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***“5 Steps for Developing Mentor Relationships ”***

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Mentors are an important part of our careers - both having a mentor and being a mentor. They can play a key role in our professional and personal development. A mentor can be a sounding board as well as a source of encouragement and support. As we progress in our careers, we can share our wisdom and learnings as a mentor to others in our workplace and community. Both relationships offer us access to people and resources when making difficult decisions, career choices and/or managing complex situations.

Making it a priority to seek out mentors in our lives and careers and taking the time to mentor others is not only important but extremely rewarding. In fact, having and being a mentor are two major milestones during one's career and contribute greatly to establishing and building our personal brand. Mentors come to us from a variety of venues, each offering wisdom and counsel in different ways. We should aim to seek out multiple mentors, be our own advocate and initiate these relationships. In addition, welcome opportunities to mentor others to give back and provide support to others.

Create a mentoring plan that allows you to be your authentic self while pushing in new ways, being open to showing vulnerability and taking some risks. Don't wait for mentors to come to you in a formal manner. Take the lead, be purposeful and focused with your objectives.

Use these five steps to help you establish your plan for seeking out mutually rewarding mentor relationships.

### ***Step 1 – First and foremost, identify what you need***

Do your homework first. Establish specific goals and objectives that you would like to achieve with each mentor. Be thoughtful and mindful of their time and set realistic and practical expectations. Create a partnership that is one of give and take. Offer your assistance, knowledge and resources to your mentors just as often as you ask for their help. It 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 with sincerity, transparency and authenticity. Be clear and concise in communicating your needs and expectations. Ask them for their input and feedback and most importantly, go into the relationship with an openness to receiving it.

### ***Step 2 – Reach out to a variety of mentors to meet diverse needs***

Determine a host of possibilities that play to your mix of goals and objectives. Establish mentor relationships with multiple individuals across different parts of your life. Mentors come in all shapes and sizes from all faucets of our 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. We enter into these mentor relationships as well as maintain them in formal and informal ways. What's most important is to be diligent in establishing and nurturing long lasting relationships with all of the mentors throughout our career stages and lifetime. Be pro-active and strategic by identifying mentors that 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 and articulate it effectively. Prior to entering into any mentor relationship, conduct your personal due diligence. Prepare yourself for the difficult questions a mentor will likely ask you and be ready for the challenge to further reflect and probe within yourself. Enter into the relationship confident and empowered. Know yourself – your strengths, development areas, knowledge, skills, competencies, interests, values and priorities. Assess your short and long term goals for your life and career. Invest in your education and continued advancement. Join and be active in professional associations and involved in your community. Take on leadership roles that allow you to grow as well as nourish and feed your passion(s).

#### ***Step 4 – Stay true to your vision and your goals***

Create a formal plan that you assess, evaluate and update regularly. Stay true to yourself by keeping yourself accountable. The mentee is the driver for any mentor relationship – keep this in mind and be diligent with your initiatives. Have a vision that includes both a short term and long term outlook. Revisit your goals on a regular basis. Make changes and adjustments as necessary. Be flexible and open 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 well beyond. Let your mentor know your progress – your successes, challenges, on-going struggles, and lessons learned. Be sure to give your mentor regular feedback by sharing the ways they are positively impacting you. Express your gratitude and appreciation. Be an active listener – embrace and reflect on the feedback you receive and incorporate it into your strategies. Stay open-minded and be flexible to new opportunities and possibilities. Accept constructive criticism openly and boldly; share your concerns with sincerity. Don't be afraid to show vulnerability and take some risks. Honest and open communications is the key to setting a foundation for building trusting mentor/mentee relationships. Celebrate your achievements!

*Ask Rita: Do you have a career question and/or a career story to share? Email your questions or stories to [rita@ritaballenassociates.com](mailto:rita@ritaballenassociates.com)*

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