

Locating a mentor

All successful mountaineers need to select their guides carefully. These guides in the business world are your mentors. It always amazes me, when I address an audience, how few have a mentor. Your mentors will help prepare you for the challenges ahead and save you falling into the crevasses. The variations of "management visions" vary as do the mountains around the world. You may wish to be a senior manager in an international bank, a CEO of a fast growing IT company, or a CEO of a major multinational. The pathway to these positions is quite different as follows:

- the CEO of a bank would require at least ten years of banking experience, including multinational banking from the major financial centers.
- a CEO of a fast growing IT company would need to have demonstrated entrepreneurial skills and the ability to relate to IT staff, they would not necessarily need over five years of sector experience.
- CEO of a major multinational would need blue chip experience with other similar sized multinationals.

Most of us recognize that we need to seek advice. The problem is we are often not too selective when we start to pour out our problems to some untrained ears. Your best mate, your parents or work colleagues may not be skilled enough to give you the balanced feedback you need for your career.

The answer is very easy, find an "Obi-Wan Kenobi", who will help coach you to find the "force within you". Typically these mentors reek wisdom, they are wise owls who have seen it all before and gracious enough to only raise an eyebrow when you talk about some mad cap action you are about to take. They talk you through it and let the enlightenment strike by itself.

In this day and age only the foolish venture forward without having a mentor supporting them from behind "the scenes". A mentor is normally someone older than you, wiser, with more grey hairs who knows something about what you are doing. In other words it could be a retired CEO of the business, a retired Board member who has known you for a while, a professional mentor, or someone in the sector where there is no conflict of interest.

A good mentor will save your career a number of times. With the advent of email, a career limiting event is only a "click on the send button" away!! The mentor is someone who you ask, "please look at this I am thinking of forwarding it on to the CEO". To which the mentor replies "lets have a coffee first before it is sent", after which, when asked about the email, you reply "what email!".

Mentors are also well connected and will often further your career during discussions on the 19th hole. They often only receive as payment a good meal once a quarter, while others will do it for a living.

How to find a mentor

When looking for a mentor, start at the top and work down. Even the most successful people are happy to mentor up-and-coming "younger guns". It is one of the greatest complements you can give someone when asking them to become your mentor.

Mentor checklist	
1. understands the sector you are in	<input type="checkbox"/> Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No
2. has reached a senior position, not necessarily a CEO	<input type="checkbox"/> Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No
3. has had a broad career experience	<input type="checkbox"/> Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No
4. has a quick and incisive mind	<input type="checkbox"/> Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No
5. a person you look up to and respect	<input type="checkbox"/> Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No
6. normally significantly older than you	<input type="checkbox"/> Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No
7. has good contacts	<input type="checkbox"/> Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No
8. is well respected by others	<input type="checkbox"/> Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No
9. is well read	<input type="checkbox"/> Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No
10. is patient and tolerant	<input type="checkbox"/> Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No
11. sees their role as mentor as important and thus commits to making meeting dates	<input type="checkbox"/> Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No
(you need to find someone who scores over 6)	

How to ask someone to be your mentor

You can approach asking someone to mentor you in a number of ways:

"Pat, I would really appreciate the opportunity to meet you over lunch sometime soon to discuss a few work issues. I have the utmost respect for your judgment and experience and I would find such a meeting most valuable." There is no need to mention the mentor or "mentoree" relationship especially because Pat has never been a mentor before.

"Pat, I have recognized that if I am to grow as a manager I need to seek advice from time to time from wise people. I was wondering if you could spare a lunch or dinner, once every quarter, my shout, so I can cover issues with you. Occasionally I might need your thoughts on a urgent matter that I might be having some problems with. My boss is very supportive of this and is happy to pay for the meals and any incidental expenses that you may incur." In this situation it is made clear to Pat that this relationship is supported by the company.

"Pat, I am aware that you are mentoring a few people. I would benefit greatly if this service could be extended to me. My manager has set aside an amount of money for my mentoring. Could I come to see you to discuss how we might make this happen". In this situation Pat is a does mentoring professionally and is paid for it so a more direct approach is possible.

Richard Branson, a modern day hero, consulted with Freddie Laker, before he went into the airline industry. The advice he was given helped him avoid the pitfalls that proved too much for Laker airways, the pioneers of the cheap travel we have today.