



Finding the Right Mentor in the Workplace

The right workplace mentor can make or break your career. But what exactly is a mentor, and how can you find one who's a good fit for you and your professional goals?

A mentor is someone who offers you career support, advice, guidance, and insights to help you succeed and thrive in the workplace. Mentors can also help you build your confidence, be a role model, and act as a sounding board for ideas.

Traditionally, mentorships were thought to benefit mentees more than mentors. However, the mentor can receive just as many benefits as the mentee. While mentees receive valuable advice and exposure for their future career, mentors can become re-energized in their career. They can strengthen their listening and interpersonal skills as well as learn more about other areas within their organization. Above all, mentoring allows the mentor to help build the next generation of leaders.¹

Key Takeaways



The right mentor offers advice, guidance, and insights to help their mentee succeed professionally.



Research shows that despite popular beliefs, both mentees and mentors benefit from this relationship.



There is a lot to consider when choosing a mentor, including their workplace, industry, and experience.



How to find a mentor

When you are ready to find a mentor, begin by making a list of things you would like to learn, skills you would like to build, and businesses you would like to know about. The key to a successful mentorship is knowing what your goals are. Once you have set your goals, consider the following:

Look beyond existing relationships: While a mentor may be found in the workplace, you can also look to a service organization, community group, or professional association.

Choose a mentor from a different industry or department: A little professional distance helps to minimize what can be characterized as a “subtle hierarchical pressure” of having a mentor who holds a senior position in your department.

Choose a mentor whose experience complements or supplements yours: Compatibility is important, but access to new skills, ideas, and resources matters more.

Know what you want in a mentor: Having a specific vision of what you want from your mentorship can inspire your choice of mentor to say yes when you ask.

Should a woman choose a male mentor or a female mentor? The research findings are mixed. A female mentor might boost a female mentee’s sense of belonging, while a male mentor might be able to offer greater access to organizational resources and opportunities.

Women who mentor other women can share their experiences, provide affirmation, boost their mentee’s confidence, and help to rally others in the company to support and cheer on the mentee. Having more than one mentor is always the best practice.

Find your mentor ASAP

Women should seek a mentor early in their career. The benefits of mentorship can help a mentee take control of their career and set solid plans for development that will help them reach their goals. Steps taken early on will help the mentee make connections, learn the important skills that will make their work life more fulfilling, and lead to a better understanding of an organization’s culture and unspoken rules.¹ Having a leader act as an advocate early on helps set the stage for long-term success.

What to look for in a mentor

Understanding what the best mentors offer is a good first step toward finding one. The best mentors demonstrate similar traits, and the search for a mentor should include evaluating the professionals you consider asking to mentor you.²

Prioritize the relationship rather than the mentorship: A successful mentorship requires rapport and common ground. Demonstrating a willingness to share knowledge, actively listen, and build a relationship through the mentorship will provide both parties with the best outcome.

Focus more on character than competency: A mentorship should be more than a job skills training program. It also molds the mentee's professional values and self-awareness. Good mentors should be enthusiastic about their jobs and their employer and should also be respected in their organization. All of those elements should be present in anyone who mentors, or the relationship could be less productive and fulfilling.

Offer more encouragement, less criticism:

A supportive mentor talks about the strengths of a mentee's idea before delving into their weaknesses.

Be more loyal to the individual: Sometimes, the highest degree of loyalty means the mentor might need to steer a struggling mentee to a more suitable career path outside of the company.

Women who want to connect with a mentor can use these best practices in creating a vision for their ideal mentorship and broach the subject of mentorship with potential mentors.

Becoming a mentor

The commitment level of being a mentor can make some people shy away from the formal commitment many mentorships entail, but women can work with others on an informal basis and still make a great impact. A mid-career person can still offer a lot of insight to an intern or a person at an early stage.

With or without the formalities, women can pass along useful resources, refer potential clients, put one another's names forward for more visible roles, and connect each other to those who could be great mentors for them.

The support you need

For more Key4Women resources to help you reach your goals, visit key.com/women, or [email us](#) to learn more.

Would you like to weigh in on future topics? Please take our [survey](#).

¹ "25 Benefits of Mentoring." Management Mentors. <https://www.management-mentors.com/resources/benefits-of-mentoring>

² Penny Loretto. "8 Qualities of a Good Mentor." December 27, 2018. <https://www.thebalancecareers.com/qualities-of-a-good-mentor-1986663>