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Guide to Getting the Mentoring You Need

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Harvard Business Review

Guide to Getting the Mentoring You Need

Stuck in a career rut? Maybe you're itching to broaden your skills and take on new challenges. Or perhaps you're eyeing a management role a level or two up.

So how do you grow and advance professionally? Not by waiting for senior managers to notice you and "bring you along." You'll be sorely disappointed by how long that takes, if it ever happens.

The key is effective mentoring—and it's up to *you* to go get it.

Done right, mentoring is one of the most powerful, efficient tools for learning and moving up. But to reap those rewards, you need to pursue them with rigor and commitment. This guide will show you how.

YOU'LL GET BETTER AT:

- **Spelling out clear, realistic goals**
- **Attracting influential sponsors**
- **Forging strong bonds with your mentors**
- **Gauging your progress**
- **Giving back to your mentors so they'll give *more* to you**
- **Building a diverse "developmental network"**
- **Learning from junior upstarts *and* sage executives**

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Section 1: What Does Good Mentoring Look Like?

Self-Assessment: What *Don't* You Know About Effective Mentoring?

Most of us realize we need mentoring if we want to develop and advance in our jobs and careers—but what should it involve, exactly? Take this brief quiz to quickly gauge what you already know and where you could use some brushing up. (Answers appear on the next page.)

1. It's important to define your mentoring goals and expectations:

a. In consultation with your manager
b. At the beginning of the mentoring relationship
c. After you and your mentor have met several times and established a strong rapport
d. After you get feedback on strengths and weaknesses in your performance review

2. A sponsor goes above and beyond traditional mentoring by:

a. Entering into a formal agreement with HR to mentor you
b. Working directly with your manager to chart a course for your professional development
c. Using her influence in the organization to lobby for your initiatives and your advancement
d. Creating a job for you in her department

3. As your informal, hand-selected group of mentors, your "personal board of directors" should consist of:

a. Various companies' board members who take an interest in your career trajectory
b. Senior executives who hold the type of job you hope to have someday
c. Close friends who understand your strengths and goals
d. Diverse specialists from your network who can advise you on a range of challenges

4. Co-mentoring is a valuable option when:

a. You need guidance from more than one person
b. You have a specific skill to learn and one to teach in return
c. You and a peer need guidance from the same person
d. You need to learn several skills or competencies

5. In a reverse-mentoring relationship:

a. The mentee "pays it forward" by mentoring a junior colleague
b. The mentee receives guidance *after* he's made a mistake
c. The mentor teaches by asking questions
d. The mentor learns from the mentee—and from the process of mentoring

6. You can build a better network by:

a. Encouraging the people in it to improve *their* networks
b. Backing away from energy-sapping relationships and bringing in energizers who will help you reach your goals
c. Seeking advisers whose interests and values mirror your own
d. Engaging with as many new people as possible

7. The ideal mentoring relationship lasts:

a. One year
b. Five years
c. An entire career
d. As long as you need it, and no longer

Self-Assessment Answers

1. It's important to define your mentoring goals and expectations:

b. At the beginning of the mentoring relationship

2. A sponsor goes above and beyond traditional mentoring by:

c. Using her influence in the organization to lobby for your initiatives and your advancement

3. As your informal, hand-selected group of mentors, your "personal board of directors" should consist of:

d. Diverse specialists from your network who can advise you on a range of challenges

4. Co-mentoring is a valuable option when:

b. You have a specific skill to learn and one to teach in return

5. In a reverse-mentoring relationship:

d. The mentor learns from the mentee—and from the process of mentoring

6. You can build a better network by:

b. Backing away from energy-sapping relationships and bringing in energizers who will help you reach your goals

7. The ideal mentoring relationship lasts:

d. As long as you need it, and no longer

The Relationship You Need to Get Right

by Sylvia Ann Hewlett, Melinda Marshall, and Laura Sherbin

How to be a good protégé—and an effective sponsor—throughout your career

Katharine, a senior HR executive at a global financial services firm, takes pride in developing rising stars. After a vice president on one of her teams consistently impressed her, she recommended him for a more challenging role in another part of the company. Months later Katharine heard through the grapevine that he was struggling in the job. She asked to meet with him. "You know we're in this together, right?" she said. "I put my reputation on the line, but I have no idea how you're performing and whether you need help or air cover." He promised to keep her in the loop, but communication dropped off again. Katharine realized that his commitment to the firm, and to her, had waned. She met with him once more and told him she could no longer be his sponsor.

When Maria, a manager at a U.S. health care firm, was invited to join a mentoring program for high-potential women, she anticipated getting guidance that would help her advance. But her assigned mentor, a physician and vice president, took little interest in Maria's career; instead she lectured to the group about her own path and gave direct advice only to the participants who were also MDs. In the end Maria turned to existing allies for career support. "Not everyone in leadership knows how to be an advocate," she reflects.

In 2003 Mark McLane, an openly gay innovation consultant at Whirlpool, was asked to serve on the company's diversity council, headed by then-COO Jeff Fettig. He excelled at the work and in 2004 sought an appointment to southwest Michigan's Council for World Class Communities, a nonprofit that furthers economic and social growth in the largely African-American community of Benton Harbor, Michigan, where the company is headquartered. Fettig supported his bid and also persuaded CEO David Whitwam to make McLane Whirlpool's director of diversity, enabling him to be the council's executive-on-loan. That year Fettig moved up to the CEO job and gave his protégé a new mission: to ensure gender balance among senior managers globally. McLane set four-year goals and aligned Whirlpool's recruiting strategy accordingly. "Mark not only grasped our vision for key areas of the company, he played a critical role in implementing it," Fettig says.

McLane also demonstrated his allegiance to Fettig outside the office. The CEO is a trustee of the local Boys and Girls Club, a nonprofit he sees as key to making Benton Harbor a "world-class community" that might have greater appeal to Whirlpool recruits and be more likely to yield local talent. McLane joined the board and, with Fettig's coaching, became president after six months. He instituted reforms that turned the organization's $125,000 deficit into a $500,000 reserve and nearly doubled its membership within a year. "If someone believes in you and gives you an opportunity, it is incumbent upon you to go the extra mile," he observes.

The Dynamics of Sponsorship

As the examples above show, the relationship between sponsor and protégé works best when it helps *both* parties. Katharine, who requested anonymity to protect her firm's reputation, cut ties with her former vice president because he failed to demonstrate basic responsiveness, let alone deliver the standout proactive effort she'd expected. Maria, who asked for anonymity because she still works with the physician once assigned to mentor her, found that the older woman lacked a grasp of the give-and-take intrinsic to effective guidance. By contrast, Fettig and McLane worked together on the twin goals of hitting Whirlpool's business targets and enhancing their reputations as leaders in the community.

Sponsorship can help catapult junior talent into top management while also greatly expanding the reach and impact of senior leadership—but only when both sponsor and protégé recognize that it's a mutually beneficial alliance, a truly two-way street.

Our recent research bears this out. We conducted three national surveys of nearly 4,000 professionals in large corporations, held focus groups with more than 60 vice presidents and senior vice presidents, and interviewed nearly 20 *Fortune* 500 executives. The best sponsors, we found, go beyond mentoring. They offer not just guidance but also advocacy, not just vision but also the tactical means of realizing it. They place bets on outstanding junior colleagues and call in favors for them. The most successful protégés, for their part, recognize that sponsorship must be earned with performance and loyalty—not just once but continually.

We repeatedly heard CEOs and top managers say that they wouldn't be where they are without strong sponsors *and* loyal protégés. One *Fortune* 500 CEO gave a powerful illustration. When interviewing candidates for senior positions, he always asks them, "How many people do you have in your pocket? If I asked you to pull off something impossible that involved liaising across seven geographies and five functions, who owes you one and could help you do it?" He told us, "I'm not interested in anyone who doesn't have deep pockets."

Ensuring that you have sponsors is a lifelong project no matter what your position. As she neared retirement age, a senior partner at Ernst & Young belatedly recognized that she hadn't "refreshed" her pool of sponsors. "I had always looked forward to a second career as a board director, but I'm realizing that being selected for a board seat is all about sponsorship," she says. "You can't apply for these positions; you've got to be tapped." Nor is it ever too early for a junior executive to start cultivating protégés. Kris Urbauer, the manager of veterans' initiatives at GE, acknowledged that to achieve CEO Jeffrey Immelt's goal of making the company an appealing employer for returning vets, she would have to develop a posse of high-performing subordinates. "With all eyes on me to deliver, I'm going to need some dedicated help," she told us.

Our first exploration of sponsorship, a 2011 HBR special report titled "The Sponsor Effect," revealed the impact a sponsor can have on virtually every aspect of an employee's career, boosting the ability to ask for and get raises and promotions and find satisfaction at work. Yet relatively few of the employees we surveyed—19% of men and 13% of women—reported having a sponsor. The use of a sponsor as a career lever is sometimes poorly understood, other times perceived as rife with risk. And corporate initiatives designed to jump-start sponsorships have had at best mixed results. Leaders can't lobby convincingly for up-and-comers they don't know, and junior employees paired with sponsors don't see what they can contribute or can't deliver it.

Mentors and Sponsors: How They Differ

Companies need to make a sharper distinction between mentoring and sponsorship. Mentors offer "psychosocial" support for personal and professional development, plus career help that includes advice and coaching, as Boston University's Kathy Kram explains in her pioneering research. Only sponsors actively advocate for advancement.

"Classical mentoring" (ideal but rare) combines psychosocial and career support. Usually, though, workers get one or the other—or if they get both, it's from different sources. Analysis of hundreds of studies shows that people derive more satisfaction from mentoring but need sponsorship. Without sponsorship, a person is likely to be overlooked for promotion, regardless of his or her competence and performance—particularly at midcareer and beyond, when competition for promotions increases.

Mentors

- Can sit at any level in the hierarchy
- Provide emotional support, feedback on how to improve, and other advice
- Serve as role models
- Help mentees learn to navigate corporate politics
- Strive to increase mentees' sense of competence and self-worth
- Focus on mentees' personal and professional development

Sponsors

- Must be senior managers with influence
- Give protégés exposure to other executives who may help their careers
- Make sure their people are considered for promising opportunities and challenging assignments
- Protect their protégés from negative publicity or damaging contact with senior executives
- Fight to get their people promoted

Excerpted from "Why Men Still Get More Promotions Than Women" by Herminia Ibarra, Nancy M. Carter, and Christine Silva (product #R1009F), *Harvard Business Review*, September 2010.

Seeking to better understand these relationships, we launched a second round of research. Our initiative, Sponsor Effect 2.0, enabled us to map the quid pro quo: how protégés can attract, sustain, and deploy sponsors to progress in their careers, and how sponsors can use the dynamic to extend their reach, expand their skills, build networks, and demonstrate leadership.

The Sponsor's Role

What exactly does a sponsor do? According to our research, it boils down to two things: putting one's reputation on the line for a protégé and taking responsibility for his or her promotion. A good sponsor will groom you to audition for a key part in a prominent production, nudge the director to choose you, and coach you on your performance. While you're onstage, she'll train a spotlight on you so that everyone takes note of your abilities and potential. Should you stumble, or should the audience turn hostile, she'll come to your aid (at least the first time). After all, "protégé" means "one who's protected."

When we asked managers what they hoped for in a sponsor, 74% said they want a sponsor to provide honest feedback, specifically by suggesting ways for the protégé to narrow gaps in skills and experience. Other frequent responses included "provide feedback on how to look and act like a leader" (59%), "provide opportunities for visibility internally" (49%), "help me define career goals" (44%), and "be willing to defend me" (41%).

