

Searching for a Mentor?

Why is your having a mentor important? Not only because of the knowledge and skills you can learn, but also because mentoring provides professional socialization and support. Quality mentoring can greatly enhance your chances for success. If you are in the market for a mentor, here are some of the steps identified by authors Terry Sjodin and Floyd Wickman in their book "Mentoring"-

Dream a bit- So how do you find one? First, dream a bit to come up with what you would like to accomplish. Perhaps you already have that figured out. It is about where do you see yourself in 5 to 10 years or setting a specific goal.

Identify Your Goals- Make a list of the qualifications of those who are doing what you would like to do. Or, identify the qualifications of someone who holds or had held the position for which you aspire.

Identify the Achievers- Now ask yourself, who do I personally know that has those qualifications? Or has accomplished the same goals. Or call friends in the business and ask if they know of anyone to whom they can refer you. The theory of "six degrees of separation" applies here. You are generally only six people away from finding someone you would like to meet.

Select the Top Candidates- So with some names of potential mentors you have gathered, make a list of them. Then break into three lists. You may want to start with those closest to home and then develop an A-list (with those being closest), B-list and C-list (those farthest away). Or you can start with those according to your knowledge of them- their reputation or who they have mentored in the past.

Set an Appointment- Some people will be more approachable than others. Some you will be able to simply call and set an appointment. After you have met them, spend a little time thinking about what you would like to communicate and then send a letter. Or perhaps you send a letter first and then make a follow-up phone call.

Ask to Hear Their Life Story- When you do have a chance for a face-to-face, ask them to share their life story. Then make sure to compliment them on what they have accomplished. Remember to reinforce the idea that you would like to achieve some of the same goals they did. It is important to begin to define what you are interested in from this relationship. Share your background and your accomplishments at this stage and your goals. Discuss the areas in which you think you need advice.

Ready 10 Questions- Be prepared and have at least 10 questions already prepared. These should be on topics/areas of the business you want to know better and will assist you in reaching your goals. Examples may be- "If you were where I am now, what would your next step be?" Or "If you could pass along a single pearl of wisdom, what would it be?"

Ask for Suggestions- You want to write down everything your mentor says regarding your questions. This is really important as it may start you on a path of greater learning.

The Trial Close- Not only are you “selling yourself”, you are selling the idea of this person becoming your mentor. The trial close is a way of asking for that. The best way is to ask, “Who were your mentors?” or “Who were the people who had a strong effect on you?” Then follow with “Are you mentoring anybody now?” Then say “The reason I am asking is that the ideas you have shared with me have really sparked my imagination as well as my enthusiasm and passion to succeed. It would be great if someday there would be opportunity to connect more often. I wonder what it would take for me to earn those opportunities to have you as a mentor.” Earn the opportunity is key here. Choosing the right words is extremely important. It sets the stage and creates the ask.

Send a Thank You Note- You want to thank them for his/her time, insight and wisdom.

Evaluate Information and Act- If you have had face-to-face interactions with several prospective mentors, take the time to evaluate which one may have interest in you and can provide the mentoring you desire. Then set up an additional meeting. Hopefully you will have started a relationship with someone who will support and assist you with your professional goals.