

## CAREER

# Mentor and be mentored: Both are critical to success

Text by Rita B. Allen

When you reflect upon your career, do you have a mentor who has played a role in your professional and/or personal development?

On the flip side, as you have advanced in your career, have you taken the time to mentor others whom you have worked with and/or managed?

Having and being a mentor are two of the major milestones during a career and represent a critical part of managing a successful and sustaining career.

Mentors are not only in the workplace, but enter your life from a variety of venues, each offering wisdom and counsel in different ways that speak to your many needs.

In fact, it's important to search out multiple mentors to address your multiple needs. Be your own advocate and initiate these relationships rather than waiting to be mentored.

Seek out potential mentors and trusted advisors throughout the different phases of your career.

In addition, welcome opportunities to mentor others throughout their careers. Practice and due diligence make this possible.

Following is a five-step model for developing mentor relationships.

**Step 1: First and foremost, identify what you need.** Set goals and objectives that you would like to achieve with each specific mentor. Be realistic and practical with your expectations, being thoughtful and mindful of their time.

Make sure that you are creating a partnership that is one of give and take. Offer your assistance, knowledge and resources



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to your mentors just as frequently as you ask for their help.

Keep in mind, this is all about relationship building – what you put into the relationship is just as important, if not more so, than what you get out of the relationship.

Approach each mentor in a sincere and authentic manner. Be clear and concise in communicating your needs and expecta-

tions. Ask them for their input and feedback.

Practice professional etiquette every step of the way – be courteous and respectful. Remember, it is every individual's job to manage his or her own career, not their mentors' role!

**Step 2: Reach out to a variety of mentors to meet diverse needs.** Establish mentor relationships with multiple individuals across many parts of your life.

Mentors come in all shapes and sizes from all facets of your world – both personally and professionally. They can come in the form of role models, peers, colleagues, managers, leaders, professors, teachers, family members, friends, relatives, coaches and other contacts.

You will enter into these mentor relationships, as well as maintain them, in formal and informal ways. At certain points of your life cycle and career stages, the relationships can be stronger than other times, taking into account your work/life integration challenges and issues as well as your changing needs.

The key is to be diligent in establishing and nurturing long-lasting relationships with all of the mentors in your lifetime. Be proactive and strategic by identifying mentors who cross all of the different paths of your career and enhance your ability to develop and grow both personally and professionally.

**Step 3: Create a strategy that offers your value-add and keeps mentors engaged.** Identify your personal brand

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and articulate it effectively.

Prior to entering into any mentor relationship, do your homework. Prepare yourself for the difficult questions a mentor will ask you and be ready for the challenge.

Enter into the relationship confident and empowered. Know yourself – your strengths, weaknesses, skills, competencies and interests. Understand your values and priorities. Assess your short-term and long-term goals for your career and life.

Invest in your education and continued advancement. Be active in professional associations and involved in your community. Take on leadership roles that nourish and feed your passion(s).

**Step 4: Stay true to your vision and your goals.** Keep a formal plan that you update and visit regularly. You cannot stay true to yourself if you do not keep yourself accountable.

The mentee is the driver for any mentor relationship – it is important to be

mindful of this and be diligent with your initiatives.

Have a vision that spans over 10 years at a minimum and revisit your goals on a regular basis. Make changes and adjustments as necessary.

Your life stages and career phases lead you down many new paths and directions. Keep an open mind to new possibilities while staying focused on your track.

**Step 5: Communicate, communicate, communicate!** Keep the channels of communication open throughout the entire mentor relationship and beyond.

Let your mentor know of your progress – your struggles, lessons learned and successes. Be sure to give your mentor feedback on a regular basis by sharing the ways he or she is positively impacting you.

Show your gratitude and appreciation. Offer direct and honest feedback. Be an active listener. Reflect on the feedback you receive and incorporate it into your strategies. Keep an open mind and be

flexible to new opportunities and possibilities.

Accept constructive criticism and offer concerns. Don't be afraid to show vulnerability and take some risks.

Open and honest communication will set the foundation for building a trusting relationship and rapport for both mentor and mentee.

Most important, keep a sense of humor and a positive attitude. As Ben Franklin said, "Life is 10 percent what you make it and 90 percent how you take it."

Mentors are an essential ingredient for career success. Be sure to include this important and valuable resource in your career planning and development strategies.

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