The degree to which a sponsor will come to the rescue of a protégé varies considerably, however. A Siemens executive told us her sponsorship has to be clearly merited lest it look like favoritism. "If you screw up, I may step in, but if you continue not to thrive, I'll have to step away," she says. At the law firm White & Case, by contrast, partner and tax attorney Jim Hayden supported his protégé Someera Khokhar repeatedly. When Khokhar had a conflict with another partner, Hayden intervened to mend fences. When long-term clients demurred at liaising primarily with an associate, Hayden vouched for Khokhar's expertise. In subtle and overt ways he ensured that she could thrive—which indeed she did, eventually making partner. "Every time I needed something, he made it happen, whether by his presence or his influence," Khokhar recalls.

The Protégé's Part

What protégés should do for their sponsors is less well understood. Our survey indicated that the top two imperatives are demonstrating trust and showing loyalty. (Some 61% agreed with the former idea and 49% agreed with the latter one.) When we asked potential sponsors, 62% said protégés should "assume responsibility and be self-directed," 39% said they should "deliver 110%," and 34% said they should "offer skill sets and bring a perspective different than mine." One respondent summed it up this way: "A protégé who doesn't do everything in her power to make her sponsor look smart for backing her is wasting the sponsor's time."

Ed Gadsden, the chief diversity officer at Pfizer, emphasizes that a protégé should keep her sponsor apprised of critical developments, conversations that might be off his radar, and constituencies outside his circle. He recalls a conversation with his sponsor, the late legal scholar and federal judge Leon Higginbotham. Early on Gadsden asked Higginbotham what he got out of the relationship. Higginbotham replied, "You're nothing like me. The people you're around, the things you see, what you're hearing—you provide a perspective I wouldn't otherwise have." Today Gadsden appreciates this quality in his own protégés.

Several successful protégés spoke of achieving their sponsor's vision (recall Mark McLane). At a large government contractor, one team leader, a former member of the military, described a boss whose big-picture goals required great tactical expertise. "I'd see where he wanted to go, and I didn't say 'That's never going to work' but rather 'Yes, sir!'" he told us. "I found solutions—and he appreciated that. Together we really drove results and fast-tracked both our careers."

Finding Each Other

Most sponsors cultivate protégés not from self-serving motives but because it's "the right thing to do" and can be a gratifying experience. "Paying it forward is my way of paying back the people who helped me get where I am today," says Annmarie Neal, the chief talent officer at Cisco.

Leaders will give their time, attention, and relationship capital only to people who perform exceptionally well. Katharine's vice president caught her attention, she told us, because he was "the kind of guy you could put in a room and he'd come up with that big idea." Sponsors also get behind those who are hungry for backing. Cynthia Rivera, a senior diversity specialist at Freddie Mac, notes, "They've got to show me they're going to make the most of what I have to give." Finally, while many sponsors seek protégés who balance their own strengths and weaknesses, they also tend to support people with similar values, mind-sets, or backgrounds. "My race and gender often form the basis for my affinity, because there are so few female multicultural leaders in tech," says Rosalind Hudnell, the chief diversity officer at Intel. "I see myself in them and in the challenges they'll face, which allows me to help them in ways others might not be able to."

Junior executives should be just as selective when seeking sponsors, and they should take a proactive approach. One IT professional highlights a common mistake. "I was great at building business and had tons of cheerleaders, but I had that typical Asian keep-your-head-down-and-you'll-get-taken-care-of mind-set," he recalls. "My boss had to take me aside and tell me that if I didn't actively cultivate her as my sponsor, I would never progress beyond senior associate."

The most successful protégés are not content with one sponsor. Throughout their careers they scan the horizon for leaders who either embody their values (the quality most sought by 45% of the protégés we polled) or value their strengths (43%). They target leaders whose style they can complement—bringing tactical follow-through skills to visionaries or offering pushback to collaborators. They target leaders they think could benefit from their networks as well as their expertise.

And they routinely *ask* for career guidance, feedback, and stretch assignments. A vice president with 26 years of experience remembers consistently approaching her bosses for more responsibility. "Sponsors cannot be clairvoyant," she explains. "If you want to grow in the organization, then spell out how—and the introductions or team postings will follow."

Cynthia Rivera recalls that early in her career she asked for an appointment with the executive vice president; when his assistant pressed to know her business, she said it was a personal matter. During the meeting she laid out her career history and desired trajectory, soliciting feedback on the skills and experience she might need. "Ask for input, not a job," she recommends. "You don't want to go in there waving a résumé." The strategy paid off: By the end of the meeting she had won a sponsor.

Women seem particularly reluctant to be so proactive. "They don't want to have to toot their own horn," explains Subha Barry, a senior vice president at Freddie Mac. During a previous job at Merrill Lynch she found an alternate strategy. She asked three female colleagues, all reporting to different executives, to meet monthly over lunch to discuss one another's work. That way they could knowledgeably promote the others to those in their own circles. "When women talk about each other, we can be quite eloquent," Barry observes. "So I might say to my boss in response to a problem he was airing, 'This is something my colleague Lisa's been working on; she's got some great ideas. You need to talk to her.'" The strategy was remarkably effective, gaining Barry and her lunchmates C-level positions within and outside the firm.

Respondents offered several additional sponsor-winning tactics. Chief among them was "leading with a yes": voicing enthusiasm when offered a challenging assignment. (If you have reservations, don't air them right away.) Others included bringing in new business, keeping potential sponsors "in the know," and developing a product or service on their behalf.

Maintaining the Relationship

Winning a sponsor is just the beginning. The relationship must be consistently nurtured and periodically refreshed—tasks that fall to the junior player. Successful protégés understand that sustaining sponsorship looks a lot like earning it: meeting deadlines, exceeding targets, and proving you will advance the larger mission. They recognize the importance of regular meetings, whether face-to-face or by phone or e-mail. They know to look for opportunities to forge bonds. And they find ways to support a sponsor's passion or help build his or her legacy outside the organization.

Protégés can also strengthen their relationships with sponsors by becoming sponsors themselves, because harnessing and growing talent is arguably the best demonstration of leadership ability. "Tiger" Tyagarajan, the CEO of Genpact, is a case in point. During the 17 years when he was the protégé of then-CEO Pramod Bhasin, he distinguished himself by building highly effective teams from scratch. "I had to hire people with background and depth and then sell them a vision, because I was putting them into what looked like a small job and making it their business to grow it," he recalls. "My ability to attract big people, get them excited, and keep them excited was one of the main drivers of my career."

Mark McLane is now the director of diversity and inclusion at Booz Allen Hamilton and is mindful of cultivating his own protégés. He recently lobbied for a team member's advancement, and that associate is returning the favor, ensuring that what's near and dear to McLane gets communicated across divisions. "He's promoting not just the percentages I've driven but the cultural changes I've effected," McLane says. "I'll continue to expend capital on him because he's taking my mission forward in ways neither of us could have foreseen."

Sylvia Ann Hewlett is the founding president of the Center for Work-Life Policy and SA Hewlett Associates and the chair of the Hidden Brain Drain, a task force of 67 global companies. **Melinda Marshall** is a senior fellow at CWLP, and **Laura Sherbin** is a senior vice president and the director of research there.

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Mentoring in All Its Shapes and Sizes

by Amy Gallo

When you think of mentoring, do you envision a sage executive counseling a junior upstart for years and years? It doesn't usually work that way anymore. Over the past few decades, mentoring has evolved into guidance and support from all kinds of sources—yet our collective thinking about it hasn't changed with the times. Here's a roundup of four dated but persistent myths you'll need to push past to grow and advance in your career.

Myth #1: You have to find one perfect mentor.

It's actually rare to get through your career with only one mentor; most people today have several. So it makes sense that Boston University management professor Kathy Kram prefers the term **developmental network**: "It's that handful of people you can go to for advice and can trust to have your best interests in mind," she says. Your developmental network can be as large or small as you want and may include people you know on a personal level, such as friends and family members. Some of the key benefits of having more than one mentor within close reach: You can get a variety of perspectives on a challenge you're facing, you'll have ready access to people with different areas of expertise, and you're less likely to wear people out if you have more than one mentor to answer questions and respond to ideas.

Consider how Soki Choi, a mobile app developer whose start-up was acquired, sought career mentoring from several people in her developmental network when she was considering next steps: Should she take a job with another telecom company, start a new business, or switch fields and pursue a degree in medical research, as she'd always wanted to do? For guidance, she turned to Ewa Ställdal, the CEO of a major medical research foundation, who connected Choi with others in the field so she could do her homework; former Ericsson CEO Björn Svedberg, who urged her to pursue her dreams as he wished he had done; and Choi's friend Martin Lorentzon, who'd made a similarly dramatic career change of his own. All those perspectives shaped her decision to get a medical PhD at the Karolinska Institute rather than accept one of the many telecom job offers that came her way.

Myth #2: Mentoring is always a formal long-term relationship.

Because we change jobs and careers more often than we used to, a long-term advising relationship may not be realistic or necessary. Think of mentoring as something you tap when you need it. "Mentoring can be a one-hour session. We don't have to escalate it to a six-month or yearlong event," says Karie Willyerd, cofounder of the executive development firm Future Workplace. "You don't need to wait until you have some big thing in your career," adds Jeanne Meister, Willyerd's fellow Future Workplace cofounder. These days, Meister says, mentoring is often "more like Twitter and less like a psychotherapy session."

Of course, the guidance may be richer and more relevant if it comes from someone who knows you well and understands your goals. You still need to build other relationships, though, so you'll have connections in place when you require advice that people closer to you can't provide. Occasionally, you may want to turn to someone who doesn't know you at all to get one-off counsel from an outsider's point of view.

Myth #3: Mentoring is only for junior people.

"We used to think it was people at early stages of their career who needed mentoring, those just out of MBA programs," says Kram. "Now we understand that people at every stage benefit from this kind of assistance." Sometimes, as Meister and Willyerd point out in *The 2020 Workplace*, it even makes sense to flip the traditional roles and have a junior colleague advising a senior one on things like new technology. No matter where the teaching comes from, if it's smart and useful, we need to be receptive to it.

That may not come naturally if you think you're already at the top of your game, as Stephen Wachter did after two decades in the recruiting business. When he founded the firm Osprey One, he landed some of the largest clients in Silicon Valley, including Google, Yahoo, and Facebook. Two years ago, his view of himself changed when he sat next to Susan Robertson, a leadership development consultant, on a plane headed to the East Coast. When they started talking about what they did, Wachter proudly shared his successes—and Robertson asked him, "So, what's your next step?" The question blew him away. He thought he simply had to keep doing what he

What people are saying on HBR.org

Posted by Marc Sokol:

I agree that traditional practices of mentoring have evolved, but **I think you blur the lines of mentoring, coaching, and advising.**

When I started a blog over a year ago, my adviser was someone 25 years younger whom I had been mentoring for a couple of years, so we had an established relationship that we could build upon. She had great insights on getting started, but I had to seek out someone more seasoned in the world of blogging to learn how to go beyond that. To call that first adviser my "mentor" just applies the term to every relationship where advice is exchanged.

I agree that mentoring isn't just older to younger, and that there isn't one perfect mentor. But for me, mentoring requires seeing people in the totality of who they are and the organizational/industry settings in which they operate. That often requires a deeper conversation than you might have with a performance coach or someone giving you an hour's worth of advice. Not that those aren't valuable—they just aren't the same as mentoring.

So I would add:

- Take the time to understand the experience and values that each party brings to the relationship; it sets the context for the advice being given and received.
- Don't assume that a cross-country flight is long enough to build a mentoring relationship.
- Don't collect mentors like baseball cards.

Response by Amy Gallo:

The lines between mentoring, coaching, and advising *are* blurred, and perhaps they were never all that distinct. Does paying someone who advises you necessarily make him a coach? Can someone get enough context about you in a five-hour plane ride to provide mentoring? These are some of the important questions that I think your comments raise.

