

## our kitchen table

WHERE WE EXPLORE, LEARN, INSPIRE & SHARE



### THE VALUE OF A MENTOR & How to Find One By Reena De Asis

Work + Money

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- FAMILY + FRIENDS
- WORK + MONEY
- LIFE BALANCE
- HEALTH + FITNESS
- ARCHITECTS OF CHANGE



Reena De Asis

Invest in your professional future by building a relationship with someone who is more experienced than you and who is willing to share that experience – a mentor. Mentors can offer advice, ideas and contacts, and they can help you create a roadmap to your dreams. How do you find a mentor, and how do you maintain that relationship? Read on to find out.

#### How to find a mentor

Before embarking on a search for a mentor, ask yourself what you want to learn from him/her. Perhaps you want to learn a specific skill, get assistance in implementing a project, or get guidance on how to expand your network, balance your career and personal life, etc.

Once you've determined your goals, it's time to find the right mentor. Check with your employer's human resources office to find out if your employer offers a formal mentor program. If not, your alma mater may provide a mentor program – particularly in your area of study. There are also websites that offer mentoring matching, like:

**MicroMentor, Menttium, Small Business Mentoring and Training, FORTUNE/U.S. State Department Global Women's Mentoring Partnership and WOMEN Unlimited**

And don't underestimate the value of networking. Consider attending events in the field of your interest – meeting people, and following up with those who seem like they might be able to and interested in mentoring you. Similarly, you can make a list of companies/organizations that you respect. Compile a list of the key executives; these are usually found on the "About Us" section of the establishment's website, or you can search by company on LinkedIn. Do your research by reading any available bio on your prospective mentor and information on their employer prior to contacting them. When you contact your prospective mentor, introduce yourself and state your interest in their company and position. Ask if they could talk briefly over lunch, a quick office visit or call. Once you've found a potential mentor, you need to gauge if it's a good match. Are they a good listener? Do they have valuable knowledge and act with integrity? Are they positive, supportive, accessible, empathetic and willing to share their wisdom with you? Another observation to make is if your communication styles match. If yes to the questions above, explain your professional ambitions, challenges and desires – and ask if they are interested in working with you to navigate these issues – would they be open to being your mentor? In this meeting, you might go so far as to establish the goals of the relationship, the duration of the program and how often and how (in person, by phone, by email) you will communicate. Try to establish clear objectives and evaluation measures. Make sure that trustworthiness and confidentiality are part of the agreement.

#### How to nurture the relationship

Mentors are there to develop talent, teach valuable skills, and provide tools and resources. Other benefits include assistance with strategic planning, building your contact base, and increasing your knowledge and your opportunities to strengthen your professional standing. Keep in mind that your meetings or conversations can be brainstorming sessions for professional development that is mutually beneficial, as well.

It is important to nurture the relationship, to be accountable and to be realistic with your expectations. Your mentor may have more experience than you, but you can still contribute to their quality of life. Take time to show your appreciation by showing your gratitude -- send a thank you card, treat them to a meal, send them information that is beneficial to their business/profession, write a note of praise to their boss on how valuable your mentor is, or volunteer to help them with a project. Whether your mentor relationship is short or long-term, try to stay connected with them as you progress in your career. After the mentorship program, the mentor can serve as a reference. Above all, show your gratitude for your mentor's insights and efforts. Perhaps one day, you will pay it forward and be a beacon of hope, yourself. As Oprah Winfrey said, "A mentor is someone who allows you to see the hope inside yourself."

