

Career Advice

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Mentor relationships can benefit both parties



Aspiring early-career professionals are often advised to find a mentor, while leaders with more seniority are encouraged to serve as mentors. The key in both cases is to foster a relationship that works for both people, one that inspires and uplifts, defined by the pronouns "we" and "us." As author Jim Rohm puts it, "My mentor said, 'Let's go do it,' not, 'You go do it.' It's more powerful when someone says, 'Let's!'"

Q. How do I select a mentor?

A. A mentor should be someone you know and trust. They might work at the same company, but it doesn't have to be in the same department. Often, it can actually be more beneficial for a mentor to be in another department or division; you may feel able to speak more honestly (but always with discretion) about your professional life. You also can look outside your company, to get a different perspective, but keep in mind how much you will be able to share with them without breaching confidentiality.

Q. How do I ask someone to be my mentor?

A. Be sure to use a professional tone, whether it is through phone or email. Express clearly what you hope to gain from a mentor — for example, how to grow within your current industry, how to manage professional and personal life, how to become a leader or all of the above. Be straightforward about how much communication you hope to have with a mentor; regular communication with a meaningful connection is key.

Q. What do I have to offer as a mentor?

A. If someone asks you to be their mentor, take it as a compliment and an honor. If you are concerned you cannot devote enough time to do a mentorship justice, remember that the quality of time you spend with a person you mentor means more than the amount of time. If you're concerned that you don't have enough to offer as a mentor, think about how often you've said, "I wish someone had told me that!" or even more importantly, "I wish I had done that."

Q. Am I too old or too young to have a mentor?

A. There is no age or stage of your career when being a mentor or having a mentor is off limits. Being a mentor and having a mentor really means participating in a mutually beneficial relationship in which knowledge and experiences are shared by both people working and learning together.