Social media and technology further blur those lines and challenge the notion that mentoring can only be a relationship between people who know each other well. Take on-demand mentoring, for example—a concept that Jeanne Meister and Karie Willyerd discuss in *The 2020 Workplace*. With on-demand mentoring, a mentor and mentee are paired up based on a background assessment and psychological testing. They never meet each other, and in fact, the entire process is anonymous. Meister and Willyerd spoke with both mentors and mentees who benefited from this kind of relationship. In particular, people cited their ability to discuss sensitive issues more openly because of the anonymity.

I think whether you call it mentoring or not is less important than knowing what kind of advice and guidance you need and finding it in a way that works for you.

Join the discussion at blogs.hbr.org

was doing. In talking to Robertson, though, Wachter realized he had room to grow in how he interacted with his clients. He also saw that if he stopped developing, the industry would grow without him and pass him by.

Wachter and Robertson have stayed in touch and continue to have a mentoring relationship. They have regularly scheduled conversations in which Robertson helps him think through challenges he's facing and forces him to reflect on who he is and how he is with others. Because she holds him accountable for his own development, he doesn't get complacent: "The danger," he now understands, "is when you think you've got it all figured out."

Myth #4: Mentoring is something more experienced people do out of the goodness of their hearts.

Though mentors can get a lot of satisfaction from helping people develop and learn, the relationship should be useful to both parties. Before you reach out to a mentor, think about what you have to offer as a mentee: Can you provide a unique perspective on the organization? Do you bring valuable information that might help your mentor succeed in his job? Whatever it is, be clear with your prospective adviser about what's in it for him. This does not have to be a direct barter. Even the promise of future help, if and when it's needed, may persuade a mentor to share his time and energy with you.

Now that you have a better understanding of what mentoring can be, do you need it? "The place to start is with self-assessment, to find out what are the challenges in front of you... and why," says Kram. "Then ask yourself, do you have the relational resources to handle those challenges?" If the answer is no, it may be time to seek out one mentor or several, junior or senior. The key, as you'll see throughout this guide, is to find the right kind of advice from the right person at the right time.

Amy Gallo is a contributing editor at *Harvard Business Review*. Follow her on Twitter at @amyegallo.

Adapted from "Demystifying Mentoring," a Best Practices article posted February 1, 2011, on HBR.org.

Section 2: How Do You Get Mentoring That Will Help You Grow and Advance?

What Kinds of Mentors Do You Need—and How Do You Find Them?

by Diane Coutu

If you're waiting for a wise, dedicated mentor to recognize your potential and lead you down the yellow brick road to happiness and fortune, you'll be waiting a long time—and even then you're likely to be disappointed. To exploit your opportunities to grow and move ahead in your work and your life, your best bet will always be to take matters into your own hands and seek out the people who can help you.

Before you decide which ones to turn to, though, you'll have to figure out what kinds of mentors will best meet your needs. In my own long experience on both sides of the mentoring relationship, I've come across three distinct types:

The co-mentor: This can be anyone—a peer, a colleague, a friend—who needs you as much as you need him. A relationship between equals, co-mentoring is rooted in the desire for skill or knowledge exchange. For that reason, it's often more short-lived than a top-down mentoring relationship. It dissolves when both parties have achieved their goals. When people co-mentor each other, they typically want to learn something very specific: They may want to become proficient in a software program, for example, or better at speaking a foreign language.

Find a co-mentor if…

- You have a specific skill to learn.
- You have something to teach in return.

Find a remote mentor if…

- You need a fresh perspective.
- You've exhausted mentoring resources closer to you.

Find an invisible mentor if…

- You can't find a co-mentor or remote mentor to provide the right guidance or support.
- You can get what you need learning by example, with no interaction.

My colleague David and I co-mentored each other years ago as senior editors at *Harvard Business Review*. We had a number of things in common: He was European; I had lived in Europe for 20 years. We had both studied at Oxford University and had lived in Germany. But it was what we *didn't* share that brought us into our co-mentoring relationship. He had an MBA and was a banker; I had studied literature, philosophy, and psychology, and was a journalist. He understood business strategy and finance and could write case studies; I understood leadership and organizational development, and I knew how to report on those topics. We both came to our senior editor positions at HBR with significant strengths—but we also had deep holes in our knowledge and capabilities.

Together, though, we were a cohesive whole. We moved into the same office and worked at the same computer, sometimes with four hands on one keyboard, teaching each other how to develop HBR articles. We became increasingly productive as we learned more about editing and more about each other's skills. Our co-mentoring relationship lasted about a year and a half, and during that time we learned how to succeed on our own as generalists. Although we remained good friends and continued to offer advice on each other's articles, we'd become self-sufficient. The co-mentoring had served its purpose—ending it was the right thing to do.

Though chances are good you can't move into the same office as your co-mentor, you can set the stage for your own meaningful give-and-take in other ways. Try meeting regularly for a working breakfast or lunch, for example, or scheduling video chats on Skype—a medium that's conducive to hands-on teaching and learning because your computer and files are right there while you're using it.

Defining Your Goals and Expectations

To set your mentoring relationship up for success, you have to decide what exactly you want to learn. "Do you want technical or strategic expertise?" asks Leslie Camino-Markowitz, director of Next Generation Leadership Development Programs at Agilent Technologies. "Cultural awareness of how business is done? Perhaps expertise in Asia?"

How do you come up with your objectives? Try using the following questions to guide your thinking.

1. **What do you really want to be and do?** Examine not only your business goals but also your driving passions in life.
2. **What are you doing well that will help you get there?** Which core strengths will best serve you? Your ability to lead and motivate your staff? Your careful management of detailed operations?
3. **What are you *not* doing well that will prevent you from getting there?** Take an honest look at the roadblocks, challenges, or weaknesses that are slowing you down.
4. **What will you do differently tomorrow to meet those challenges?** When you practice your tennis, do you tend to favor your forehand? How will you start giving your professional "backhand" the attention it requires?
5. **Where do you need the most help—and who can provide it?** Now that you've worked your way through the questions above, you're ready to articulate your goals for the mentoring relationship and map them to potential mentors who have the strengths, relationships, and resources to help you.

Stick to four or five goals for the relationship. If you include more than that, you'll have trouble taking in what your mentor has to offer. And be sure to spell them out for the person who agrees to mentor you. Steve Trautman, author of *Teach What You Know: A Practical Leader's Guide to Knowledge Transfer Using Peer Mentoring* (Prentice-Hall, 2006), tells an all-too-familiar story about what happens when you don't:

Ross and Julie are a mentor/protégé pair who have worked together for six months with little progress. They started down this road because one day, their boss had told Ross, "Hey, you should be Julie's mentor." Both Ross and Julie are often out of the office at meetings. They never sat down to clarify [expectations], such as when and how often they would meet and who would set up those conversations. Ross and Julie's boss did not define the skills that Ross should teach Julie or even topics of conversation. Julie was worried about bothering Ross, and Ross did not want to presume Julie needed help.

If Julie had gone to her boss for more detail on which challenges he thought Ross could help her with and taken the time to assess her own goals for learning and growth, she could have roughed out a game plan with Ross. That small but crucial bit of direction would have led to a more focused and fruitful relationship.

Adapted from "360 Degree Mentoring," by Elizabeth Collins, *Harvard Management Update* (product #U0803B), March 2008, and "Five Questions Every Mentor Must Ask," by Anthony Tjan, March 25, 2009, HBR.org.

The remote mentor: This is someone outside your organization who can offer a fresh perspective and objective advice. Though mentors from your company can be invaluable, given their familiarity with the culture and the key players, certain needs are best served by outside, or "remote," mentors. Suppose your unit needs to downsize, and you have to decide which people to keep on staff when there isn't any dead weight to shed. If the senior managers you work with are short on creative ideas for solving the problem because it's the first time they've faced it, you may want to consult with someone who has orchestrated a successful reorg at another company altogether. Or say you're being groomed to lead your department or unit, and everybody knows it. You've got a lot of important learning to do, but people may not be open with their feedback, even when you ask for it directly. Sometimes they bite their tongues or, worse, stroke your ego, afraid that anything they say now might count against them when you take the reins. Look for one or more mentors on the outside to get you up to speed on setting agendas, building teams, delegating, and other senior management skills.

Remote mentors can be family members, friends, old college professors—anyone in another company or another industry. They can even be strangers.

That was the case with a mentor I'll call Jon. When I was 35, on leave from *The Wall Street Journal Europe,* I decided to work on a short memoir about being a pioneering woman in the 1970s. I had never taken a creative writing course, had never published anything besides journalistic articles, and had nothing but hope—and stories—to fuel my efforts. Though I had the discipline to write every day, I knew I needed instruction in the craft of creative nonfiction: How do you tell a compelling personal story that will resonate for others? How much detail is too much? How do you avoid the narcissistic traps that so many memoir writers fall into?

Living in Brussels at a time before there was much remote learning going on in universities, I didn't have ready access to the relevant courses in English. I had also exhausted the other mentoring resources around me. So I sought out writers who shared my interest in psychology, writers whose creative work I admired. I read biographies and narrowed my search to authors whose backgrounds and sensibilities intersected with mine. After poring over their letters, essays, fiction, and whatever else they had produced, I sat down and sent out 15 customized letters asking for help. Because my search was so targeted, it was very successful—every writer responded. Two offered to work with me through correspondence. I chose Jon for his sense of humor, and so our remote mentoring relationship began.

We never met; we never spoke on the phone. But we exchanged letters almost every week. I sent him pages of prose, which he marked up in red, teaching me about voice and pacing and segues from scene to scene. Even after I finally had a decent manuscript, Jon and I continued our correspondence until he died a few years later. The relationship was remote in the truest sense: He wrote to me only after I wrote to him. The advice was never unsolicited or paternalistic, and it was always in direct response to a question I had asked. In return, he asked me to critique his published works. I offered as much constructive criticism to him as he had to me—and in doing so, I honed a skill that was essential to my work as an editor both at McKinsey & Company and *Harvard Business Review:* giving honest, sometimes tough, feedback to authors.

The invisible mentor: This is someone you learn from with little or no direct interaction. Choreographer and dancer Twyla Tharp knew that George Balanchine, the larger-than-life artistic director of the New York City Ballet, was the person she would learn from the most structurally and musically. They met only three times—he didn't teach open classes, so she couldn't simply sign up for one—yet he served as her invisible mentor for 20 years. As Tharp explained when I interviewed her for an HBR article: "I mentally parked him in the corner of my studio, and the insistence on thoroughness that I saw in him became my standard."

A mentor like that doesn't have a personal relationship with you but can be crucial to your development. Invisible mentors may be unresponsive or deceased, or even authors of books that speak to you. "When someone asks me how to find a mentor," Tharp told me, "I tell them, 'Just go to Barnes & Noble and pull down a book from a shelf—pick out a writer, pick out a thinker. Pick out somebody who can teach you something.'" History is filled with people who turned to books for their mentoring. John F. Kennedy read Winston Churchill; Bill Clinton read Kennedy.

My literary mentor is Emily Dickinson. At every stage of my life, she's had something to offer—whether I was studying the Holy Ghost in the fourth grade or struggling to understand human psychology when I was 30. I identified with Dickinson because she was an utterly free thinker. Her belief about the role of women in society was as complex and unconventional as she was. But above all she was a brilliant writer—someone who kept reaching out for mentors, and who kept writing to them, even though they didn't help her find success (in the traditional sense) during her lifetime. When I tried my own hand at writing, she provided inspiration, wisdom, solace, and companionship.

So how can you choose your own invisible mentors? Think about the leaders, thinkers, entrepreneurs, inventors, artists, athletes, and others at the top of their game who move you. *Why* do they move you? Is it because of their craftsmanship? Their drive to excel? Their creativity? Their integrity? That "why" will shine a light on values and talents they can, by example, help you cultivate.

No matter what type of mentoring relationship you're in, it must have clear boundaries. You can deliberately draw and observe them, or the situation (a firm deadline, for instance) may *force* them. Either way, you need sharp lines to keep you out of murky personal territory: If you start expecting intimacy from your mentor, for example, or looking at him as the father you never had, you're headed for trouble and disappointment.

