

# How To Start A Mentorship Relationship - Forbes



In my work as a [career coach](#), I find there are several helpful resources that very few people take advantage of. [Mentorship](#) definitely falls on this list. It's really a shame. Having a mentor can elevate your professional capabilities exponentially.

And—added bonus—mentors are amazing people. When you take the time to develop a strong mentorship relationship, you get access to a wealth of knowledge and experience, but you also end up with a lifelong friend and potential future business partner. In short, there's no downside.

Of course, if you aren't familiar with the concept, you may have questions about how it all works. Well, that's what I'm here for!! Please allow me to offer some insights.

## What Exactly Is a Mentor?

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A mentor is a more experienced (typically older) professional in your field who offers you career guidance, advice and assistance from a real world point-of-view. Pretty simple, huh?

## Why Should I Bother?

As mentioned above, mentorship offers a host of amazing benefits. A good mentor is wise and willing to share his or her knowledge and experiences in order to help you succeed. It's like having a wonderful trusted ally to go to whenever you're feeling unsure or in need of support. They can help you [set and achieve career goals](#), make smart business decisions, overcome [workplace challenges](#), learn new skills or simply offer an outside perspective when you're [facing frustrations at work](#). The benefits are truly endless.

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This is a big question and I recommend you take some time to think it over carefully. The choice of person makes a big difference in the success of the relationship and, ultimately, in YOUR success. Look for someone you respect professionally and someone who has a career you'd like to emulate. That doesn't mean you want to follow in their footsteps *exactly*; you're just looking for a person who has had success in your field (or even a similar one) and someone who embodies the professional characteristics you're working to achieve.

Of course, you also need to find someone who is willing to be a mentor, is eager to share knowledge, will be open and honest with you, will have time to dedicate to you (though how much is flexible) and is trustworthy. You'll be potentially sharing a lot of sensitive information so this last point is essential.

Lastly, I recommend that you look for someone you like on a personal level, not just a professional one. You should look forward to spending time with your mentor. The conversations should be pleasant, engaging and inspiring.

### **How Does the Mentorship Relationship Work?**

Establish specifics around your relationship in whatever way works best for both you and your mentor. It can be a formal arrangement, an informal one or something in the middle. No matter what, it has to work for both of you. To get started, I recommend that you, as the mentee, come up with your “ideal” relationship. Share the information with your mentor and make sure you leave it open for discussion. Find out how much [time they are willing to invest](#) and build a schedule based on that.

For example, my first mentorship relationship was rather informal. My mentor and I would meet via phone about once a month (usually for an hour) and in between these conversations, we would communicate via email. I would send work to him when I needed a quick critique. He would send me links of articles to read when he stumbled upon something I might learn from.

When I was facing a challenge, I'd check in with him for a little guidance and reassurance that I was doing the right thing. A few times a year, he'd UPS me a book. It was an easy relationship for both of us to keep up with, but I got tremendous benefit from it.

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The key to success is simply defining the relationship from the beginning. Make it an open dialogue. [Ask for what you want and need](#) from your mentor, be willing to compromise, and listen closely to make sure there is agreement. Be sure to clarify your expectations (specifically around things like confidentiality). You don't want there to be any confusion.

Lastly, let your mentor know that you see this as an ongoing process. If, at any time, the relationship isn't working for either one of you, the details can and should be reviewed and revised. This doesn't have to be stressful like a contract negotiation. Remember, it's supposed to be a fun, growth experience!

### **What's In It For Them?**

You're probably reading all of this thinking, “I get why I should want a mentor. But what's in it for the them?” Good question. And the answer is different for everyone.

Some mentors simply believe in the person they are helping and want to see him or her succeed, and that alone is worth the time and energy. Others look at mentorship as a way of leaving a legacy. As a mentor, you get to pass your wisdom down to the next generation. You have the power to make a huge difference in your industry, your company and even the world.

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In truth, some mentors just like the challenge. They like to talk about what they know and their experiences. It's fun when someone looks up to you. It kind of feeds the ego.

So there are all kinds of reasons mentors do what they do. It's a win-win situation.

I hope I've inspired you to start a mentorship relationship today. And if I failed to address an important question, please post it in the comments below. I'll be happy to continue chatting about this!!