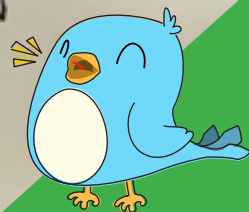


# YOUR PATH TO SUCCESS MAY DEPEND ON A MENTOR

A mentor, whether formal or informal, can help you succeed in life and in your career.



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# YOUR PATH TO SUCCESS MAY DEPEND ON A MENTOR

A mentor, whether formal or informal, can help you succeed in life and in your career.

By Ken Revenaugh

**M**usic was Ray Charles' single driving force. It catapulted a poor, black, blind, orphaned teenager to a national treasure and an international phenomenon. Through his efforts, rhythm & blues became universally respectable, jazz found a mainstream audience and country & western grew to worldwide popularity. Along the way, Ray Charles was also instrumental in the invention of rock & roll.

## RAY CHARLES AND HIS 'BOOGIE-WOOGIE' MENTOR

When Ray Charles sat down for an interview at Harvard University one day, he spoke about his mentor, Wiley Pittman. "He was a cat. I mean, if it hadn't been for him, I don't think I'd be a musician today.

"A mentor is the one person who'll take you under his or her wing."

"We lived next door to him. He had a little café, a general store and he had a piano in there. Every afternoon around 2 or 3 p.m., he'd start to practice. I was three years old – I don't know why I loved him, I can't explain that – but

anytime he'd start to practicing and playing that Boogie-Woogie – I loved that sound – I would stop playing as a child. I didn't care who was out there in the yard, my buddies, or whoever, I would leave them, and go inside and sit by him and listen to him play.

"He knew how much I liked music, so he started to teach me how to play little melodies with one finger. And, of course, I realize today that he could've said, 'Kid, get away from me, can't you see I'm practicing?' But he didn't. He took the time. Somehow he knew in his heart, this kid loves music so much, I'm going to do whatever I can to help him learn how to play."

## DON'T CONFUSE A MENTOR WITH NETWORKING

The story of Wiley Pittman and Ray Charles is a great example of a strong mentor/mentee relationship. What separates a mentor from the average networking contact is a long-term commitment and a deep-seated investment.

- A mentor is willing to guide you, help you, take you under his or her wing and nurture your career quest.
- A mentor will probably find a way to spend a lot of time with you. You'll share lunch, coffee, time in his or her office.
- A mentor is often in a position you'd like to emulate and has the clout and connections to guide you to a similar position.
- A mentor is someone with whom you have unusually good chemistry. The mentor enjoys sharing stories about his or her own climb to success.
- Finally, an effective mentor isn't afraid to criticize constructively.

## HOW DO YOU FIND A MENTOR?

First, check to see whether your current employer, professional organizations in your field, your college alma mater or other organization with which you're associated have formal mentoring programs. In these structured arrangements, participants sometimes take personality assessments to match mentees with compatible mentors.

Don't leave any stone unturned. Search the internet for potential opportunities to find mentors. For example, Women Unlimited, a development program for achievement-oriented women, employs a model in which it pairs mentors with three mentees. Similar groups may exist to suit your needs.

- **To find a mentor on your own, identify someone you admire and respect.** You can choose someone from within your organization or outside of it, or both; many people have more than one mentor.

- **Decide what you need in a mentor.** Which skills would you like your mentor to help you develop? Consider your goals and the characteristics you're seeking when choosing a mentor.
- **Do a bit of sleuthing to find out about the prospective mentor.** What is his or her communication style? Ask the would-be mentor's co-workers and subordinates for their insights. Check linkedin.com to see if there are particular areas of interest or specialties your potential mentor offers that are not immediately obvious.
- **It's a good idea to choose someone working in your functional area,** as well as someone who shares your values.
- **Some mentees prefer an older, more experienced mentor** at a higher organizational level.
- **Even if you don't expect it, you can benefit from peer mentors.** A perfect example is Lourdes Townsend, a career-focused businesswoman. She worked with 20 peer mentors as part of program sponsored by Stride Rite, where she later became an international marketing manager. In a story in Fast Company magazine, Townsend said, "I never thought about learning from someone on my level. I always looked two to four levels above me and wondered what I had to do to get there."
- **Don't ask your direct supervisor to be your mentor.** It's better to have someone with whom you can talk freely about career and workplace issues.

**"Don't ask your direct supervisor to be your mentor."**

## MASTERMIND GROUPS

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By Ken Revenaugh

Forming a Mastermind Group, brain-power group or dream team can be as simple as saying “Hello.” Many entrepreneurs and business owners form or join such groups to expand their vision, share specialized knowledge and hold themselves accountable for following through on their plans.