That said, feeling connected is key—whether it's with a co-mentor, who benefits from the relationship as much as you do; a remote mentor, who interacts with you thoughtfully but from a distance; or an invisible mentor, who has no idea you exist but calls out to you all the same. "Clicking" with someone you look up to empowers and motivates you to do your best work. Sometimes that matters even more than expertise.

Diane Coutu (dcoutu44@gmail.com) is the director of client communications at Cambridge Advisors to Family Enterprise. She also mentors high school students through the college application process.

Starting and Maintaining Relationships with Mentors

by Lew McCreary

Years ago, I failed to go out and get the mentoring I needed. I was then in the midst of my first magazine launch. I had always worked on the editorial side of the company, with little exposure to sales and marketing. Nonetheless, I claimed for myself the grand dual title of editor in chief and publisher—wanting a stake in the magazine's business future, not just its content. My boss, despite some skepticism, indulged me. But soon enough, I recognized that I was in over my head and would benefit from the guidance of someone with sales acumen and objective distance from my business unit's maverick culture. I even picked out an especially good candidate: a seasoned executive from another unit who had a strong track record on the commercial side and a firm grasp of editorial values and practice.

The first hurdle is picking the right mentor. Look for someone whose experience suits your goals.

Many times I came close to asking him to mentor me, confident he would agree to it. However, something always stopped me: I'd been given responsibilities that exceeded my experience—and, I feared, my abilities. That's not uncommon, of course. Throughout our careers, we must stretch and grow. I just wasn't sure I wanted to admit to anyone that I felt overwhelmed by the challenge. Would others start doubting me the way I secretly doubted myself? And if I did start a mentoring relationship with my executive of choice, how candid could I safely be about my colleagues, up to and including my boss?

If you're on the verge of reaching out to a mentor, you'll face difficult questions like these. The risks are real, but don't let them stymie you as they did me. Instead, keep them in check with a few ground rules for establishing and maintaining a strong, productive mentoring relationship.

Getting It Going

Here are some principles that will help you get started whether you're creating your own mentoring experiences from scratch, as many of us have to do, or participating in a formal program.

Selecting appropriate mentors. The first hurdle is picking the right people to guide you. If your company has a formal program, you may have a roster of mentors to choose from. If it doesn't, you'll need to narrow the field yourself. (See the previous article, **"What Kinds of Mentors Do You Need—and How Do You Find Them?" by Diane Coutu**.) As you consider colleagues and people outside your unit or company, look for someone with experience that suits your goals. The executive I nearly asked for mentoring had mastered the trick I wanted to learn: transitioning into the publisher role. But a mirror image isn't always the best choice. Sometimes difference is more valuable than similarity. For example, in my more recent career, I mentored someone from the sales function. He was seeking a better understanding of the editorial operation and of the larger company culture, which I had lived in and helped shape for more than 15 years.

Ideally, you'll figure out early on whether you and your mentor are well matched. But even if it takes you awhile to conclude you're not (we often suspend disbelief about initial impressions that prove truer than we'd hoped), cut bait as soon as you figure that out. Hanging on will just be a waste of your time—and your mentor's.

Getting to know your mentor. Once you've sized up your mentoring needs and identified the right person (or people) to help you meet them, there's plenty yet to do. Kicking off a relationship may take more time and effort than you'd think. Michael Kohlman, an IT executive at a medical device manufacturer, says he and his mentor devoted their first three sessions last year to "getting an understanding of who we both were and what I wanted and needed."

Why did their preliminary work take so long? In part because they were interacting remotely, via teleconference, e-mail, and the occasional webcast. "With a long-distance relationship, you lose a number of the cues we take for granted in face-to-face communication," Kohlman says. "That doesn't mean a distance-based relationship can't work, but it does require more up-front investment."

But even if you've got proximity going for you, starting a mentoring relationship involves sharing and discovery on both sides, which may take a couple of sessions. Kohlman and his mentor—a long-tenured CIO—found they had much in common. Both had specialized in IT infrastructure and operations, and both had spent most of their careers in life-sciences companies. That gave them a lot to talk about—time well spent, in Kohlman's view.

You'll need the mentoring equivalent of the Las Vegas Rule: What happens there *stays* there.

Still, there are some shortcuts worth considering. Before you begin your mentoring sessions, you may want to complete the Myers-Briggs Type Indicator or some comparable personality assessment, if you haven't already done so. I've worked with business coaches who use such tools to help them understand their clients (and help the clients understand themselves). Why not apply them in your mentoring relationship?

The results can give you and your mentor quick insight into your strengths and preferred styles of work, collaboration, and leadership. When you meet, you can say, for instance, "I'm an INTP" (it stands for Introversion, Intuition, Thinking, and Perceiving). If it's been awhile since your mentor has visited the Myers-Briggs website (www.myersbriggs.org), remind her what INTP means: You're interested more in ideas than in social interaction, you're flexible and adaptable, you'll focus deeply on whatever problems you are called on to solve, and you're skeptical by nature.

If you have concerns about entering the relationship, air them at the start. You might want to begin with confidentiality, the big mental hurdle that kept me from enlisting a mentor. Productive mentoring demands candor—admitting your mistakes and revealing your fears, doubts, and limitations. You'll need the mentoring equivalent of the Las Vegas Rule: What happens there *stays* there. Confidentiality has to be an explicit covenant. Don't leave it to your mentor's good judgment not to let it slip to your boss that he's helping you conquer your morbid fear of delivering presentations to the executive committee.

The discretion should be mutual. Your mentor might want the freedom to disclose to you details of business life that are, strictly speaking, some distance above your pay grade. If he doesn't bring this up, raise it yourself. You'll learn more from your mentor if he knows you're not someone who talks out of school.

You can also speed up the getting-to-know-you process by bringing to one of those early sessions a list of *recent* situations that have caused you difficulty. Pick examples that speak to your mentoring objectives. For instance, if you need help in managing up, you should probably recount yesterday's contentious conversation with your boss about budgeting for expensive advanced encryption software to secure corporate information stored in the cloud. Much as your boss loves the idea of the cloud, he's less keen on the cost of making it work. Ask your mentor for advice: How can you get your boss to trust—not micromanage—the routine recommendations you make?

Such concrete examples are like case studies, only better: They'll ground your mentoring conversations in the very reality you're trying to improve. Extract from them three to five key areas where you need to develop expertise or comfort.

Creating milestones. After articulating your goals, you'll need to chart a clear path to get where you're going. Work with your mentor to create milestones—they'll give your plans direction and, just as important, help you measure your progress. Shelley Lineham, a senior IT director at a large energy retailer, finds them essential to making headway in both formal and informal mentoring environments. Without milestones, she says, "it's not so clear where you started, what you got out of the relationship, and how that benefited you at the end." Lineham actually prefers formal programs because they often *provide* basic milestones that you can then tailor to your needs. But if you're on your own, map out your mentoring in much the same way you'd manage a large project—by breaking your goals into manageable, measurable chunks.

To expedite the process, try drafting a list of milestones yourself and then asking your mentor for feedback. Say your goal is to become better at internally marketing the work of your crack SWAT team of process innovators. Identify ways to show your mastery of discrete areas of marketing competency: for example, creating metrics that capture the speed with which your team goes from concept to delivery of a newly designed process; developing outreach initiatives, such as rapid-prototyping demonstration sessions, to build demand for the team's services; publishing the internal equivalent of a marketing brochure for your team; and delivering a PowerPoint presentation of ROI case studies at an all-hands business-unit meeting. Lineham advises building in checkpoints for reflecting on what you've gained by achieving each milestone. Step back and ask yourself whether the milestones in front of you still make sense and build on what you've already accomplished.

As you're charting your path, you'll also need to agree on its length. Work with your mentor to determine a time frame for achieving your goals. The notion of an open-ended relationship may be appealing if you have a lot to learn—but you and your mentor will both find it easier to stay productive with a time commitment that's reasonably clear from the outset. You can always reassess your projected end point after you've hit a few milestones.

Sorting out logistics. One more way to set the stage for mentoring success is attending to logistics: If you hate the telephone, try to arrange in-person meetings. If your energies are at low ebb late in the day, aim for morning sessions. These details may seem small, but they affect the quality of the exchange. Defer, of course, to your mentor's preferences. She's more likely to give you time and attention if the arrangement is convenient and comfortable for her.

Keeping It Going

Now that you've established your expectations for the relationship, you're ready to make progress—and measure it. The milestones you've agreed on will keep you honest and help you get value from your mentoring over time. But you'll need more than that to maintain your momentum.

Providing structure. To keep the mentoring relationship going, you'll need structure—and it's up to you, the mentee, to supply it. Set up regular meetings with agendas so your conversations won't degenerate into aimless bull sessions, where the mentor holds forth on the triumphs of a sparkling career. Base your agendas on an overall plan—for example, "I want to develop, put forward, and win leadership approval for one entrepreneurial idea within the next year"—and make sure each meeting moves you closer to your objective.

Formal programs' processes can add structure and help you stay focused and motivated. Shelley Lineham joined a yearlong program called Pathways—an offering of the CIO Executive Council, which caters exclusively to IT professionals' career development. (Michael Kohlman is also a participant. See the sidebar "Formal Mentoring Programs" for a description of his Pathways experience.) The program's structure helped Lineham push herself to tackle one of her main goals: balancing her personal life with the growing demands of work.

Pathways provides mentees with a menu of activities and resources—including participation in webcasts, seminars, discussion boards, and professional groups. Lineham took full advantage of these suggestions. Her mentor encouraged her to join Women in Technology International (WITI), a group dedicated to helping women achieve their potential in a field long dominated by men. She attended both online and in-person events, and learned

Formal Mentoring Programs

Even if you've acquired effective mentoring on your own, there's still much to gain from a formal program. Does your company lack an in-house offering? Try an external one. Career-development consultancies and professional associations are great places to look for mentoring that fits your industry and job function.

Just ask Michael Kohlman, an IT executive for The Cook Group, a highly entrepreneurial medical technology company. With its strong culture of self-reliance, Cook offers no formal leadership-training programs; it regards mentoring as an exotic frill. So Kohlman has found his mentoring elsewhere.

He describes "almost a classic journalistic technique" for seeking leadership guidance: "reaching out to people, doing research," and doing a great deal of reading. "Peter Drucker, Tom Peters—I ate all that stuff up during my formative years," he says. "I was mostly self-taught, with a limited budget." He also cultivated informal relationships with senior executives.

As valuable as all that networking and research was, Kohlman didn't think it was enough. Four years ago, he became a member of the CIO Executive Council, a leadership-development organization for IT executives that's run by the publishers of *CIO* magazine (my former employer). Among the Council's offerings is Pathways, a program that provides group and individual mentoring. Kohlman signed up.

The IT profession is well stocked with people who have far more responsibility than they do authority. Since they can't do things by fiat, they have to be persuasive and consultative. Kohlman—soon to be in the thick of implementing a new IT architecture designed to tie together all of Cook's far-flung business units and regions—felt he needed to fortify his selling skills to pull that off. Through a series of group mentoring sessions, Pathways helped Kohlman increase his powers of persuasion.

The group aspect—about which he was initially apprehensive—had a natural multiplier effect. Each group in Pathways has about a half-dozen mentees, led by a single mentor. Because all the members are natives of the IT profession, they understand such defining conditions as the responsibility-without-authority problem. All of them share the need to be a world-class persuader.

"Making a project happen is far more likely when you get people involved and enthused than when it's a mandate," says Kohlman. "Group mentoring gave me the chance to see the approaches others had tried. Having a group to use as a sounding board can be invaluable—especially when that group has no personal stake in the internal influences of your organization."

As much as he credits Pathways with helping him meet his goals, Kohlman is planning to leave the program: "It has nothing to do with its quality," he says, "and everything to do with my progress in it." In the past year he has brought two of his direct reports into Pathways. And he now finds himself acting more often as a mentor to others.

