

## Is a Mentor Right for You?

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My introductory article last week on mentoring evoked some strong comments from a reader regarding her lost opportunity. “For a decade, I resisted finding a mentor because of my ambivalence about what I wanted out of my career. I deprived myself of some clarity about what was important to me. Opening myself to another’s perspective could have helped with that.”

This individual lost the benefits that a mentor might have provided during those ten years. Her organization, a highly recognized builder of future leaders, encouraged individuals with her potential to avail themselves of such an opportunity.

As you evaluate a potential mentoring relationship, consider the benefits it might bring. First, it represents a low-threat learning opportunity. Rather than relying on trial-and-error for your growth, you’ll have an experienced individual to offer suggestions and provide perspective on your ideas.

Having someone to patiently support you as you role-play various options will build your confidence. Sure, you’ll receive some very frank feedback, but you’ll make adjustments to your approach and style before you actually perform the actions on the job.

We all need someone who is willing to listen and offer assurance. How terrific when that person isn’t just a friend, but is someone who has experienced what you are attempting, able to help you imagine effects that you had not considered. With that guidance, you can avoid possible stumbling blocks, and you will correct problems before they become significant.

We rarely stretch beyond our comfort zones on our own, but a mentor will challenge you to put your abilities to the test. You’ll develop business expertise and technical knowledge that you might have overlooked. Your mentor likely will provide access to additional resources, including people who would not otherwise give you their time and attention.

All of that may sound great to you. But as my reader shared in our dialogue, “There is a level of commitment required to enter into a relationship with a mentor.” You should evaluate your own characteristics to determine whether a mentor would be interested in supporting you.

Are you committed to expanding your perspectives and your capabilities, or are you really looking for a short-term “free ride”? Are you genuinely open to considering new ideas, new ways of learning, and taking on growthful assignments?

Are you willing to be held accountable for commitments that you accept? Are you able to receive feedback and act upon it? Do you have a sense of personal responsibility and a willingness to apply your learnings for the benefit of your business and your colleagues?

The biggest commitment is likely to be your respect for your mentor, including a willingness to regularly meet, use the time together effectively, and bring relevant agenda items to stimulate dialogue. Your mentor will likely not share confidential information with you, but he or she will expect you to be discrete about your relationship and your conversations.

Healthy mentoring relationships are rare. That’s because in any alliance, both parties have to remain sensitive to the health of the relationship. Think of what the mentor has to gain from his or her involvement with you. Beyond helping a younger individual develop awareness and skills, there are few benefits to the mentor.

Next week, we’ll look at the potential pitfalls of mentoring and how to prevent them. And we’ll look beneath the surface at some additional benefits to mentors. Frankly, I believe serving as a mentor is one of the greatest services a leader can provide!

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