

WHY EVERYONE SHOULD CONSIDER HAVING A MENTOR?

by Toni Gieuw, Senior Consultant - Human Resources & Corporate Services, Aquis Search

A mentor helps guide you through your professional life helping you to navigate some of the challenges and recognise opportunities that are presented to you. A mentor is usually someone in the same industry as you, although not always in the same company. He/she is available to answer questions, set goals, formulate strategies and achieve your full potential. It is a two way street, as although you will reap the benefits of learning insights and receiving guidance from someone more experienced and seasoned than yourself, in return, your mentor is using the opportunity to hone and refine their own leadership skills.

Anyone can benefit from a mentor. Whether you are just starting out or whether you are in a senior position, a successful career is forged from listening to the sage advice of those who have been through the business highs and lows before you. It will also help to expand your professional network, introduce you to new ways of thinking about day to day business decisions, larger strategic issues and your own career goals.

How to find a suitable mentor?

Many organisations have a formal mentor program, and if you haven't been assigned someone when you join the company, then simply contact human resources to discuss your options. Leading financial organisations run comprehensive programs for all levels of staff, others include programs specifically to encourage diversity or help women returning to work. Law firms have programs that foster the newly qualified lawyers and help them progress through the ranks. The human resources department is a good place to start even if you don't have a formal program in place, as they can advise you of anyone who would be open to mentoring you from within the firm.

If you need or prefer to look outside of your organisation, then consider people who you respect within your network and your industry. Organisations such as The Hong Kong Institute of Certified Public Accountants and the Singapore Business Federation run formal programs, but if this is not the case in your industry, the administrators of such organisations may be able to point you in the direction of professionals that would consider taking on the role.

What makes a good mentor?

A mentor needs to have several skills and characteristics. Almost all successful mentors will share all of the following traits:

- They are able to focus on life's positives, and are able to turn negative situations around
- Have the respect of the peers and colleagues for their knowledge, experience and wisdom
- Are able to give advice clearly, constructively and emphatically
- Can speak openly and honestly about their own successes and failures

- Have and continue to have a career that is growing, and are still motivated and inspired by learning new things.
- Have taken advice from others themselves, and maybe even has their own mentor.

It is important to set out the terms of the relationship so both parties have realistic expectations of what will be involved. Consider factors such as how often you will have contact, when, where and how will this take place, is the mentor available for ad hoc advice between meetings and how will you work together to set and achieve goals.

Once the parameters and expectations are defined, it can evolve into a mutually beneficial and incredibly rewarding relationship that can span many years and advance both careers. When you are ready, becoming a mentor yourself will ensure you continue to be engaged in a cross section of experiences and thought leadership in your career network.

About the Author

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