He hopes to establish a Pathways-like program at Cook—specifically within the Global IT Management Group. The company has made great strides in reengineering its IT infrastructure to unify its many divisions around the world. But success brings challenges. "We need to develop leaders who will be able to grow with the organization," Kohlman says. He sees mentoring as an indispensable tool for "creating a culture of continual leadership development."

Acknowledging the company's skepticism about formal career development, he says, "I know I'm looking at an uphill battle." Fortunately, the battle will demand the same selling skills that Pathways helped him enhance.

through discussions with other participants how they've managed to meet the demands of a career in IT while maintaining life balance.

Seek only enough structure to keep yourself fully engaged and making progress—and not so much as to stifle spontaneous exploration. Allow room to go in unexpected directions when circumstances warrant—for instance, when an opportunity or crisis presents itself, and your mentor can help guide you through it. Also, make time in each meeting for a "news of the week" segment, where you recount one or two anecdotes that show progress on your goals or highlight challenges that keep tripping you up.

Expecting rigor. Beware of mentoring that demands too little of you: If your mentor isn't providing regular assignments that sync up with your overall plan, ask for them, and work them into your agendas. They'll keep you moving toward your goals.

I once suggested that a mentee—someone eager to rise into the senior editorial ranks at a magazine—should volunteer to lead a special project. He would need to work with the art director to create a feature article that told its story graphically rather than mainly with text. He took to the assignment with gusto and executed it so well that such projects expanded his portfolio of skills, eventually helping him land the opportunity he was seeking.

Moving on. As noted earlier, most mentoring relationships have a natural end. After you've achieved your goals, move on before the law of diminishing returns kicks in.

Of course, that doesn't mean you should cut all ties. As the mentoring process winds down, your mentor may become a sponsor who advocates for your advancement in the company. Such rewards should be reciprocated. Perhaps your mentor has drawn fresh ideas, understanding, and inspiration from her exposure to you—the business's next generation. That's a good reason not to be stingy with your comments on what you find strange, perplexing, or exciting about the way your organization works. They may create a lasting—and useful—impression.

Looking back over my suggestions, I can see two things quite clearly. First, effective mentoring requires hard work and commitment from mentees and mentors alike. Second, I would have been far smarter and better served to go for it rather than hang back when I needed this kind of support.

As it happened, my magazine launched as scheduled. It won some editorial awards, and it had an exciting two-year run—before it was cut short by dwindling ad sales. Maybe if I'd gotten guidance from a mentor with commercial chops, things would have turned out differently. For one thing, had I enlisted the mentor I'd identified, I am sure he would have advised me to give up the publisher title—in retrospect it was a distraction—and instead use my editorial skills to boost the magazine's business prospects. Later in my career, I learned a lot about how editors add value to the sales process. I am certain that mentoring would have shortened my learning curve.

Plus, I would have developed an important new skill: asking for help and then making the most of it.

Lew McCreary is an editorial consultant and a contributing editor to HBR. He has launched five magazines over the course of his career and served as a formal and informal mentor to numerous colleagues.

How to Get More from Your Mentors

by Jodi Glickman

A senior publishing executive at William Morris once told me how baffled she was when an aspiring literary agent asked her to be a mentor. She looked at me and said, "She's got to make me *want* to be her mentor. Isn't she supposed to do something for me?" The answer is a definitive yes.

Mentors can provide valuable insight into your organization, inside information about the politics of the place, and useful over-the-shoulder advice about which people to work with and which ones to avoid. But to get all that and more, you've got to figure out how to repay the favor and make the relationship work for both of you.

We're all busy. Like you, your mentors have competing demands on their time and resources. They might let mentoring fall by the wayside when they're closing a deal, bringing a new product to market, or putting out a fire for an important client. That's why you, as the mentee, must make your mentors' investment in you worth their time and energy.

Here are four ways to provide value to your mentors—and receive more in return.

1. **Keep their interests on your radar so you can share relevant ideas and articles or provide access to resources.** Talia, a coaching client of mine, knew her mentor Fred was keen to create a diverse workplace in the male-dominated financial industry. (Names in this article are disguised.) Shortly after she had interned at his investment management firm as a college student, she decided to pursue a career in an entirely different field—but she still valued his feedback and advice, so she kept the mentoring relationship going. In return for Fred's ongoing guidance, Talia looked for ways to help him recruit female talent. She promoted his firm to her career center on campus and referred potential interns to him. She also introduced him to various women's groups at her university and sent him articles and blog posts about why women were—or weren't—seeking financial jobs. Fred appreciated the introductions and the market intelligence, and continued to counsel Talia on positioning herself and speaking to her skill set as she carved out her new career path. He even reached into his Rolodex and put her in touch with several people in her new industry of choice.
2. **Provide insight into the rank and file of your organization.** Your mentor may feel out of touch with the cubicle culture, as leaders often do. You can help by sharing your peers' reactions to new social-media restrictions at the office, for example. Or, like Margot, a nonprofit program manager, you can explain that your fellow employees have been wanting a flextime policy for ages and offer yourself up as an organizational experiment. Margot's boss and mentor, Bruce, lobbied for her flextime arrangement (the organization's first) and had real skin in the game: If Margot's performance suffered as a result of her working at home one day a week, so would his reputation. But the experiment went well, and Bruce asked Margot to put together a proposal on his behalf for a firm-wide flextime policy. Bruce earned points with colleagues for being forward-thinking and became known as an accommodating (and desirable) boss. He also benefited from Margot's continued loyalty: She was always willing to put in extra time and energy whenever he needed help moving something new through the organization.
3. **Participate in activities and programs your mentor cares about.** Perhaps one of your mentors does a lot of college recruiting for

your firm and runs a leadership development program. Why not offer to accompany her on a recruiting trip or suggest speakers for her leadership program? Consider Caroline, a magazine copy editor who took a special interest in her mentor's "lunch and learn" series, a lineup of informal lectures by guest experts from various fields. Caroline made a point of flagging speakers who were in town for her own alumni events and took the initiative to book several of them for the brown-bag series. Soon her mentor turned the entire series over to her—and Caroline received high marks on her performance review for helping to promote learning in the organization.

4. **Buy 'em lunch.** At the very least, if you really struggle to find ways to add value, take your mentors to lunch or dinner (one at a time, of course). Even if they try to foot the bill, be firm and generous in your offer. Let them know that you appreciate their help and it's your pleasure to be able to return the favor in some small way. A nice glass of wine and a good meal goes a long way toward building goodwill.

Jodi Glickman, founder and president of the communication training firm Great on the Job, is the author of *Great on the Job* (St. Martin's, 2011).

Adapted from content posted on September 23, 2009, on HBR.org.

What readers are saying on HBR.org and LinkedIn

Posted by Michael Weening:

I would add one more thing—perhaps building on the buy-them-lunch element? Say thanks and share the kudos.

Mentors who extend their knowledge and support to mentees because they enjoy doing it will appreciate being part of your success. Acknowledge their contribution either publicly or in private (depending on the situation and the individual), and their willingness to take part in the next phase of your success will be unquestioned!

Posted by Ian Conway via

The best reward you can give your mentor is to use her good advice in a meaningful way and develop to the point where the mentor/mentee relationship is no longer required.

Join the discussion at blogs.hbr.org

Employ a Personal Board of Directors

by Priscilla Claman

Like avocado-colored appliances, traditional mentoring is something you don't see much anymore. Yes, corporate-sponsored mentoring programs will always improve personal exposure and connections. But the career strategy of hitching your future to some rising manager is outdated.

That's partly because midlevel and senior managers are no longer the ones with stable jobs. Many organizations are dealing with restructuring, downsizing, acquisitions, mergers, and, of course, recessions—so your mentor is just as likely to move on or be laid off as you are. And if you are considered her special protégé, you may lose your job when she does.

Another reason one mentor alone won't cut it is that no single person can possibly give you all the guidance and nurturing you'll need to reach your potential. Even the wisest, most insightful people have blind spots, and even the most loyal and committed mentors can offer you only so much of their energy and time.

What you need instead is a board of directors for your career, a group of people you consult regularly to get advice and feedback on matters ranging from job performance to career advancement to personal enrichment. There's no need to hold meetings or even inform each person of his or her status as a board member—but you do need to select the right people, stay in touch, and reciprocate their generosity.

Just like any good board, the people you choose should make different contributions to your thinking about how to reach your professional and personal goals. You might want to include your boss or a colleague you admire—or both. If you are a senior manager, consider job search professionals, academics, and consultants with expertise in your specialty. The people on your board should know more than you about something, be better than you at something, or offer different points of view. Putting only buddies on your board won't help you grow and develop.

Worried that assembling your board will take too much time away from your work? It's actually not all that time-consuming—and your board will help you do your job better and more efficiently, especially if you've been placed in a role before you're fully equipped to handle it. The key is to match up your weaknesses with others' strengths—and, so you can give as well as get, your strengths with their weaknesses.

For example, I often go to my friend Ted, an expert in the world of finance, with questions like "What do the Basel Accords really mean?" and "Why did my corporate client's stock shoot up?" (Names in this article have been changed.) He is full of statistical information, but when he is looking for some up-to-date hunches, like what I think is going on in the job market, he calls me.

I get in touch with Kerry, a former colleague of mine who has a gift for delivering bad news, when I have something particularly difficult to communicate. For instance, Kerry helped me come up with an effective way to tell an upset client why I thought his employer wasn't giving him the promotion he thought he deserved. Kerry turns to me when he has a hard job to fill and wants some leads.

Pat, a longtime client of mine, goes to all the conferences in our field, and she always knows the latest theories and research, so I check in with her periodically to find out what's new. She introduced me to concepts in emotional intelligence and neuroscience long before they became trends. And because she knows I enjoy batting around training ideas, she asks me for suggestions when she's looking for a creative new training exercise.

I have learned from each of these folks. They know I think highly of their advice, and I do what I can to help them in return.

Mentoring from a personal board is also invaluable if you're making a career transition. Ellen, another client of mine, took six years off from a demanding technology career to raise her children. When she was ready to return to work full time, she looked for advice on how to make the transition. She sought out a former colleague, and he was candid: Her technical skills just weren't up-to-date. With his assistance, Ellen identified the new software she needed to know and took a training class. When she asked for extra help in the class, the instructor found her a software coach, and the coach got her connected with a user group. Then, the user group connected her with a headhunter, who told her he could find her a job if she were certified in the software. While working toward the certification, Ellen regularly stays in touch with her former colleague, the instructor, her software coach, and the headhunter to make sure she is on track.

No single mentor could have made the contributions to Ellen's career that all these individuals did. Finding and tapping her personal board members required some elbow grease, but it paid off.

Go forth and consult your own network. Instead of relying on a single upper-level manager, assemble a team of specialists for yourself as if you were creating a company's board of directors. Their combined efforts could yield real results for you.

Priscilla Claman is the president of Career Strategies, a Boston-based firm offering coaching to individuals and career management services to organizations. She is a former corporate human resources executive and the author of *Ask…How to Get What You Want and Need at Work* (Insights, 2002).

Adapted from content posted on October 20, 2010, on HBR.org.

What readers are saying on HBR.org

Posted by Mal Watlington:

Seeking diversity of thought is key. Loading the board with people who think like you do will not shed light on those "blind spots" that are career derailers. If, for example, you are a highly intuitive, "big picture" person, consider adding some "details" people to the board (your opposite number from a Myers-Briggs perspective). If you are a risk avoider, ask yourself if you know any successful risk takers that you might add to the board. If you work in a company, have at least one member of your board be a current or former employee—someone who knows the context of your work environment.