The keys to the success of such a group are forming trusting relationships with others who have specialized knowledge, taking action, and getting results.

Napoleon Hill, author of “Think and Grow Rich,” learned about this concept from Andrew Carnegie, the wealthy steel maker, early in the Twentieth Century. Carnegie told Hill that he did not have a clue as to how a person would go about making steel. He told Hill about the group he had assembled which had combined their various areas of expertise to create his fabulously successful company. Andrew Carnegie, the famous steel magnate, didn’t know how to make steel, but he knew how to use the Mastermind principle to build a great company!

I always valued collaboration. I love building teams and I always searched out varied talents. As a Sales Leader, I led my team through work sessions every Monday morning. Each week, we leveraged our group’s collective knowledge to plan our sales strategy and close the deals.

While meetings are commonplace in Corporate America, it was not until I decided to form FastTrack Tools that I realized the importance of Mastermind Groups. It was then that the story I had read about Andrew Carnegie came together in my mind.

I needed help – and not just from one or two people. I needed to form a Mastermind Group with people who knew about publishing, copywriting, online education, website design, branding and marketing. I found them all and made my dream come true. I also found I had a lot to contribute to such a group. Mastermind Groups can “fast track” your mentoring opportunities.

I consider this group a secret to my success.

That group continues today. At each meeting, we allow 30 minutes for social talk. Then, in the order in which we arrived, we each take 20 minutes to report on projects announced the week before, mention new projects and ask for guidance and advice as necessary. We use a timer, and we’re pretty strict. Knowing that the group will hold me accountable for my plans guarantees that I will meet my objectives.

Mastermind Groups. They can help put an assignment, a marketing program, your career or an entrepreneurial dream on a fast track to success.

**“Avoid a mentor who is too controlling, judgmental, or a know-it-all.”**

## WHAT SHOULD YOU LOOK FOR IN A MENTOR?

A mentor may be a role model and may wish to mold a protégé in his or her own image. This is fine as long as the mentor is not too obsessive about it, and you are comfortable with the image into which you’re being molded. Let’s say you’re a woman or a member of a minority who is underrepresented in your workplace. You may find it especially helpful to seek out mentors/role models of the same background so you can identify with their success. Let’s take a look at other important considerations:

- **You should have a good feeling after a few meetings** as to whether the rapport is right for a mentoring relationship. At that point, you might want to come right out and ask the person to be your mentor, if that feels appropriate. If not, you could simply say how much you’ve benefited from his or her wisdom and that you hope he or she will continue to share helpful insights with you in the future.
- **Trustworthiness and the ability to keep confidences are important** in any mentoring relationship. Both the mentor and mentee should approach their relationship with openness, honesty, introspection, realistic expectations, accountability and the ability to admit mistakes and share failures.
- **Superior mentors have a sense of humor**, good listening skills, a high comfort level in giving feedback and the ability to discuss a wide range of issues.
- **Jeffrey Patnaude, author of “Leading from the Maze,”** suggests that mentors should possess emotional intelligence, intuition, a drive to keep learning and a

desire to bring about change. Avoid a mentor who is too controlling, judgmental or a know-it-all. Look for a positive, upbeat attitude – someone who will become invested in and celebrate your successes.

## PERSUADING A MENTOR TO GET ON BOARD

Once you’ve identified a mentor candidate, how do you persuade that person to sign on to your cause?

- **No guts, no glory.** If, after meeting together for the first time, you feel that you’ve hit it off immediately with someone, ask for the sale right then and there – say you’d like him or her to mentor you. If you don’t get a “yes,” you might at least get a “maybe.” And that’s good.
- **Ask good questions**, listen well to responses, and demonstrate that you are hungry for advice and counsel. Would-be mentors are most receptive to people who exhibit these qualities.
- **A mentorship is more likely to result** when the mentor believes that the relationship is a two-way street and that he or she can learn from you. Some view mentoring as an opportunity for personal growth – a chance to learn new skills and competencies and to revitalize their own careers. Anything you can do to promote your willingness to “give and take” will help you find a good, invested mentor. Be careful to walk a fine line – avoid suggesting that the mentor needs you, instead of the other way around.

### DON’T PLAY ‘I’VE GOT A SECRET’

When seeking a mentor, be sure to reveal as much about yourself as possible. Mentors are most likely to invest time in those in whom they see a little of themselves – which is why you should never approach a prospective mentor in a state of desperation or helplessness.

**“Mentors give you a leg  
up on your career.”**

## **WATER A MENTORSHIP TO KEEP IT HEALTHY**

Flowers need water. Mentorships need their own kind of water, a special nurturing to keep them fresh and alive.

