

The Role of Mentors in the Career Development Process

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On the first day of your first internship or real post-college job, you are in your first staff meeting, and have absolutely no idea how to behave. You feel like everyone is waiting for you to screw up. Later, you have no one to eat lunch with. And that afternoon, you find yourself perplexed by the strange interpersonal interactions you see in your new workplace or by the unusual way important decisions are made.

Time to quit and find a new job? Maybe...but hopefully not. Wouldn't it be easier and more effective if you could talk to someone about your many questions?

Whether you are looking for a boost in your job search or in your working life, it is important to find yourself a mentor -- or let one find you. A mentor is that one person who can guide you, help you, take you under his or her wing, and nurture your career quest. A Yoda to your Luke Skywalker. A Glinda the Good Witch to your Dorothy Gale. What separates a mentor from the average network contact are long-term commitments and a deep-seated investment in your future. Where a typical network contact might be associated with quick introductions, exchanges of business cards, and phone calls, your relationship with a mentor likely involves all of the above in addition to long conversations and chats over coffee or lunch and time spent in the mentor's office.

A mentor is someone who's knowledge and experiences the mentee respects and someone whose wisdom and know-how can support the professional growth and development of the mentee. Often this is a boss, professor or other leader who the mentee has already met, but sometimes a mentor can be someone who is not known to the mentee. Mentors do not necessarily need to be the most senior person at an organization or within the field; the right mentor depends on what knowledge the mentee hopes to gain.

Sustaining a Healthy Mentor Relationship

Making the most of a mentoring relationship starts with a formal agreement that outlines the roles and expectations of both participants. The agreement which includes details such as when the pair will meet, how frequently and for how long, and what the goals of the relationship are will build a strong foundation for the relationship.

While the duration and frequency of mentoring meetings varies, most mentoring partners meet or talk at least once a month, sometimes as often as once a week, for about an hour. The format and content of these conversations may vary, but typically consist of brainstorming sessions to solve problems, updates and follow-ups on current projects, or more focused discussion of professional development topics. A mentoring relationship should not be considered an inside track to the top or an opportunity to air complaints; it is a respectful and professional relationship in which both parties have constructive conversations and can learn from the experience and from one another.

You will know the relationship is working if your mentor encourages you to set higher goals, provides direct and constructive feedback, helps you develop self-awareness, challenges you to grow beyond your perceived limitations, introduces you to movers and shakers, and above all, listens to you and is easy to communicate with. As the relationship develops, mentees should remember to share their successes with their mentors. Finally, most importantly, remember to regularly say how much you value your mentor's guidance and time. The feeling of being needed and making a difference in someone's life is an important payoff for the mentor.

Finding a Mentor

Not sure who to ask to be your mentor? Look no further. The Baruch College Executives on Campus (EOC) program is here to help. Through mentoring, lectures, and workshops, EOC provides undergraduate and graduate students with networking, interviewing, and other essential business etiquette skills vital to compete in today's job market. EOC mentors are alumni and non-alumni friends of Baruch College employed at major companies and organizations in and around New York City. EOC offers both short and long-term programs for students to participate in.

If you are a student and interested in learning more about Executives on Campus, please contact us at executivesoncampus@baruch.cuny.edu

If you are interested in becoming a mentor, please contact Kimberly Chu at kimberly.chu@baruch.cuny.edu.