Posted by Brad Howe:

For the past 22 years, I've been meeting once a month with three fellow professionals in fields allied to mine to compare notes about our work and personal lives as well as the local business, political, and sports environment. We've gotten to know one another's families firsthand and business associates secondhand as we have referred business opportunities back and forth and shared timely, objective advice on significant decisions in our lives. I am encouraging my adult kids to develop the same type of outside support group now that I no longer offer them unsolicited advice.

Posted by Kent Wilson:

It's difficult to put together a personal board that is committed. I've succeeded in doing so only on a temporary basis—during a major career transition, for example, or during a leadership crisis at work. One way executives can build this type of board is to join peer advisory groups that meet regularly, such as Vistage and the Alternative Board. I've been a member of a Vistage group for more than nine years, and it has revolutionized my leadership and learning. It has been more significant for me than any schooling or seminars because it provides an environment of continual learning and accountability.

Posted by Lorraine:

Some of my most successful clients have been [relying on a personal board] for years. I am on at least four that I know of. One of my clients, now director of people for a major European airline, has kept some of his old mentors from earlier businesses on his board. He had the benefit of their mentoring when he worked with them, but they've also seen him develop over time, so he gets the benefit of their increased commitment as well.

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A Smarter Way to Network

by Rob Cross and Robert Thomas

Successful executives connect with select people and get more out of them.

One of the happiest, most successful executives we know is a woman named Deb. She works at a major technology company and runs a global business unit that has more than 7,000 employees. When you ask her how she rose to the top and why she enjoys her job, her answer is simple: people. She points to her boss, the CEO, a mentor who "always has her back"; Steve, the head of a complementary business, with whom she has monthly brainstorming lunches and occasional gripe sessions; and Tom, a protégé to whom she has delegated responsibility for a large portion of her division. Outside the company, Deb's circle includes her counterparts in three strategic partnerships, who inspire her with new ideas; Sheila, a former colleague, now in a different industry, who gives her candid feedback; and her husband, Bob, an executive at a philanthropic organization. She also has close relationships with her fellow volunteers in a program for at-risk high school students and the members of her tennis group and book club.

This is Deb's social network (the real-world kind, not the virtual kind), and it has helped her career a lot. But not because the group is large or full of high-powered contacts. Her network is effective because it both supports and challenges her. Deb's relationships help her gain influence, broaden her expertise, learn new skills, and find purpose and balance. Deb values and nurtures them. "Make friends so that you have friends when you need friends" is her motto.

"My current role is really a product of a relationship I formed over a decade ago that came back to me at the right time," she explains. "People may chalk it up to luck, but I think more often than not luck happens through networks where people give first and are authentic in all they do."

Over the past 15 years, we've worked with many executives like Deb, at more than 300 companies. What began as organizational research—helping management teams understand and capitalize on the formal and informal social networks of their employees—has since metamorphosed into personal programs, which teach individual executives to increase their effectiveness by leveraging their networks.

The old adage "It's not what you know, it's who you know" is true. But it's more nuanced than that. In spite of what most self-help books say, network size doesn't usually matter. In fact, we've found that individuals who simply know a lot of people are less likely to achieve standout performance, because they're spread too thin. Political animals with lots of connections to corporate and industry leaders don't win the day, either. Yes, it's important to know powerful people, but if they account for too much of your network, your peers and subordinates often perceive you to be overly self-interested, and you may lose support as a result.

The data we've collected point to a different model for networking. The executives who consistently rank in the top 20% of their companies in both performance and well-being have diverse but select networks like Deb's—made up of high-quality relationships with people who come from several different spheres and from up and down the corporate hierarchy. These high performers, we have found, tap into six critical kinds of connections, which enhance their careers and lives in a variety of ways.

Through our work advising individual managers, we've also identified a four-step process that will help any executive develop this kind of network. But first, let's take a look at some common networking mistakes.

Getting It Wrong

Many people take a misguided approach to networking. They go astray by building imbalanced networks, pursuing the wrong kind of relationships, or leveraging relationships ineffectively. (See the sidebar "Are You Networking Impaired?") These people might remain successful for a time, but often they will hit a plateau or see their career derailed because their networks couldn't prompt or support a critical transition.

Consider Dan, the chief information officer of one of the world's largest life-sciences organizations. He was under constant pressure to find new technologies that would spur innovation and speed the drug commercialization process at his company, and he needed a network that would help him. Unfortunately, more than 70% of his trusted advisers were in the unit he had worked in before becoming CIO. Not only did they reinforce his bias toward certain solutions and vendors, but they lacked the outside knowledge he needed. "I had started to mistake friendship, trust, and accessibility for real expertise in new domains," he told us. "This didn't mean I was going to dump these people, as they played important roles for me in other ways. But I needed to be more targeted in who I let influence my thinking."

Write down three business results you hope to achieve in the next year, and then list people who could help you with them.

Another overarching mistake we often see in executives' networks is an imbalance between connections that promote career advancement and those that promote engagement and satisfaction. Numerous studies have shown that happier executives are higher-performing ones.

Take Tim, the director of a large practice area at a leading professional services firm. On the surface he was doing well, but job stress had taken its toll. He was 40 pounds overweight, with alarmingly high cholesterol and blood sugar levels, and prone to extreme mood swings. When things went well at work, he was happy; when they didn't, he wasn't pleasant to be around. In fact, Tim's wife finally broke down and told him she thought he had become a career-obsessed jerk and needed to get other interests. With her encouragement, he joined Habitat for Humanity and started rowing with their daughter. As a result, his social network expanded to include people with different perspectives and values, who helped him focus on more healthful and fulfilling pursuits. "As I spent more time with different groups, what I cared about diversified," he says. "Physically, I'm in much better shape and probably staved off a heart attack. But I think I'm a better leader, too, in that I think about problems more broadly, and I'm more resilient. Our peer feedback systems are also clearly indicating that people are more committed to the new me."

Getting It Right

To understand more about what makes an effective network, let's look again at Deb. She has a small set of core contacts—14 people she really relies on. Effective core networks typically range in size from 12 to 18 people. But what really matters is structure: Core connections must bridge smaller, more-diverse kinds of groups and cross hierarchical, organizational, functional, and geographic lines. Core relationships should result in more learning, less bias in decision making, and greater personal growth and balance. The people in your inner circle should also model positive behaviors, because if those around you are enthusiastic, authentic, and generous, you will be, too.

More specifically, our data show that high performers have strong ties to

1. people who offer them new information or expertise, including internal or external clients, who increase their market awareness; peers in other functions, divisions, or geographies, who share best practices; and contacts in other industries, who inspire innovation;

2. formally powerful people, who provide mentoring, sense-making, political support, and resources; and informally powerful people, who offer influence, help coordinating projects, and support among the rank and file; and
3. people who give them developmental feedback, challenge their decisions, and push them to be better. At an early career stage, an employee might get this from a boss or customers; later, it tends to come from coaches, trusted colleagues, or a spouse.

Meanwhile, the most satisfied executives have ties to

1. people who provide personal support, such as colleagues who help them get back on track when they're having a bad day or friends with whom they can just be themselves;
2. people who add a sense of purpose or worth, such as bosses and customers who validate their work, and family members and other stakeholders who show them work has a broader meaning; and
3. people who promote their work/life balance, holding them accountable for activities that improve their physical health (such as sports), mental engagement (such as hobbies or educational classes), or spiritual well-being (music, religion, art, or volunteer work).

How does one create such a varied network? We recommend a four-point action plan: analyze, de-layer, diversify, and capitalize.

Analyze. Start by looking at the individuals in your network. Where are they located—are they within your team, your unit, or your company, or outside your organization? What benefits do your interactions with them provide? How energizing are those interactions?

The last question is an important one. Energizers bring out the best in everyone around them, and our data show that having them in your network is a strong predictor of success over time. These people aren't necessarily extroverted or charismatic. They're people who always see opportunities, even in challenging situations, and create room for others to meaningfully contribute. Good energizers are trustworthy and committed to principles larger than their self-interest, and they enjoy other people. "De-energizers," by contrast, are quick to point out obstacles, critique people rather than ideas, are inflexible in their thinking, fail to create opportunities, miss commitments, and don't show concern for others. Unfortunately, energy-sapping interactions have more impact than energizing ones—up to seven times as much, according to one study. And our own research suggests that roughly 90% of anxiety at work is created by 5% of one's network—the people who sap energy.

Next, classify your relationships by the benefits they provide. Generally, benefits fall into one of six basic categories: information, political support and influence, personal development, personal support and energy, a sense of purpose or worth, and work/life balance. It's important to have people who provide each kind of benefit in your network. Categorizing your relationships will give you a clearer idea of whether your network is extending your abilities or keeping you stuck. You'll see where you have holes and redundancies and which people you depend on too much—or not enough.

Let's use Joe, a rising star in an investment bank, as a case study. He had 24 close advisers—on the surface, a more than healthy number. But many of the people he relied on were from his own department and frequently relied on one another. If he eliminated those redundancies, his network shrank to five people. After giving it some thought and observing his peers' networks, he realized he was missing links with several important types of people: colleagues focused on financial offerings outside his own products, who could help him deliver broader financial solutions to customers; coworkers in different geographies—particularly London and Asia—who could enhance his ability to sell to global clients; and board-level relationships at key accounts, who could make client introductions and influence purchasing decisions. His insularity was limiting his options and hurting his chances of promotion to managing director. He realized he would need to focus on cultivating a network rather than allowing it to organically arise from the day-to-day demands of his work.

De-layer. Once you've analyzed your network, you need to make some hard decisions about which relationships to back away from. First, look at eliminating or minimizing contact with people who sap you of energy or promote unhealthful behaviors. You can do this by reshaping your role to avoid them, devoting less time to them, working to change their behavior, or reframing your reactions so that you don't dwell on the interactions.

John, an academic, realized that two university administrators in his network were causing him a great deal of anxiety. This had so soured his view of his school that he was considering leaving. He therefore decided to devote less time to projects and committees that would involve the negative contacts and to avoid dwelling on any sniping comments they subjected him to. Within a year he was much more productive and happy. "By shifting my role and how I reacted to the idiots, I turned a negative situation around," John says. "In hindsight it was an obvious move—rather than leave a place I loved—but emotions can spiral on you in ways you don't recognize."

The next step is to ask yourself which of the six categories have too many people in them. Early-stage leaders, for example, tend to focus too much on information and not enough on personal development and might want to shed some of the contacts who give them the former to make more time for those who give them the latter.

Beyond this, consider which individuals—and types of people as determined by function, hierarchy, or geography—have too much of you, and why. Is the cause structural, in that work procedures require you to be involved? Or is your own behavior causing the imbalance? What can you change to rectify the situation? Too often we see leaders fail because they accept or create too many collaborative demands.

Paul, the head of research in a consumer products company, had a network of almost 70 people just at work. But he got many complaints from people who said they needed greater access to him. His productivity, and his unit's, was suffering. When he analyzed his network, he realized that he was missing "people and initiatives one or two levels out." To address this, he decided to delegate—stepping away from interactions that didn't require his presence and cultivating "go to" stand-ins in certain areas of expertise. He also changed his leadership style from extraordinarily accessible to helpful but more removed, which encouraged subordinates to solve their own problems by connecting with people around him. "As a leader you can find yourself in this bubble of activity where you feel like a lot is happening moving from meeting to meeting," Paul says. "You can actually start to thrive on this in some ways. I had to move past this for us to be effective as a unit and so that I could be more forward-thinking."

Diversify. Now that you've created room in your network, you need to fill it with the right people. Simple tools like work sheets can help you get started. For example, you might make a list of the six categories of relationships and think about colleagues who could fill the holes you have in each. Remember to focus on positive, energetic, selfless people, and be sure to ask people inside and outside your network for recommendations.

You should also think about how you could connect your network to your professional and personal goals. Here's another simple exercise: Write down three specific business results you hope to achieve over the next year (such as doubling sales or winning an Asia-based client) and then list the people

Are You Networking Impaired?

