

Mentoring

A mentor can be a huge source of inspiration, advice and knowledge at any stage in your career – but particularly in the early days. Unlike any normal business contact, a mentor is someone who offers ongoing guidance and a long-term investment in your future goals. A mentor is normally at the top of their game and most likely has a certain degree of influence and respect in their chosen field. They'll probably be in a position that you aspire to be in one day and will have a wealth of experience to draw from and a long list of connections to share.

Typically, an ideal mentor is someone who:

- You respect and admire in a relevant field
- You have a comfortable, easy rapport with
- Has reached a level that you aspire to
- Is considered an expert and forward-thinking in their field
- Is perhaps from a similar background as you (personally or professionally) so you can identify with one another
- Will commit to your development and is keen to impart knowledge
- Is positive and upbeat
- Is not afraid to offer honest, constructive feedback and advice
- Is not directly in charge of you or supervising your work

How does a mentorship work?

There's no set pattern to how a mentorship will run and it'll be different for each individual pairing. Some organisations and institutes offer official, carefully-structured mentoring schemes but others will work on a more informal basis. Generally speaking, a mentor will offer the following benefits to their pupil:

- Career advice and guidance on professional development

- Introduction to useful contacts and organisations
- Exposure to innovative ways of thinking
- Constructive criticism and feedback on particular projects/career choices
- Suggestions on how to build on strengths and overcome weaknesses
- The opportunity to increase knowledge and develop new skills

Finding a mentor

Think carefully about what you want to get out of a mentorship and always make sure the mutual expectations of both parties are clearly aligned. Don't be too over-zealous with a prospective mentor by demanding too much time and attention from them. Instead, talk openly about your aspirations and why you feel their guidance would be beneficial. Hopefully, through honest discussion from the outset, you can come to a mutually agreeable structure and time commitment.

Again, there's no set way of finding a mentor but there are a few routes you could try.

- Formal, structured mentoring schemes may exist in your current company. Check with your HR department to see if they have details.
- Get in touch with existing connections if you're finding a mentor yourself. LinkedIn is a useful resource for searching a wide base of contacts - both current and past.
- Speak to former education or training institutions. Their alumni programme might facilitate mentorship match-making.
- Be proactive in asking for referrals wherever possible.
- Look out for specific websites and independent schemes that help assist mentorships - but be wary of schemes that ask for money.