

Mentorship Is Key to Career Success

If you can find and participate in a productive mentorship program as either a mentor or a mentee, you'll learn some valuable life skills that will enhance your career and help you grow.

Throughout our lives, many of us have become a mentee without much effort or even intent on our part. When we are children, we typically look to our parents or guardians for the much-needed advice, support, and life's instruction. As we grow older, attending high school or college in pursuit of our future occupation, our reliance on our parents begins to lessen and may be replaced by a teacher, professor, or upperclassman. These bonds that are formed in our early stages of life are arguably part of the reason we've gotten where we are today. They have helped shape who we are, gotten us through the tough times, and may ultimately be responsible for the career we've chosen. These people have been mentors to us—in many cases, informally—and they have provided the guidance to get us to the next stages of our lives. In our early mentoring experiences, the mentor/mentee relationship is natural and occurs without much effort. Once we begin our careers,

however, finding a mentor becomes a larger task but worthy of the undertaking.

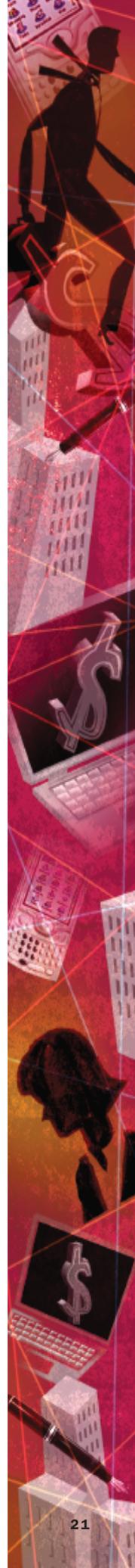
Mentorship

Mentorship is a personal developmental relationship in which a more experienced person takes a less experienced person “under their wing.” My mentors have played an important role in my career. My first mentoring experience actually changed my career path. A college professor who recognized my potential in one of my early accounting classes provided me with an arsenal of information highlighting the benefits of the accounting profession and the opportunities it presented. I used this information, selected the accounting major, and never looked back.

Upon graduation, I began my career as an auditor for a large national accounting firm. During my time at the firm, I realized the need for a formal mentor relationship both inside the organization and outside the firm. The internal mentor provided me with knowledge about career advancement and opportunities within the firm. He was also able to provide me with firsthand knowledge of his experiences and how he got

to his position. This mentor relationship was relatively easy to establish as many of the employees of the firm had traveled along similar career paths. Finding a mentor outside the firm required me to utilize my network I had established through accounting organizations in which I participated. The external mentor was necessary, particularly during the time when I made the decision to make a career transition. My mentor provided me with details of his career progression and the different opportunities he had been afforded along the way. He was also able to put me in contact with people in his network who provided additional insight about their current roles and career paths.

During one of our discussions, my mentor mentioned the CMA® (Certified Management Accountant) credential as a possible next step in my career development. After researching it, I decided to pursue the certification. My career path has evolved through my mentorship experience, taking a path I may not have anticipated right out of college. I don't think I would be in the position I am in today without the knowledge and advice



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these various mentoring experiences provided me.

These relationships can be informal or formal. The formal mentor/mentee relationship has provided me with the most benefit. The formal relationship establishes and encourages greater commitment on the part of both the mentor and the mentee. The most successful relationships will be those in which both parties are engaged and working toward the goals of the relationship. My personal goal in my role as a mentee has always been development of my skill set and education. Career advancement is a goal as well, but, as I develop my skill set and knowledge base, I feel the career advancement will naturally follow. I have used my meetings with my mentor to expand my business acumen and ask questions in a comfortable setting.

Benefits and Value

A successful mentorship is invaluable. In today's business environment, we are continuously being challenged. It seems the phrase "business as usual" no longer applies. One of the greatest benefits of a mentoring relationship is the knowledge that there's a place to turn when the job gets tough. In many cases, the mentor may have experienced the problem previously or may be experiencing the difficulties along with you, but with the benefit of past experience. My experiences as a mentee have prompted me to participate in a mentor program my organization offers for outstanding college freshmen. As a mentor in the program, I'm available to the student to pro-

vide career advice, résumé tips, and input on course selection and to address any questions the student may have. My experiences have illustrated to me that, in a successful mentorship, both parties benefit. It's truly a great feeling to see your mentee realize successes and achieve their goals. Successful mentoring has long-term effects as the mentees of today will grow to become the mentors of tomorrow.

Finding a Mentor

The key to finding a good mentor is to seek out someone who has the skill set, personal qualities, or career that you aspire to have. Identifying the characteristics you seek may be difficult and all the more reason to establish a mentor relationship. As I mentioned, I have personally realized the value of having a mentor inside my workplace as well as a mentor outside my organization. Internal mentors may be colleagues or any employee in the organization who exhibits the qualities and characteristics you are looking for. I have found external mentor relationships are best uncovered by forming a strong network and utilizing members of your network as potential mentors. I think you'll find that most people will be very open to a mentor relationship because it's truly a compliment to be asked. Your local IMA chapter may be a great place to start. IMA chapters are typically composed of members from various industries, ages, and backgrounds. Additionally, IMA recently formed a program that exemplifies all the qualities of a formal mentor relationship: the

IMA Leadership Academy.

IMA Leadership Academy Mentoring Program

The mentoring program is a new, formal program offered by the IMA Leadership Academy. The purpose is to engage professionals in a mentor/mentee relationship that's mutually beneficial for both parties as they progress along their career path. *What's in it for you?* You'll have the opportunity to "LinkUp" with a mentor—someone who can help you reach your development goals. In addition, you may be interested in becoming a mentor to develop the future leaders of our profession. The IMA Leadership Academy will assist in the matching of mentor and mentee. In addition, there will be quarterly Mentor Round Table Meetings to assess the program, get feedback, and share ideas in an hour-long discussion held via WebEx. The inaugural Mentor Round Table was held in May 2010 and covered the vision, expectations, and limitations highlights of the mentoring module from the Leadership Academy as well as the ground rules and next steps. If you are interested in the program, please contact Marcine Johnson at mjatas@bellsouth.net. **SF**

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