In our work, we have identified six common managerial types who get stuck in three kinds of network traps. Do any of the descriptions below fit you?

The wrong structure

- **The formalist** focuses too heavily on his company's official hierarchy, missing out on the efficiencies and opportunities that come from informal connections.
- **The overloaded manager** has so much contact with colleagues and external ties that she becomes a bottleneck to progress and burns herself out.

The wrong relationships

- **The disconnected expert** sticks with people who keep him focused on safe, existing competencies, rather than those who push him to build new skills.
- **The biased leader** relies on advisers much like herself (same functional background, location, or values), who reinforce her biases, when she should instead seek outsiders to prompt more fully informed decisions.

The wrong behavior

- **The superficial networker** engages in surface-level interaction with as many people as possible, mistakenly believing that a bigger network is a better one.
- **The chameleon** changes his interests, values, and personality to match those of whatever subgroup is his audience, and winds up being disconnected from every group.

—R.C. and R.T.

(by name or general role) who could help you with them, thanks to their expertise, control over resources, or ability to provide political support. Joe, the investment banker, identified counterparts in the Asian and European operations of his company who had relationships with the clients he was focused on and then scheduled regular calls with them to coordinate efforts. "In a couple of cases this helped me identify opportunities I could pitch proactively. In others it just helped us appear more coordinated when we were competing against other banks," he says. One of the big challenges for Paul, the consumer products executive, was managing a new facility and line of innovation in China. Because none of his trusted advisers had ever even been to that country, he reached out to the head of R&D at a major life-sciences organization that had undertaken a similar effort.

Capitalize. Last, make sure you're using your contacts as effectively as you can. Are there people you rely on in one sphere, such as political support, that you could also use to fill a need in another, such as personal development? Could you get more out of some relationships if you put more energy into them? Our research shows, for instance, that high performers at all levels tend to use their information contacts to gain other benefits, such as new ideas. Reciprocal relationships also tend to be more fruitful; the most successful leaders always look for ways to give more to their contacts.

Alan, a top executive at a global insurance company, realized that although he had a good network, he was still making decisions in relative isolation. He failed to elicit insights from others and, as a result, wasn't making enough progress toward his goals. So he started inviting his more-junior contacts, who were informal opinion leaders in his company, to lunch and asking them open-ended questions. These conversations led him to streamline decision making and uncover innovation deep within the firm's hierarchy. "When I met with one lady, I was stunned at a great new product idea she had been pushing for months," Alan says. "But she hadn't been able to get the right people to listen. I was able to step in and help make things happen. To me the right way to be tapping into people is in this exploratory way—whether it is about strategic insights or just how they think I'm doing on some aspect of my job. That's how I get to new ways of thinking and doing things, and I know it makes me much more effective than people who are smarter than me."

A network constructed using this four-point model will build on itself over time. In due course, it will ensure that the best opportunities, ideas, and talent come your way.

Rob Cross (robcross@virginia.edu) is an associate professor at the University of Virginia's McIntire School of Commerce. **Robert Thomas** is the executive director of the Accenture Institute for High Performance.

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Accelerate Your Development: Tips for Millennials Who Need Mentoring

by Jeanne C. Meister and Karie Willyerd

Many of the 70 million jobs that Baby Boomers will vacate over the next two decades—from the front lines up to senior management—will go to Gen Xers and Millennials (also known as Generation Y). If you're a Millennial (born after 1980), that might mean early career advancement for you, though you'll have lots of competition for those positions: 88 million others in your generation, plus about 50 million Xers, will also be vying for them.

How do you compete for jobs formerly held by people with decades more experience, especially when you're younger than at least a third of the candidates out there? By putting your mentoring and development on a fast track. Don't wait for your company to notice you and groom you. Be bold—and hungry—as you seek out the counsel you need to become a serious contender for one of those roles Boomers are leaving open. These seven tips will help you scour the landscape for the right mentors, persuade them to work with you, and collaborate with them to accelerate your development.

1. **Build a diverse network of mentors to round out your skills and knowledge.** To fill a retiring Boomer's shoes, you'll probably need to broaden and deepen your skill set—and the longer that takes, the more likely you'll be to lose out to someone who's a quicker "study." Got your eye on a position above you that may open up in a year or two? Compare your experience with that of the person currently in the role to see where you have catching up to do—and look for several mentors who can speed up your learning in key areas. For example, consider reaching out to:
   - A senior executive with experience in a country where your company is expanding—perhaps in an emerging market, such as Brazil or Russia. Use this mentoring relationship as an opportunity to develop a global mind-set about the business you're in.
   - A high-performing peer in an adjacent unit or industry. Say you're a health care marketer, and you're struggling to create innovative campaigns. Try connecting with someone who naturally looks at the health care world through an innovator's lens—a medical-product developer, for instance. He may be equally eager to glean your insights into customer needs.
   - A midlevel manager in a sector your business serves. Suppose you work at a tech company, and one of your biggest customers is a government agency. An IT manager in that sector can help you understand how agencies think about security, for example, and what impact new regulations will have on the services your company is developing.

   Each mentor in your network should have a distinct area of expertise that complements your knowledge. (For more on building a diverse network of mentors, see **Priscilla Claman's article, "Employ a Personal Board of Directors,"** in this guide.)
2. **Select at least one mentor with only a few more years of experience.** Experts may be so far removed from your day-to-day world that they can't articulate good approaches to the kinds of problems you face. If you wanted to learn to play chess, Bobby Fischer wouldn't be the best person to teach you the basics. Same goes for acquiring work-related skills: Ask a senior executive to counsel you on challenges she hasn't tackled in 20 years, and you'll both probably end up frustrated.

   As Andi Litz, a Millennial who works in human resources at General Electric, explains, "Those who are only a couple of years senior can…relate to our experiences. Their input and advice will be realistic and achievable." Also, she points out, it's often "easier to develop a trusting relationship" with them, because they're more accessible than senior executives.

When Litz moved to Selmer, Tennessee, to take a new job with GE, she reached out to the person she was replacing. "Since he had just left the job for another one at GE," she says, "he was really helpful. We exchanged lots of phone calls, text messages, and instant messages. I'd be on a big call with people from all over the place, and I could IM him to get quick insight on an initiative that came up in the discussion."

If your organization has an affinity group for Millennials, such as a new-hire club or a young leaders' group, start there to find people who have recently walked in your shoes. Or look for groups in your community that sponsor development for young leaders.

3. **Show potential mentors that they can have a big impact with their limited time.** Your potential mentors—Boomers and Xers in particular—may have complex jobs, time commitments outside work, and multiple mentoring requests coming in from other Millennials. So it's important to treat their time as a precious resource. With some thought and creativity, you can design a mentoring relationship that moves your development along without placing too many demands on the mentor's schedule.

   For starters, select a few critical goals to focus on, and identify ways of measuring success. There's nothing more draining for a mentor than a growing list of goals, with no end in sight. Also, consider buddying up with Millennial peers at your company and asking an experienced manager to work with you as a group on a specific skill, such as making a compelling business case for a new product. A mini class on a discrete topic like that is attractive to a busy mentor because it reins in the conversation. It not only gives the mentor bigger bang for buck but also lends you and your Millennial cohort strength in numbers: You gain visibility as a group that pursues professional growth—and your mentor earns a reputation for nurturing young talent.

4. **Use your mentor's preferred method of communication.** As a Millennial, you may rely heavily on Skype, Facebook, LinkedIn, Twitter, and texting to communicate efficiently. These tools accommodate you wherever you are and can help you keep a brisk dialogue going with your mentor—but only if she likes using them, too.

   If she prefers interacting with you in face-to-face meetings and over e-mail, then so be it. She's sharing her time and expertise with you. Make it easy for her to be generous. After you've found a method that works for her and established a comfortable rhythm, you may discover that she's interested in learning more about social media, for example. That would be a good time to offer a crash course on Twitter and see whether she'd like to start using it to supplement your dialogue.

5. **Remember to *listen*.** Your goal is to learn and develop quickly—and rich feedback is a critical part of rapid development. As a young protégé, you may view your mentoring sessions as opportunities to impress someone who has the power to advance your career. But your mentor will be put off if you do more self-promoting than learning. Access to someone with influence is a terrific benefit of mentoring, but you'll gain greater access by putting growth first, showing a little humility, and making it clear that you take your mentor's advice seriously.

   So, if he provides feedback on how to make a more succinct, polished customer pitch, don't respond with a knee-jerk "Yes, I knew that already" or "That doesn't really apply to me now." Instead, restate in your own words what your mentor said, to make sure you've got it right, and ask questions to clarify. Mentors will test you by seeing how you respond to feedback, and the better you are at receiving it, the more of it you will get.

6. **Ask what you can do for your mentor.** Look for ways to give rather than always take. As a Millennial, you have digital skills that your mentor may want to pick up, so offer some reverse mentoring: Show her how to sign up for Google Alerts and receive articles on topics of mutual interest. And if you share documents with your mentor—for example, PowerPoint presentations or white papers from industry analysts—teach her how to use a cloud service like Dropbox so you can easily discuss these without having to email them back and forth. She may discover she

likes collaborating this way and start doing the same thing with her own team.

7. **End the relationship before it becomes a chore for the mentor.** It's easy to extend mentoring relationships beyond their usefulness. You get into a groove; you enjoy the stimulating conversations; and you've still got lots to learn in a tight time frame. But resist the temptation to wring ever-more value from your mentor.

   Follow the excellent advice of Ryan Healy, a Millennial who cofounded Brazen Careerist, a career website for young professionals: "Be clear about setting goals, and assess whether you have achieved them," he says. "If the answer is yes, it's time to move on and find a new mentor to assist you with another set of goals while continuing to keep in touch with your mentors past and current." Thank your mentor for all the help you've received—and ask permission to use him as a reference when you're scouting for the next one.

Jeanne C. Meister is a partner at Future Workplace, which helps organizations redefine their corporate learning and talent management strategies. **Karie Willyerd** is the chief learning officer at SuccessFactors, a cloud-based-software company. They are the authors of *The 2020 Workplace: How Innovative Companies Attract, Develop, and Keep Tomorrow's Employees Today* (HarperBusiness, 2010).

Mentoring for Gen Xers: What You Need and How to Get It

by Tamara Erickson

If you're a member of Generation X (born between the early 1960s and the late 1970s), you may worry that Gen Ys (born after 1980) will get all the mentoring love at work, but don't: You're actually in a pretty good position.

For starters, you're armed with more experience, which you can use to attract good mentors. Think of all that experience as a stack of poker chips acquired for being an effective, valuable contributor over the years—chips that you can now cash in to get the specific career advice and support you need.

Your Gen Y colleagues, no matter how "golden," often receive indiscriminant, same-for-all counsel. Like college freshmen, they have to study the core curriculum before they can spend much time concentrating on a major. So they may sit in on group sessions to learn more about the corporation's values and strategies, for example, or receive coaching on writing effective memos. Much of their mentoring is either broad orientation or basic tactical learning. As a result, it covers a wide range of skills and knowledge, and can be hit or miss—more like the rewards from a slot machine than a payout for a poker game well played.

Now that you're well into your thirties or forties, you need mentoring that's tailored to your individual strengths and career goals. And at this point, you've earned it. But don't expect the company or your Baby Boomer bosses to think of it on their own—*you've* got to be the one to make it happen. How? By playing to your strengths, building a network of mentors who can help you achieve your goals, and working with those mentors to optimize your current role.

