

Finding a Mentor

Does mentoring employees even exist anymore in organizations? Are people too busy to take the time to be a mentor to those less experienced? Or do leaders within companies still mentor those under them? I raise these questions because mentoring programs once a big part of corporate America, does not seem to be as prominent today. It seems these days that if managers came from a mentoring environment, they are likely to bring that attitude with them as part of their management style or in a formal mentoring program. Mentoring can provide such value to employees by helping them grow as an individual and guide them as they climb their career ladder.

The Merriam-Webster online dictionary defines a mentor as "a trusted counselor or guide." Mentors can be someone in the organization you work for, or someone you know outside of work that you respect and see as successful and can share with you the steps of career climbing. If you are just starting out in your career and do not have mentors in your life right now, do not get discouraged. Having a mentor that you can speak with often and ask for guidance is ideal. It's even more helpful if you can watch how they conduct themselves in meetings, with other employees and ask questions about their challenges and successes and learn from their personal experiences. But I know that such a person is not readily available for everyone. The next best thing is to read books about men and women that have achieved success in their career. Take notes because these leader's can become vicarious mentors. There are many successful leaders in every industry; many have either written books or people have authored books about them that we can all learn from. Some of these books are in the Pink Ladders Book Store for purchase on the website and you can find hundreds more in the library or at any bookstore. I have personally been encouraged, motivated and inspired by reading books such as these over the years.

One employee that started working for me about seven years ago still works for me today. He has now been with me at three different companies and has held three different positions. The first time I met him he was very shy and quiet and honestly did not interview well. But I knew he had the experience I was looking for and was probably nervous and just

not very good at interviewing. It took some time, but I finally got him to open up and ask questions that would confirm or deny his abilities to do the job. After interviewing other candidates, I ended up offering the job to him and I'm glad I did.

I have watched him grow as an individual, an employee and a manager over the last seven years. Although we have never sat down and outlined a mentoring program if you will, I have taken it upon myself to mentor him over the years. I guide him in situations, provide advice where needed, discuss with him the areas to improve upon and the skills and characteristics needed to advance to the next step in his career. I give him projects and responsibilities that match his abilities, and others that take him out of his comfort zone a little to help stretch his thinking and problem solving abilities.

Being a mentor to him and others throughout my career has been a rewarding experience. I've also been fortunate to have mentors in my life that I could look up to and seek their advice on a variety of topics. My mentors have not been people that formally decided to be my mentor. I have chosen them as people that I respect and admire for the person they are and their successes. Then I watch how they interact with people, in meetings, in difficult or stressful situations and in social settings. What I admire, I try to emulate in my own situations throughout my career. I wrote an article on one such mentor, "Thank you, Farley!" located on the Pink Ladders website. He was such an inspiration to me when I was a young woman starting out in my career that it left a lifelong impression. Dr. Jeffrey Hymes was and is a mentor in my life today as are my good friends Rob Chioini, Eric Liew and my current boss, Dean Weiland.

Does mentoring still exist in organizations today? I would have to say yes it does even if it is not a formal mentoring program. Anyone that seeks to advance their career should pay attention to how the CEO's, COO's, President's or any other position interacts and leads a company and people. Watch how they speak, how they interact with others, how they conduct themselves in meetings and around competitors, customers and vendors. Take notes and learn from them, then begin applying those techniques that you admire. If your company offers a formal mentoring program, I recommend looking into it and seeing how you can become involved. If you are sincere in wanting to climb your own pink ladder, having mentors in your life can be so valuable and inspirational.