the way.

Sending thank-you e-mails periodically as you achieve big career wins can also help cement a close bond, Espinoza says. Such a note might read, "I followed your advice and joined that professional association. I attended my first meeting last night, and I'm so glad I did."

Another way to show gratitude is to provide your mentor something in return. "Ask if there's anything you can do or share to support them," Templin suggests.

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