- Talk with your mentor about mutual expectations for the mentoring relationship: How it will work, what it will look like and how often you'll communicate. You and your mentor may want to agree at the outset that either of you can end the relationship at any time with no hard feelings.
- Be sure not to overburden your mentor by demanding too much time and attention or becoming overly dependent. Some experts suggest monthly meetings supplemented by regular e-mail and phone contact. Your meetings can be at the workplace, over a meal, at the gym or any place that is conducive to a productive exchange of ideas.
- Set boundaries relating to confidentiality, time commitments and the areas in which you mutually believe the relationship can be most helpful.
- The mentor may tend to give a lot more than you to the relationship, so be sure to regularly express how much you value and appreciate your mentor's guidance.
- The feeling of being needed and making a difference in a protégé's life will often be a rewarding payoff for the mentor. However, don't be afraid to supplement that reward with token gifts and gestures. Consider sending flowers or a thank you note, or pick up the check when you share a meal.
- You could also send a note to the mentor's supervisor praising his or her contribution to your professional growth.

You'll know if the mentoring relationship is working if your mentor encourages your goals, provides

honest and constructive feedback, helps you develop self-awareness, challenges you to grow beyond your perceived limitations, introduces you to movers and shakers, motivates you to join professional organizations that can help you advance, and above all, listens to you and makes communication between the two of you very easy.

**“Ideally, a mentor will motivate  
you to do your best work.”**

## **WHAT MENTORS DO: THEY GIVE YOU A LEG UP ON YOUR CAREER**

Your mentor can help you assess your strengths and weaknesses, as well as help you develop skills for success and a long-range career plan.

- If you and your mentor share the same employer, your mentor can foster your sense of belonging within the organization, help you navigate the company's culture and politics, and clue you in to the key players in the organization.
- You can also work through career and workplace problems with your mentor's assistance. A mentor can provide a fresh perspective – a new way of looking at a problem or issue. You can bounce ideas off your mentor.
- Often, a mentor is more of a coach than adviser – helping you to facilitate your decision-making process by suggesting alternatives rather than telling you what to do.
- Ideally, your mentor will motivate you to do your best work.

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track  
tools**

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# How to be a More Effective Mentee – 10 Success Tips

## SUCCESS TIP #1

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**Come to every meeting prepared.** Take notes or record the meeting. After the meeting, review your notes and set action items. Before your next meeting, review your action items and make notes regarding their status. Bring the notes to the next meeting for discussion.

## SUCCESS TIP #2

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**Take a personal interest in your mentor and share information about your life outside of work.** Ask your mentor about what's going on in his or her life. Try to find an area of common interest. When you know your mentor well enough, share a joke or relate something funny that's happened to you.

## SUCCESS TIP #3

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**Don't say, "I'd like to pick your brain."** You don't want to interrogate or bore your mentor. Instead say, "I would really value your opinion." It's much gentler and it will lead to a more pleasant conversation.

## SUCCESS TIP #4

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**Don't try to monopolize a lot of your mentor's time at first.** Connect in a way that's quick and easy. Don't invite him or her to a lunch or dinner requiring a long time commitment. Arrange a time, pick up coffee or tea and be pleased with a short 15- or 20-minute meeting.

## SUCCESS TIP #5

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**Be clear about what you're doing and what you need.** Don't be "murky" in your interactions. Work on developing a clear "elevator" speech and mission statement. Think about one or two specific questions you need answered and how to pose the questions clearly.

## SUCCESS TIP #6

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**Force yourself to listen, listen, listen.**

You wouldn't have chosen this mentor if you didn't want to learn something. Don't miss an opportunity by doing all of the talking. When you do talk, you might say, "I'm dealing with yada, yada, yada — how would you suggest overcoming those obstacles?"

## SUCCESS TIP #7

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**Thank your mentor and keep him or her in the loop when you take action steps.** It will be very satisfying for your mentor to know the results of his or her advice that you put into action!

## SUCCESS TIP #8

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**Reciprocate once in awhile.** If you see a great article you think he or she would enjoy — send it with a quick note. If you have a trade or skill and can offer to help your mentor out in some way — offer it. Don't say, "How can I help you?" Say, "I'm really very good at \_\_\_\_\_. If you ever need \_\_\_\_\_, give me a call, I'll be more than happy to help out any way I can."

## SUCCESS TIP #9

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**Learn to make the link between cause and effect.** Don't put your mentor in a position where he/she has to tell you what to do. The job of a mentor is not to take you by the hand every step of the way. It's to give you some guidance as you're on your way. Your job is to make the link between what you learn and how you will apply it to your life and career.

## SUCCESS TIP #10

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**Go back and review the above Success**

**Tips often.** You know what they say, "Practice makes perfect."