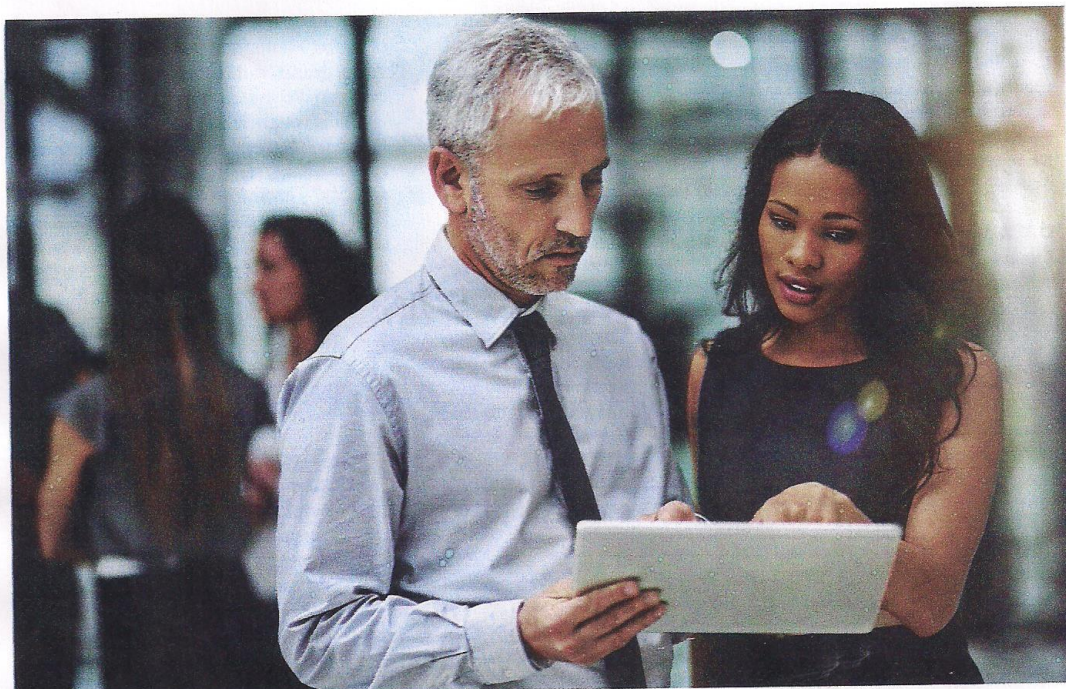


RISE TO THE TOP WITH A MENTOR

Do you want growth? Why not make 2018 the year to get serious about mentorship? Use this guide to help you move ahead in your career.

By **AYANDA NKONYANA**



Finding a mentor can be the best strategic career decision you make. Many renowned professionals attribute their success to a mentor who took a personal interest in working with them. Like Jabulile, 35, an internal auditing manager, who was fortunate to have such a person on her side. "My mentor did not instruct me, or provide coaching or training. Instead, he challenged and encouraged me to think differently on issues and approaches with his painfully-difficult to answer questions. He served as a source of wisdom when I needed it the most. While our relationship ended after I changed companies, his impact carries through in my work today," she adds.

Some of the most influential people in history were mentored to success by some well-known and powerful people of our time. Philanthropist and media mogul Oprah Winfrey was mentored by celebrated author and poet, the late Maya Angelou. "She was there for me always, guiding me through some of the most important years of my life. Mentors are important and I don't think anybody makes it in the world without some form of mentorship," Winfrey said.

Finding a mentor is valuable and in the ever-changing world of work, it is becoming increasingly important to have someone to guide you and help you reach your goals.

WHAT IS A MENTOR?

Mentors can be a great resource to help you think through current challenges, manage a career strategy, or just vent frustrations. The role of a mentor is to encourage the personal and professional development of a mentee through the sharing of knowledge, expertise and experience. It is someone who has walked the journey you are in and who can give you their take on how they addressed certain issues, says Penny Holburn, a Joburg-based life and career coach. "The mentor is not an adviser but someone who can relate to what you're faced with. They may sometimes give advice but this should not be the norm," she says.

