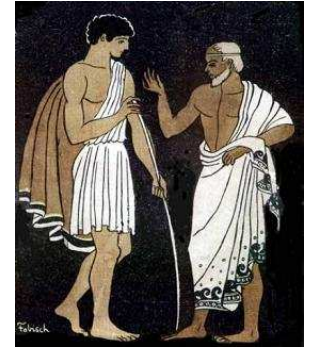


Seeking a Mentor

The derivation of mentoring dates back to Homer's eighth century BC epic poem, *The Odyssey*, when the King of Ithaca appointed Athena, the Goddess of Wisdom, in disguise as Mentor, to educate and watch over his son, Telemachus, while he went off to fight the Trojan War.



Later in 1699, François Fénelon used the term "mentor" in his book, *Les Aventures de Telemaque* and the contemporary application of the word "mentor" is often traced to this publication.

Modern Day Usage

Modern day mentors volunteer their expertise to help less experienced individuals enhance their education, advance their careers, and build their network. These understudies are typically referred to as apprentices, protégés, or mentees.

Mentoring relationships can be formally arranged and acknowledged as such, or simply take shape extemporaneously, and can be initiated by either party.

Mentors can be managers, counselors, teachers, or just trusted friends and colleagues, but regardless of the connection mentors are always more experienced persons. Some organizations offer formal mentoring programs that pair experienced employees with newcomers and junior staff so they may counsel them as they progress through the ranks. Some universities also have formal mentoring programs for new students or students who are experiencing difficulties with certain subjects.

A person is rarely an expert in everything you need, so seek more than one mentor.

Regardless of whether an organization has a formal mentoring program, individuals should seek their own advice-giver relationships with leaders they most admire and trust. There is no rule that says you can only have one. Having more than one mentoring relationship exposes the mentee to diverse thoughts, styles, personalities, and cultures.

Benefits to the Mentee

Many benefits accrue to the protégé from mentoring relationships, including:

- Being able to access a support network for advice about areas important to you.
- Having a place from which to get straightforward feedback from those who experienced similar issues countless times before.
- Obtaining insight that allows making more informed career decisions.
- Increasing one's self-esteem and confidence.
- Acclimating to a new job faster.
- Gaining individual recognition, encouragement, and support.

- Building confidence to aspire to new goals and explore alternatives.
- Identifying skill gaps and gaining insights into the best ways to improve skills and productivity.
- Getting advice on how to balance work with other priorities and responsibilities.
- Understanding the "do's and don'ts" within an organization or industry.
- Decreasing job stress and role conflicts.
- Building networking experience.
- Improving one's professional identity.
- Increasing one's career satisfaction and obtaining a realistic perspective of one's career.

Choosing a Mentor

While you may find yourself in situations where you are formally assigned a mentor, mentors will not engage in successful relationships if they view forced assignments as a form of organizational bureaucracy.

The more powerful mentoring relationships are those that you choose yourself, so choose carefully. Target individuals whom you look up to as role models and with whom you feel you can cultivate a welcoming attachment.

Longstanding advice is not to ask your immediate boss. He/she is responsible for managing the entire team and cannot be perceived as playing favorites, and some bosses simply do not want to develop a subordinate to the point where that individual can pose a take-out threat.

Likewise, building mentoring relationships with your boss's peers could put those individuals in awkward situations should you require counsel on a superior-subordinate issue.

If you are unsure of whom to ask, there is nothing wrong with asking colleagues and managers for a list of suggested names, either inside or outside your organization.

Lastly, understand that not all choices are final and forever; there may be times in your career when you need to seek different mentors based on your progression and that of your mentor.

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