

THE EIGHT STEPS TO DEVELOPING A SUCCESSFUL MENTORING PARTNERSHIP**1. Determine why you need a mentor.**

To begin the process of creating a mentoring partnership, the first question you need to ask is: Why do I need a mentor? Assess your readiness and determine your needs. If you have done a thorough inventory of your values and emotional needs, and if you have begun the process of crafting your vision for the future, there should be plenty of material from which to help identify why you want a mentor. There are many reasons why people ask mentors to partner with them in pursuit of personal and professional goals. Some of the more common reasons include:

- Supporting work and life balance goals
- Building and expanding a professional network
- Enhancing leadership development
- Improving interpersonal skills
- Facilitating better communication in relationships
- Navigating corporate culture
- Planning career strategies
- Resolving current work-related challenges
- Learning new problem-resolution skills
- Developing new perspectives and expanding possibilities

2. Select an ideal mentor.

To choose the best mentor for your present situation, make a list of the goals for mentoring and your current needs. Then write down all of the qualities and characteristics that an ideal mentor would possess to help you reach your goals. What kind of personal and professional experience would they have? Think in terms of family background, gender, age, and cultural similarities and differences. Sometimes choosing someone who is different from you but has qualities and characteristics that you admire produces greater growth and will expand your perspective more effectively than someone who is quite similar. Talk to friends, family and business associates to get recommendations by sharing with them some of the qualities and experiences you value in a mentor. When you have developed a list of several potential mentors, evaluate your choices and prioritize your preferences.

3. Recruit a mentor.

Once you have clarified your purpose for mentoring (goals and objectives) and outlined the reason why you think someone would be a good mentor, you have everything you need to recruit the right person. Asking someone to be your mentor – to support your development in a sustained, consistent manner – requires a direct and clear approach. Make sure you set up enough time to ask someone (in person, preferably) to partner with you. Let the individual know why you are seeking his or her help. Articulate your reasons for choosing that person as a mentor. Don't be shy with compliments and expressions of what you admire most about the person. People respond well to sincere compliments about what you admire most about them being a mentor. Lastly, it is important to present a general scope of the partnership (length of commitment, how often you would like to meet, request for honest feedback, and the types of goals you are hoping to achieve) so that the person is on the same page as you when/if they accept your request for support.

4. Determine the boundaries of the relationship.

This is the place where confidentiality, honest communication and trust are presented as the hallmarks of a successful mentoring partnership. Be clear with your desires and expectations and ask for agreement that your mentor will honor your wishes. Next develop the protocol for when, where and how often you will meet with your mentor. These detailed decisions are highly personal to each different partnership. Some mentors and mentees meet during the business day, some at a lunch meeting; others get together more informally after work for a drink, tennis or racquet ball game, sporting event, or even dinner. What you do is not important, but making sure the design of the meetings is comfortable and convenient for both parties is. When you plan your meeting schedule, aim for consistency, and plan a routine that is least likely to be broken due to travel, work or family commitments. Take the time during this first session to discuss your respective styles. Do you want candid, straightforward feedback? Do you want your mentor to challenge you and be aggressive with his/her recommendations for how you can stretch yourself and grow? Are you already overwhelmed at work and just need time to talk through your emotions and internal conflicts? What do you expect from your mentor, and what does your mentor expect from you?

5. Understand roles.

As previously stated, it is important to recognize that the mentee is the one who drives the mentoring partnership. As the mentee, it should be your goals, your agenda, and your responsibility for managing the relationship. You need to have clear expectations of what you want and how you are going to ask for it. Once you have set guidelines, established the schedule, and discussed the boundaries, it is

your responsibility to take action if the mentor is not meeting his/her commitments as mutually agreed. Learning to communicate, even in difficult situations, is one of the valuable lessons learned through mentoring.

- A good mentee is organized, proactive, asks for what she needs, comes prepared to meetings, shows respect for her mentor's time, follows up with assignments and recommended tasks, shows appreciation, and stays committed to her growth and development. For the greatest impact, a mentee will stretch beyond her comfort zone and will ask the mentor to challenge her. Taking an honest inventory of one's strengths and developmental areas, she should be willing to listen and learn to improve skills, attitudes and behavior.
- A good mentor also demonstrates excellent listening techniques and uses the art of questioning to probe deeper to allow the mentee to learn more about himself. A mentor does not need to give advice; instead he/she should encourage and practice good problem-solving skills with the mentee. Candid feedback is a must and, when appropriate, the mentor should qualify an observation with "This is just my opinion based on my experience." It will be up to the mentee to respond to, reflect on, or accept a mentor's perspective. A good mentor does not have to have all the answers. Serving as a resource and networking agent are valuable components of the role. Willingness to share one's personal story and professional experiences – including challenges and the key elements of knowledge gleaned from life's experiences – are important attributes of a quality mentor. Commitment, above all, is the key to success. The partnership should be dynamically reciprocal, and the mentor will always have an opportunity for improvement if the mentee is prepared and willing to give candid feedback.

6. Set goals and meeting agendas.

When you recruit your mentor, you should give him/her an overview of your reasons for wanting a mentor. Early in the partnership it is a good idea to formalize your objectives and prioritize (with your mentor) specific goals. You should discuss whether or not to have formal or informal meetings and whether an agenda is something he/she would like to see in advance. As a coach, I always summarize my client's objectives after our first session, and in subsequent sessions I repeatedly refer back to that list to make sure we are on task and moving forward. Ask your mentor for other ideas on how to structure as well as evaluate goals throughout the partnership. He/she may have also had an informal mentor, and you may learn new ideas from his/her experience.

7. Evaluate progress.

When you set your goals for the partnership, you hopefully will build in an evaluation mechanism for how to assess progress. On a consistent basis, it is imperative that you both give candid feedback on how the partnership is going. If either one feels that the meetings are not meaningful or productive, there is likely to be a derailment or cessation of the partnership. It is recommended to plan in advance for a defined endpoint of the relationship (six to twelve months are typical timeframes) and to choose a midpoint at which you will more formally evaluate progress against goals and desired outcomes. If either party feels a need to change the dynamics of the relationship, it is easier to confront at the midpoint when you are formally setting time aside to make improvements for even greater success. The final evaluation may, in fact, be a decision to continue the partnership because it has been successful and/or you are on a positive path to personal power. A final evaluation is a nice summation that gives the mentor feedback on his ability to coach and communicate and offers the mentee final reflections on achievements or continued areas for development.

8. Bring partnership to a close.

This component of the mentoring partnership is highly personal and, depending on the quality of the relationship, can prove to be celebratory or insignificant. At a minimum, demonstrate appreciation and acknowledge the mentor's gifts of time. If you thought the mentor was particularly good at listening, coaching, offering strategic options, serving as a resource, etc., then by all means communicate his or her strengths at the conclusion of your formal time together. These are gifts of praise that a mentor will keep and cherish. Lastly, feel free to discuss informally keeping the partnership alive with a periodic or annual get-together. It is recommended that you clarify if/how your mentor would like to receive your ongoing communication. Some mentors are always willing to receive an additional call for help; others prefer to move on to their next protégé and can only spare time for a periodic luncheon get-together. If you gained insight and sharpened your perception skills throughout the partnership, you will know just how to end or continue this relationship with your partner in power. On a final note, by all means, send your mentor announcements of your career advancements with a special note thanking him/her for his/her part in your success!