Choosing a mentor depends on what you perceive as possible commonalities with your core as a mentee. "This could include your value system. It's also based on gut feel and intuition," Holburn adds. Great career management goes beyond selecting the perfect career or calling. Mentors are there to mobilise and develop you beyond your own perceived limitations. They need to be compassionate with the intent to dislodge untapped potential.

THE IMPORTANCE OF MENTORSHIP

The long-term impact of mentoring can be life and career changing. According to research by Richard Nemanick, author of *The Mentor's Way*, those who have mentors tend to have better career-related outcomes.

Mentoring helps both the mentee and the mentor recognise their abilities and limitations and highlight areas for future development, says Vanessa Carstens, a career coach based in Joburg. "It helps prompt thought about career development and come to a realistic conclusion about their career potential. It can help increase the motivation of both the mentee and the mentor. The mentee gains a new direction or perspective while the mentor feels a sense of achievement when their mentee succeeds."

Data from an emerging Workforce study in the U.S. showed that 37% of employees who don't receive regular mentoring plan to look for another job within 12 months. In an ever-changing highly complex world, careers evolve faster than what we can keep up with. That's why mentoring can enable you

to remain relevant and employable, and help you discover new perspectives. This was the experience of Pretoria-based Zanele, 32, a chartered accountant. "I attribute part of my professional growth to the guidance of a patient mentor. Mentors taught me the importance of managing expectations through effective delegation; the importance of managing time without compromising on family; active community involvement, being a responsible leader and accountability for my actions. Six months into my mentorship programme I was promoted from a junior position to senior analyst. A mentor will help you move ahead in your career and help you solve problems in the workplace they've already solved," Zanele adds.

"A mentor can also introduce you to people in their networks and help you get better connected," Holburn says.

HOW TO PICK A MENTOR

A clear understanding of how you see the relationship work out and objectives of the mentoring should be non-negotiable when seeking a mentor. Once you have an idea of what you need you can go and find suitable candidates.

Make time to meet your mentors in person before you choose someone, says business coach Penny Shoji.

"Connection" is key, she says. "If you don't connect it becomes just a battle with yourself to try to listen, let alone convince yourself of what you are hearing. Before committing to the mentoring, both parties must be satisfied they are compatible." This can be done by organising a "chemistry session", a get-to-know-each-other session that can help determine fit and eliminate any discomforts in the future. During this session, rules of engagement could also be established to avoid raising expectations," she adds.

Not every person can mentor, Holburn says. "The biggest mistake people make is choosing someone prominent or senior

who has no time to mentor anyone, or who's not good at interacting with people or mentoring another person. Some people are very task-orientated and have no interest in growing and developing others. Pick someone who's good at guiding and developing people," she adds. Personal networks developed through mentoring are crucial to unleash hidden potential or to succeed at the next level within an organisation.

"If you'd like to be considered for job opportunities or a promotion, identify

someone that can connect you, generally a person not more than two levels above you in the company," Carstens says.

Shoji advises to have more than one mentor with different sets of skills and experiences. "For example, a mentor who's an expert at writing and acquiring grants may not be the best at managing a lab. Apart from the expertise level,

multiple mentors can provide a number of solutions or advice for a particular problem. This is helpful for advice on a practice that has changed and is different from what a senior mentor experienced," Shoji says.

WHAT'S YOUR ROLE?

What does it take to be someone a mentor wants to spend their time on? The mentoring relationship is built on mutual trust, respect and communication. It involves both parties meeting regularly to exchange ideas, discuss progress and set future goals. Initially, allow your mentor to take the lead in the relationship, says business coach Julia Fourie. "Listen and respect the opportunities, limitations and format of the relationship your mentor is able to provide for you. Always act with courtesy and respect towards your mentor. Use active listening skills during discussions. Be careful not to interrupt, unless you need to clarify a point. Take notes when appropriate and have a purpose for your questions."

Always be on time for meetings. Thank your mentor for their time and help. Do the work, contribute to the relationship but learn to solve your own problems. ■

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