Playing to Your Strengths

Earlier in your career, it made sense to try a bit of everything and to push yourself to improve in areas of weakness. Though self-improvement is still an admirable goal, now is the time to consolidate your efforts and focus on what you do best. You'll deepen your expertise and, just as important, attract the attention of mentors who can help you grow and advance in your areas of strength. Ask yourself:

"Am I pursuing opportunities at work that demonstrate my strengths?" Consider Jonathon, a software specialist at a large distribution firm, who had come to realize that his ability to manage projects well set him apart from his colleagues. (All examples in this article are drawn from my research on Gen X.) He began to seek work assignments that allowed him to highlight that skill set. Because he was organized and good at meeting deadlines, he frequently offered to lead projects. Over time, the VP of his company's project management office took note and began to send increasingly challenging opportunities Jonathon's way. To set him up for success, the VP also mentored Jonathon by sharing the tacit knowledge he'd gained over the years—tips for handling negotiations with difficult stakeholders, for example, and ways to access scarce resources.

"Do my external activities reinforce my professional strengths and reputation?" When you sign up for responsibilities outside work, try to choose ones that build on your expertise. If you're good at managing large projects, consider joining the school building committee in your district. Or if marketing campaigns are your bailiwick, offer to develop one for a local animal shelter.

Susan, a human resource generalist, was fascinated by the strategic issues associated with talent management and realized she wanted to specialize in that area. As part of her career development plan, she volunteered to serve on the long-range strategy committee of a local arts organization. Helping this committee consider the impact a changing workforce would have on the organization gave her strategy-development experience relevant to her field—and a number of stories she could inject into watercooler conversations at work. She posted updates and lessons learned in her profile on the company's social network. Her reputation for big-picture planning spread quickly. Soon her enthusiasm attracted the attention of several senior managers, who were willing to invest time in mentoring such an obviously dedicated individual: They shared their own experiences and best practices with her, gave her assignments that required an innovative look at future trends' implications for the company, critiqued her work on those assignments, and supported her requests for corporate funding for additional education.

Building a Mentoring Network

At this stage in your career, it's critical to broaden your perspective and increase your access to career-advancement opportunities—and you can do both by building and tapping a network of multiple mentors.

Of course, younger employees create networks of contacts, too, but not typically for the kind of mentoring you'll benefit from. Theirs are often designed to help them get necessary information for immediate tasks or guidance on specific challenges, like delivering effective presentations. Given where you are in your career, your networking goal should be much larger than that: to open doors for growth and advancement.

Ben, a specialist in procurement, worked in a corporation that had several strong, decentralized divisions. He had a solid relationship with his department head, but no contacts in other parts of the company. However, by asking his mentor for targeted introductions, he formed a cross-unit network of influential, in-the-know people within the operational functions in multiple divisions. That's how he learned about a plum opportunity to move into a broader operational management role when it came up in another division.

And then there was Laura, a star in sales who had a long-term goal of moving into marketing. She worked with her mentor to understand which aspects of her past experience would be most applicable to marketing roles (her detailed understanding of the distribution channels, for instance)—and then to position herself as a potential marketer in conversations with others in the firm. Her mentor also introduced her to people who coached her on skills she lacked, such as conducting market research. With confidence in her base of experience and exposure to some new skills, Laura made a successful move into a product manager role when the next one opened up.

Start building your mentoring network by creating a personal relationship map. Identify all the people you need to collaborate with in order to do your current job successfully and everyone who might help you achieve your next job or career goal. Ask yourself which of those individuals you need to know better, and leverage your current mentors to form stronger relationships with them. For example, ask existing contacts to provide key introductions, as Ben's and Laura's mentors did, and have them fill you in on people's backgrounds and interests. Work with your mentors to identify issues or projects your target contacts are working on: Maybe you can offer relevant expertise or ideas, or find ways for your team to assist theirs.

Optimizing Your Current Role

Many midcareer challenges you'll face as a Gen Xer are likely to stem from a mismatch between your tried-and-true approaches to work and your changing roles over the course of your career. In your earlier roles, success probably depended on acquiring knowledge, gaining technical proficiency, and working hard to produce whatever your company produced. But now you may be responsible for managing processes, activities, or other people. Or perhaps you've moved into a senior role, where your job is to establish and reinforce the company's values, strategies, policies, and leadership behaviors. Success, in either case, now depends on your ability to create an environment where *other* people can shine.

Making such transitions is tough because knowledge and skills that previously served you well no longer apply. One of the most important roles mentors play at this point in your career is to help you see yourself clearly and modify your behavior appropriately as you strive to meet new expectations. It's difficult to get this perspective yourself—and the kind of honest feedback that's required is not something a casual colleague is likely to provide. You need trusted mentors, invested in helping you succeed.

Take Barbara's situation. Based on her terrific work as a research analyst, she was viewed as a rising star at her company and promoted at a young age to a senior position that involved managing many others. Her new direct reports were also acknowledged stars or eager to become recognized. Barbara's role abruptly shifted from *producing content* as an individual contributor to *creating context* where other contributors could perform well. Fortunately, a mentor helped her adjust her focus and tone—for instance, by doing some role-playing with Barbara to prepare her for difficult types of conversations. From such exercises, Barbara learned that she needed to soften her tone and adopt a more nurturing attitude. Her mentor showed her how to convey genuine respect and caring for her direct reports through word choice and body language, and explained the importance of gaining their trust by acknowledging their accomplishments and their need for recognition.

Mentoring for Gen Xers is a reinforcing circle: The more you use your experience to build your reputation and your network, the easier it will become to attract effective mentors. And by working with those mentors, you can leverage the knowledge and skills honed in your current role to grasp the next big opportunity.

Tamara Erickson, the managing director of the research consortium Moxie Insight, was named one of the 50 leading management thinkers in 2009 and 2011 by Thinkers50. She is the author of a trilogy of books on the generations: *Retire Retirement*, *Plugged In*, and *What's Next, Gen X?* (Harvard Business Review Press, 2008, 2008, and 2010).

Seasoned Professional? Keep Learning from Your Protégés—and Get Over Yourself

by Hollis Heimbouch

I'm fortunate to work in publishing, a field that has long relied on an apprenticeship model of talent management and promotion. Like many of my peers, I began my career as an editorial assistant, reporting to two senior editors. They were responsible for finding and developing new book projects, which seemed to require many fancy meals and trips to glamorous locales. And I was responsible for handling all the sundry details of getting books out the door, which required lots of trips to the photocopier and the mailroom. (We're talking late 1980s.) A recent college graduate, fresh-faced and naïve, I thought I knew a lot about literature—but I knew absolutely nothing about the business of books.

I was mentored well by my two supervisors. They allowed me to sit in on calls with authors, read manuscripts, and contribute feedback. They offered me an unvarnished look into the life of an editor. A few years later I was finally in charge of my own projects and mentoring an editorial assistant of my own—and I learned as much from her as I did from my senior colleagues.

The great thing about working with people who are eager to learn is they aren't afraid to ask questions. Bone-headed questions, profound questions: Why don't we just publish bestsellers? Why is one author a dream to work with and another the subject of recurring nightmares? How do I edit a book? How do I judge a good jacket design? How do I say no without burning a bridge? How much is a project "worth"?

I tried to be a good mentor, but I can't lie: At first I resented the amount of time and effort involved, afraid that all the yammering might take me away from "important" editorial work. But the more we talked about what it meant to be an editor and what it was I actually *did*, the more I came to understand the craft myself. In these conversations, I was able to articulate the mental checklist I used to assess a project's merits and inherit risks—financial, psychic, and otherwise. I was able to identify a set of communication techniques, a list of dos and don'ts, that had proven helpful in dealing with difficult authors. And I came to see that my work didn't depend solely on hyper-productivity (the number of projects acquired, the number of bestsellers); emotional intelligence and the care and feeding of long-term relationships mattered just as much. Previously these so-called soft skills hadn't much figured into my daily to-do list, but I now realized they were at the heart of what made some editors great.

My assistant's almost total lack of inhibition gave me, the smarty-pants senior editor, a second chance to learn critical, intangible aspects of my job: *why* I did things the way I did and what assumptions were behind my actions. Psychologists call this practice of "thinking about how we think" **metacognition**, and I would argue it lies at the heart of every productive **reverse mentoring** relationship, where the teacher learns from the student.

The first time around, as novices, we learn a lot by doing—by making mistakes, by self-correcting, by having our errors pointed out by others. The second time around we learn by teaching someone else to do what we do. That process forces us to be explicit about the embedded rules and mental models we've been using to make decisions. It reinforces and clarifies what we know in our guts.

It's this second-time-around learning that turns good professionals and managers into great ones. While we're imparting new knowledge and perspectives to our mentees, we're also gaining deeper insight into what we do. In the best of these relationships, it's hard to tell the mentee from the mentor, so symbiotic is the learning and exchange.

The trick is not to get hung up by hubris once you feel you've "arrived." Even the most seasoned of us have much to learn not just by looking up the ladder but also by looking down, around, and even outward, to people in other departments or fields. If you get snooty and dismiss unusual suspects from your lineup of potential mentors, you'll miss out on important guidance and growth. I picked up that lesson the hard way.

As a lifelong runner, I had gotten bored with marathons as I approached my 40th birthday and decided to compete in a triathlon. But I'd never swum competitively, despite having learned basic swimming skills as a kid. So what did I do? I brought the same discipline to swimming that I'd brought to running and, for that matter, editing. I read books, watched videos, and spent several hours a week thrashing through laps on my own and trying to pick up tricks by observing other swimmers. And still I wasn't getting much better. Stubbornly I completed a few triathlons training this way. But when I examined the race results, my swim times consistently put me in the bottom 20% of overall finishers. How could this happen after I'd worked so hard?

At a loss, I spoke to another triathlete, a much better swimmer than I was. She pointed out that swimming is highly technical, more so than running or cycling; much depends on the physics of body position, stroke, and so forth. I'd read as much in my manuals, of course, and tried to follow the instructions, but something was still missing.

Finally I gave up and hired a swim coach, even though I found it galling to take advice from a brawny guy named Coach Mike, whom I could easily outrun in a 10K road race. In the pool, though, he was Baryshnikov. Together we began breaking down my so-called technique, with Coach Mike showing me how poor form and a bevy of tiny errors had caused me to be inefficient in the water. It was tedious work, often involving my performing idiotic-looking drills as other swimmers sliced the water in adjacent lanes. Coach Mike spoke somewhat mystically about learning to "feel" the water, understanding instinctively how it works with and against your body. The metacognition of swimming, if you will.

Even as I longed to experience that "feel," I was amazed at how a shift in the position of my hips or a slightly more bent elbow, for instance, resulted in marked and immediate improvements. I was not only swimming faster but also expending less energy doing so. I could never have made these corrections on my own, no matter how much time I spent in the water or how many DVDs I watched. Even today, swimming is still my weakest sport, but I've graduated from thrashing to "feeling it"—and perhaps more important, I'm now able to recognize when I'm starting to lose that feel so I can refocus on the fundamentals of good form.

Of course, the larger lesson isn't about the need to refine technique or even to hire a coach. It's about how difficult, but necessary, it is to prevent ourselves from becoming atrophied by success and pride. It took me three times longer to become a decent swimmer than it should have because I'd lost the openness and humility that makes learning possible. I'd considered myself proficient in other parts of my life—working, editing, running, being a grown-up in general—and expected the rules I already knew to apply to swimming. I'd brought my ego to the pool, acting with fear and self-consciousness rather than with the inquisitiveness that had served me well early in my professional life.

Mastery can become a closed world; we do only those things that reinforce a positive image of ourselves. By contrast, being a novice can make highly specialized skills seem easy to master: a simple matter of jumping in and flapping around. That's why it's so powerful to bring together the intensity of learning-by-doing with the reflection in learning-by-teaching. It's the reciprocity between the two that leads to satisfaction and growth over the course of a career.

As I head toward my third decade in publishing and my sixth year as a swimmer, I'm trying to stay in close touch with the kids in the world—not just because they can teach me jazzy things about social media and computer games but also because their questions encourage me to keep asking my own.

Hollis Heimbouch is the vice president and publisher of Harper Business, an imprint of HarperCollins, and a former associate publisher/editorial director of Harvard Business Review Press. She continues to compete in road races and triathlons, creaky joints permitting.

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