

# Eight steps to scouting a successful mentorship

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**Y**ou've heard it before: To further your career, find mentors to guide you. Mentors are people who have experience and knowledge in your desired vocation and who are willing and able to share what they know. But how exactly does one go about finding a mentor?

Let's get one thing clear first. Mentorship is something you engage in, not something that just happens.

It is a process, not an accomplishment. Successful mentoring relationships are intentional, and the impetus for action has to come from you. It is certainly not going to happen if you wait around hoping that a mentor will miraculously find you.

So, here then are eight important steps that will help you get the mentorship that you desire.

■ **Be thoughtful about who you choose.** Just because someone has the job you aspire to does not make him a good mentor. You need to find someone you like and respect; a role model who has traits you want to emulate. If you think he's a jerk, then he is not going to be a good mentor! So seek someone who has values that resonate with yours. And look both within and outside your current organization.

■ **Initiate the relationship.** Once you find someone you believe would be a good mentor to you, find ways to connect to them, either physically or virtually. What meetings or events might you attend in common? Do you have people in your professional circles that could introduce you to one another? If they are active on social media, look to see where and what they post and participate in the dialogues. Show genuine and sincere interest in who they are and what they do, and you'll get the ball rolling.

■ **Invest time in building the connection.** Don't expect a mentoring relationship to be created overnight. It is unlikely that you would ask someone you just met to marry you. Us-

ually, the first encounter tells you if there is chemistry. And then you'd date each other for a while to see whether you're compatible. It's no different when it comes to finding a mentor.

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■ **Let the relationship build naturally.** Just like dating may eventually get more serious, a mentoring relationship also develops over time. In most cases, the best mentoring happens without the formal label "mentoring." So don't ask someone you barely know to be your mentor. Instead, once a preliminary connection is established, ask for a first meeting, either in person,

on the telephone or even virtually. Come prepared with questions, but let the conversation flow naturally.

■ **Evaluate the relationship.** The mentoring relationship is a two-way street. Not only must you see value, but so must your mentor. Is she interested in interacting with you? Was she encouraging? Do you feel a connection and want to continue? Often, potential mentors can be busy people, so keep your expectations reasonable. But if there is clearly no mutual attraction, then it's time to let go and move on.

■ **Show your continued interest.** If there is a desire to continue on both sides, then it's up to you to keep the momentum going. Send a thank-you note. Express that you'd like to meet again. Offer to schedule a date and time. Be brave, remember that as long as you are unobtrusive, your interest will most probably be perceived as a compliment.

■ **Maintain the relationship.** Your continued conversations with your mentor can give you a variety of benefits – a listening ear, alternate perspectives on issues, a sounding board for ideas, continuing support and encouragement, insights from her successes and failures, and connections to others in her network. But for it to thrive, your mentor has to get something out of the relationship, as well. Usually, it's the satisfaction that comes from watching you grow and develop in your career. But be sensitive to other opportunities. Have the emotional awareness to pay attention to when you can be helpful – is there knowledge that you can provide or introductions you can make?

■ **Welcome negative feedback.** A good mentor will challenge your assumptions and let you know if he thinks you have made a misstep. When that happens, embrace it. It means that he has reached a point in your relationship where he feels comfortable enough to call you on it. This is a good thing. You are now at the stage where you can truly call your mentor "a mentor."