

Five People to Have in Your Mentor Network

Early-career employees should strive for more than one professional mentor.

BY KYRA LEIGH SUTTON

There is value in having multiple people whom you either informally or formally identify as mentors. Why? Because each of your mentors will likely have different strengths, all of which are critical to your career development. Here are five types of mentors you should seek out early in your career.

Mentors with networks

We all know that, for the most part, individuals get jobs through word of mouth. Sure, you can still apply for jobs, but it is much easier to search for a job through networks, including internal opportunities.

At the beginning of your career, you are in the process of building up your network. As a result, try to find a mentor who has an extensive network and consider asking them if they are willing to make introductions on your behalf to others in their network.

However, if you ask your mentor to do anything, make it easy. As an example, craft a note your mentor can use to make the introduction. It should include a summary of your relevant job and educational experiences and the type of opportunities you are seeking.

Before reaching out to your mentor for help, be sure about the kind of role you want. It will make your mentor look bad if they introduce you to members of their network and you are unsure about the type of work you desire and the goals you want to achieve.

Why does having this type of mentor matter? This individual will be invaluable during a job search because it's much easier to get an organization interested in you if someone has referred you.

Also, this is a person you should study and figure out how they developed their network. Ultimately, you have to build your own personal network, but it takes time to create.

Buddy

It's essential to have a mentor who is around the same age and no more than 10 years older than you. This person will likely be one to two levels above your current role.

Think of an individual with whom you can be completely transparent and

5

Steps for Maintaining a Mentorship

1

Ensure you are ready to listen and process advice related to your goals.

2

Initiate contact with the mentor and explain why you are seeking help.

share your career aspirations and plan for achieving what's important. Your buddy is a person with whom you can be open and honest about your salary and the kind of work you like versus what you dislike.

If you have any concerns about your manager, seek out advice from your buddy. If you have any fears or insecurities, share them with your buddy. If you are managing any personal challenges (such as illness, taking care of a relative, or mental health concerns), reach out to your buddy.

Identify someone whom you can call or text and will always be there. You don't have to do much planning for the conversation; instead, you can shoot from the hip and think out loud about your career plans, life, and any challenges you are facing.

Why does having this type of mentor matter? The role of this mentor is to be your sounding board. It is a person to whom you reach out when you're making a decision and want perspective about the impact it will have on your personal and professional life.

Mentor with knowledge of your work performance and behaviors

Another kind of mentor you need is somewhat familiar with your job and has seen you interact with others at work. Identify a person who can speak to what you're good at, what you need to improve, and the extent to which you are building relationships at work.

Ideally, this person knows what it takes to be successful at an organization,



Think of an individual with whom you can be completely transparent.



including how to secure a leadership role. They also have a keen knowledge of how to build relationships at work and can give you suggestions on people you should seek out. This individual should be a vital source of feedback for you, where you reach out to them at least every two months to discuss what you're doing at work and the approach you are using to get things done.

Consider jump-starting the process by participating in a 360-degree assessment. Identify 10–12 people who are familiar with your performance to participate in the assessment. You and your mentor can review the resulting report and discuss your strengths, development opportunities, and plans to enhance your performance.

Why does having this type of mentor matter? The role of this mentor is to be your source of truth regarding the work you are doing. They should be able to tell you whether you are adding value to the organization. More importantly,

Where to Find a Mentor

Input from various mentors is the key to your long-term success. However, locating multiple mentors requires personal effort.

Mentor with networks.

Observe individuals in your company. Who seems to be connected with several people? Outside your company, do you know any entrepreneurs? Don't forget to reach out to people at universities, including professors, career counselors, and alumni affairs officers.

Buddy. If your employer has a young professionals employee resource group, consider joining it to meet other people in a similar career stage. Also, think about co-workers with whom you've shared meals and other celebrations.

Mentor with knowledge of your work performance and behaviors. The best person to share feedback about your work performance is your manager or a senior leader with whom you interact regularly.

Subject matter expert.

One of the best places to find SMEs is through membership in professional organizations. For example, if you are managing leadership development programs, reach out to an organization's members who are doing similar work.

Global perspective. To find a global mentor, maintain relationships with friends and peers from other countries. You can also join cultural organizations in your local community.



Determine how often you will interact, discuss the length of the relationship, and identify the rules of engagement. For example, both parties should acknowledge that ideas shared during conversations will remain confidential.

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your mentor can give perspective on the extent to which the approach you use at work is desirable. That is, sometimes, how you get something done is as important as what you have accomplished.

Mentor with subject matter expertise

Someone with in-depth knowledge about the type of work you do will be able to help you solve challenges and reflect on the implications of the suggestions you are making. They can provide perspective on cost implication, the timeline for implementation, the resources you'll need to move forward with an idea, and so on.

Look for an individual who has been working in your respective field for several years, ideally at more than one organization. They can be an individual contributor or a leader, but in all cases, they know your area very well.

Why does having this type of mentor matter? The role of this mentor is to share specific knowledge and advice in your field. When you begin your career, you will encounter a learning curve—and sometimes, it's steep. If you have a person who knows your area well, they can help you come up to speed more quickly. Further, you'll be in a better position to deliver results aligned with the business needs.

Mentor with a global perspective

One of the perspectives employees often lose sight of at work is how things are done globally. They may suggest a great idea but will fail to consider whether the recommendation will work both in their

home country and globally. It's essential to understand customer preferences and cultural differences, norms, and how business is done outside your home country. If you select a mentor within your organization, they can help you build relationships with leaders in the countries where your employer is present.

Why does having this type of mentor matter? This mentor's role is to tell you whether the solution, recommendation, or project you are working on is relevant to global customers and international stakeholders. This mentor can share differences in cultural norms and how those norms will affect your solution's or recommendation's effectiveness. Also, to the extent your organization works with different parts of the world, it may be beneficial to have country-specific mentors. There are often differences in culture, norms, and customs across countries that are geographically close to one another.

Critical roles

While mentoring is rewarding for both parties, it's important to acknowledge your mentor's suggestions, ideas, and willingness to push you closer to meeting your goals. Also, it's a small gesture, but thank your mentor for their time. What's most important for your career is to make the most of your time with your mentor or mentors.

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Prepare for your meetings in advance—consider updates you will share and any questions you have.



Discuss updates, challenges, and plans—anticipate your mentor doing more listening while you guide the conversation.



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