



8 Steps to Finding (and Making the Most of) A Mentor

While rubbing their belly and making three wishes might only garner you a restraining order, there is no doubt that establishing a relationship with a mentor can create magic when building your career or business.

Whether you're just starting out, or already running a business, mentoring allows you to tap into the wisdom, experience and expertise of those who have gone before you.

With a mentor in your corner, you will be better prepared to meet the challenges of business in today's fast changing world with skill and confidence. It could be the kick-start you need to go further and it could inspire you to take some risks, set new goals and ultimately realize your greatest personal and professional ambitions.

So get out of your comfort zone and take the first step on this road to success. Find, and make the most, of a mentor:

1. Decide What You Need

Knowing yourself and identifying your needs is the foundation to success. Getting a clear picture of what you want to gain from a mentor will enable you to maximize the benefits of the experience.

Write down a list of your objectives along with your ideal results. Here are a few questions to help you focus:

- What are your short-term and long-term career/business goals?
- What are your strengths? What areas require improvement?
- What knowledge and skill-sets do you want to develop with your mentor's help?
- What characteristics and values are you looking for in a mentor?
- What key information could a mentor provide that would benefit you the most?
- What kind of mentoring model would you work best within -formal, informal, or something else?

2. Finding a Mentor

This may take some time. Make sure you choose carefully. Seek individuals who exemplify the skills and traits you identified as desirable in Step 1, and who have set and met high standards in their vocations.

Take stock of people in your immediate circle. If there are no suitable candidates, draw on the networks of your family, friends and colleagues. Clearly communicate what you are looking for when you ask for referrals.

Other valuable resources include:

- Local/regional/national women's organizations
- Government, industry, professional, social and networking organizations
- Local/online mentoring programs or mentor-matching services
- Churches or faith-based groups
- Local business owners or retirees

Or, check out my list of resources [here](#) (insert link to resource page) to get you going.

3. Do Your Homework!

To make a good first impression and to get the most out of the exchange, carefully prepare for the initial contact with your mentor.

- Prepare and practice a brief elevator pitch (insert link to 15 second pitch creator <http://www.15secondpitch.com/new/index.asp>) to introduce yourself and to share some of your background.
- Find out as much as you can about your mentor and their business. Use this information to carefully plan questions and an agenda with your goals and their expertise in mind.
- Be prepared to communicate why you have chosen them and what you hope to learn from them.
- Be assertive (insert link to assertiveness <http://mentalhealth.about.com/cs/psychotherapy/ht/htassert.htm>). Be able to convey what you bring to the table and why they should invest in you.

4. The Pitch

Approaching your potential mentor can be as easy as asking them to coffee or lunch. Take it slow, build a rapport and be proactive, but not pushy. Asking for too much too soon can turn people off (consider what's in it for them).

- Discuss your values and work ethics. Are they aligned?
- Evaluate the quality of interaction. Do you feel respected and comfortable? Are you communicating well? Do you understand each other?
- Do they really possess the qualities and skills you are looking for?

5. Your First Session- Setting Goals and Ground Rules

Once someone has agreed to mentor you, establish a framework for an ongoing relationship. This is the time to set some goals and ground rules. Be sure to touch on the following:

- Establish your objectives and set goals- yours and your mentor's.
- Determine expectations for commitment levels; this includes frequency, duration, method, and scope of your meetings.
- Identify key activities, tasks, desired results and set manageable timelines for putting them into action.
- Write down your plan of action. This will serve to reinforce your goals, solidify your vision and fuel your commitment.
- Talk about things outside of mentoring. It is human nature to be more vested in the well-being and success of people we know, like and respect.
- Listen! Listen! Listen! Like the old saying goes, "You have two ears and one mouth."

6. Act with Integrity and Be Accountable

A mentoring relationship is all about cooperation and mutual benefit. Approach every aspect of the relationship with the highest regard for integrity and accountability.

- Be trustworthy. If you say you are going to do something, do it.
- Admit when mistakes are made and bring to light your failures; failure can be a great teacher.
- Respect your mentor's time and don't postpone or cancel meetings.
- Keep lines of communication open; be consistent, honest, direct and realistic.

- Be conscious of confidentiality and always protect the privacy of your mentor.

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7. Evaluate Your Progress and Modify Your Plan (If Necessary)

Continuously evaluate your progress and your mentoring relationship. Whether this is done formally or informally, be sure to communicate with your mentor about the things that are going well and things that are not going so well.

As your career or business progresses, your needs will change.

- Be flexible.
- Be honest.
- Be reasonable! Don't expect miracles overnight.
- If you need to modify your plan of action, talk about it. It is likely that your mentor has been in the same place at one time or another.

8. Say "Thank You"

It is just the nature of the process that your mentor may give more to you than you give back to them. That is why it is so important to regularly, and sincerely; express your appreciation for their efforts.

Saying "thank you" is only part of the gratitude quotient. The other part is to do the work. Beyond the rewards that you will experience personally, nothing will please your mentor more than seeing you grow beyond your perceived limitations and achieve personal and professional success under their guidance.

This is your time to shine; go forth boldly and find a mentor who will support you, guide you and challenge you to be the best that you can be.

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