



Australasian Wound & Tissue Repair Society

Strategies for finding a mentor and creating successful mentoring relationships

By Dr Carolina Weller and Dr Rachael Murray
AWTRS Newsletter Volume 7 Issue 2

If you study the trajectories of successful people, you'll see that most of them had considerable help along the way. A mentor can be a benefit to any career.

What is mentorship?

A mentorship is a relationship formed between a mentor and mentee with the goal of sharing knowledge and expertise between the mentor and the mentee.

It can be a formal relationship with written goals and scheduled meeting.

The mentoring relationship is primarily one that focuses on developing the work skills and

abilities of the mentee. The mentoring relationship can enhance the professional abilities of the mentee by providing on-the-job support and assistance with task-based activities such as developing a research proposal, updating a CV, applying for promotion, or learning about the organisation.

Why Should I Bother?

Mentorship offers a host of amazing benefits. Knowledge is generally accumulated through experience, making use of mentorship through learning from the experience of those that have already accomplished whatever it is that you are trying to do, makes sense. 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.

'If I have seen further it is by standing on the shoulders of giants.' Sir Isaac Newton, 1675.

mentor
/'mento:/'

noun
noun: mentor; plural noun: mentors

1. an experienced and trusted adviser.
"he was her friend and mentor until his death"
synonyms: [adviser](#), [guide](#), [confidant](#), [confidante](#), [counsellor](#), [consultant](#), [therapist](#); [More](#)
- an experienced person in a company or educational institution who trains and counsels new employees or students.
"regular meetings between mentor and trainee help guide young engineers through their early years"
synonyms: [trainer](#), [teacher](#), [tutor](#), [coach](#), [instructor](#) [More](#)

verb
verb: mentor; 3rd person present: mentors; past tense: mentored; past participle: mentored; gerund or present participle: mentoring

1. advise or train (someone, especially a younger colleague).
"both trainees were expertly mentored by a site supervisor"

When Should I Get a Mentor?

Mentors are helpful regardless of where you are in your career. Whether you're fresh out of college or a few years from retirement, there are always others who have 'been there, done that' from whom you can learn. So no matter who you are NOW is a great time to start.



How do I find a mentor?

Is it as simple as just asking? Well, pretty much. You choose someone you think would be a good mentor and then ask, 'would you consider a mentoring relationship with me?'

But wait! Before you do that, optimise your chances and check out these tips:

1. Be clear on why you want a mentor. Are you looking for someone to offer specific advice? Or do you just need a sounding board?
2. Define your personality and communication style. What kind of mentor would best complement you? You may choose someone who's your opposite (an extrovert to your introvert, for example).
3. When asking someone to be your mentor, explain why you're asking and what you'd expect out of the relationship (see No. 1). Name your reasons for approaching this particular person. Don't be afraid to be flattering (e.g. I'm asking you because you are the most successful person I know).
4. A mentor is a powerful role model. Look for someone who has the kind of life and work you'd like to have. Also, choose a mentor you truly respect. Don't just go for the biggest name you can find.
5. Before asking someone to be your mentor, consider first simply asking for input on a single specific topic. How did that go? Was it good advice? Was it delivered in a way that made sense to you?
6. Show gratitude. Never let your mentor feel taken for granted! Also, supply feedback. If your mentor suggested something that really worked out for you, report back. People love hearing about their part in a success story.
7. When looking for a mentor, think beyond former bosses and professors. Look to community leaders, the networks of your friends and colleagues, or officials of professional or trade associations you belong to. Avoid asking your direct supervisor at work. You want to be free to discuss workplace issues as well as your plans for future advancement.
8. Keep in mind that mentoring can take many forms. It can be a monthly lunch, a quarterly phone call, a weekly handball game, or merely a steady e-mail correspondence. Your mentor

does not even have to live in your city or region but it does sometimes help to have face-to-face meetings.

9. Don't become too dependent on your mentor. The idea is that one day you will eventually be able to fly on your own. In fact, you may not take every bit of advice your mentor offers. Continue to think for yourself.

10. Remember that mentors are there to give a leg-up and not a handout, so do not head into the relationship with expectations that your mentor will hand things to you on a plate.

11. Guess what: You're allowed to have more than one mentor. In fact, you can have a whole committee if you want. Choose different mentors for different facets of your professional life.

12. Finally, if you ask someone to be your mentor and that person refuses, don't be hurt or offended. This is not personal! Potential good mentors are very busy people. Thank him or her for the consideration, and ask for a referral.

Setting up a well-structured framework for working together

While all aspects of the mentoring relationship should be negotiated and agreed upon by the mentee and mentor, the mentees' developmental goals should be the guiding principle in negotiating a plan of action and the mentee should be the one to initiate meetings and contact between meetings.

Mentoring relationships work well when both the mentee and mentor bring to the relationship certain qualities.

Mentees achieve more when they are:	Mentee goals might include advise on:
Interested in developing their careers	Career planning/development
Able to take responsibility for their own development	Communication skills or grant application writing skills
Open to receiving feedback	Understanding organisational structures/promotion procedures
Willing to accept challenges	Research skills and management
Positive about change and growth	Leadership skills and conflict resolution
Able to set goals and work towards them	Balancing teaching, research and administration
Committed to working through on-the-job issues	Time management and balancing work and family

How often do you make contact with your mentor and what form will contact take?

Now you have your mentor you need to think about the time both you and your mentor have available for and are willing to devote to the mentoring relationship. This includes i) the length of the relationship (e.g. 3 months, 6 months, 1 year, life), ii) the frequency of meetings (e.g. every two weeks, monthly), iii) availability for other sorts of contact (e.g. phone and email) and iv) where/how you will meet and get in contact (e.g. e-mail, face to face). The time you

both have available should be thought about before the first meeting with your mentor. It is at this meeting that you will negotiate and agree upon a time commitment that suits both of you.

Structuring your meetings

The first meeting will depend on how well you and your mentor know each other. It is important that the mentors and mentees get to know a bit about each other and negotiate the parameters for working together. It is vital at this stage to communicate to each other clearly and honestly.

Some suggested topics are below but this will depend on how well you know each other prior to setting up the mentor relationship:

- Discuss each other's expectations about the mentoring relationship. Be as clear and specific as possible. If expectations don't match, negotiate a mutually agreeable plan.
- Discuss the issue of confidentiality.
- Discuss and agree on the time length of the relationship and an end date, the frequency and length of meetings, and the location of meeting.
- Exchange information about background, careers, interests.
- Discuss your goals. It is important to spend adequate time discussing the issues together to clarify the work situation and the real needs of the mentee.

Subsequent meetings should occur as agreed between the mentee and mentor. At the second meeting, a more detailed plan of action can be developed, where goals for the mentee can be broken down into specific tasks.

Don't ask for advice but seek the counsel of those that have done what you are trying to do...

Some helpful sites

How to Find a Mentor: [The Value of a Mentor: Find Yourself a Mentor | Quintessential LiveCareer](#)

Women mentoring women: [Women mentoring women to be leaders](#)