

How a great mentor can transform your career

The Denver Post · 6 Aug 2017 · By Kathleen Winsor-games — Kathleen Winsor-games is the principal of The Winsor Group, a Denver-based firm offering leadership development, team building and career coaching. See her blog at Thewinsorgroup.com.

Every career has turning points. Every career has setbacks. Have you thought about the positive impact a great mentor could have on your career progress and lifelong success?



The Merriamwebster dictionary defines a mentor as “a trusted counselor or guide.” The mentee, or protégé, gains wisdom, insight and accelerated growth in a successful mentoring relationship.

If you haven't yet experienced this career-changing relationship, don't wait for it to happen. You can proactively seek a mentor and establish a productive relationship by following a few guidelines. I am grateful to have experienced a series of transformative mentor relationships and can attest to their lasting value. Here are a few of the lessons I can share to help you along.

Begin with the end in mind. Start by determining what you want from a mentoring relationship. A few ideas for you:

- Advanced tech knowledge
- Insight into the politics of your company or department
- Advocacy in an aggressive or fast-paced work environment
- Guidance on building strategic alliances
- Increased visibility in your company or industry
- Exposure to opportunities that challenge your skills

What should you look for in a mentor? I think it is important to have a success criteria developed before you take the crucial step of speaking to a potential mentor. I have advised my coaching clients to include these traits:

- Integrity, honesty and mutual respect
- Wisdom and experience
- Connections and credibility
- High emotional intelligence
- Discretion and tact
- Ability to challenge your thinking and skills
- Insight into the strengths and potential of others

Where will you find a mentor? Start by looking inside your company. Does your company have a formal mentoring program? If so, find out what it takes to become involved. If not, an informal mentoring relationship can still be formed, either internally or externally.

Before you approach a potential mentor, define the goals of the relationship. For instance, is your potential mentor a gifted financial analyst who may be able to help you pass the CFA (Certified Financial Analyst) exam? Do you admire the leadership skills of the COO in your company, and hope to emulate his or her influencing skills?

Whatever your goals, make sure you can articulate them clearly. Think carefully about the commitment required. You will be more likely to get a favorable response if you ask for an hour or two each month than if you expect your mentor to devote hours every week.

Once a commitment is made, stick with it. Honor the time of your mentor. If she or he asks you to do homework, such as reading a leadership book, or taking on extra studies toward a designation, make sure to complete the work.

I believe everyone can benefit from a great mentor. Remember, mentors come in all shapes, sizes and ages.

And, once you have experienced the benefits of a mentoring relationship, be sure you pay it forward.