



The most successful achievers have relied on mentors to reach their full potential.

GUIDES FOR THE JOURNEY

by Marcia Jedd

Bill Gates consulted them. So did Luke Skywalker. Mentors are wise, loyal advisors. Ask any successful business owner and, chances are, they have had mentors along the way and probably still have them. Mentors are trusted sources or guides who can help you learn more about expertise you don't have, help you grow your business and more.

Mentoring is about building a partnership between mentor and mentee that enhances the self-worth of both and promotes the sharing of ideas, support and successes, according to the consulting firm Perrone-Ambrose Associates Inc. in Chicago. By its nature, mentoring experts say the process is nothing short of mind-expanding, particularly for the protégé.

"Often one of the biggest benefits mentees gain is a larger perspective, a broader view of either the organization or the business climate in general," says Kimberly Vappie, COO of Mentium Corp., a Minneapolis firm that provides companies with mentoring programs. Typically, a mentee is at a lower level than the mentor, who acts as a sounding board, observer or listener, she says, noting confidentiality is a hallmark of the relationship. The best relationships are driven by the mentee, she says.

People who use mentors are more successful than those without mentors, and that's substantiated by academic research, says Ellen Ensher, associate professor of management at the business college at Loyola Marymount University in Los Angeles. "They get more promotions, make more money, and have more career and job satisfaction," she says.

About 70 percent of *Fortune* 500 firms have formal mentoring programs, Ensher says. While the traditional relationships still exist—with a more mature mentor helping the protégé move up the ladder—they've been supplemented by a bevy of variations. Mentors may be found outside a company in other industries and walks of life.

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Leading by Example

Stories of Mentorship

Gloria Estefan: My Mentor, My Grandmother



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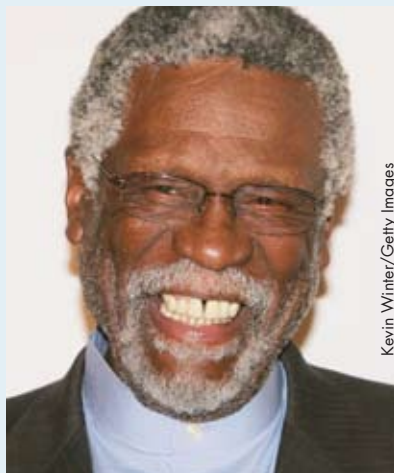
“My grandmother on my mother’s side, Consuelo Garcia, represented to me a vivid example of a woman ahead of her time. She was a strong, caring, spiritual humanitarian who filled my life with possibilities, and through her example, gave me the belief that there was nothing I could not do or achieve in life,” says Gloria Estefan in *The Person Who Changed My Life: Prominent Americans Recall Their Mentors*, edited by Matilda Raffa Cuomo.

Born in 1905 in Cuba, Garcia dreamed of becoming a lawyer, but had to leave school to help her large family. At 10, she taught herself to read and write. Estefan credits her grandmother with giving her the confidence to pursue a singing career.

“The most valuable lessons I learned from my grandmother were to discover what makes you happy, and do it with as much energy and joy as you can muster,” Estefan says. “And that success takes perseverance, determination and an unwavering belief in what you have chosen to do.”

Bill Russell: My Mentor, My Mother

“My mother protected me in this life. She was my shield and my guardian; she made the dangerous world I grew up in appear to be safe. She insisted that I keep distant from those who would harm me physically or verbally; she kindled my imagination, insisted the library was the place for me, as well as the church on Sundays (from 8 in the morning till 10



Kevin Winter/Getty Images

at night!),” writes basketball great Bill Russell in *Russell Rules*, a memoir co-written with David Falkner.

“One day, when I was 12, she became ill and was taken to the hospital. A week later she died—a complete and overwhelming shock. But even then, more strongly than ever, she stayed with me—in my thoughts, my goals, my aspirations,” Russell writes.

“The power of her love for me was that strong. And in some way, it was not exceptional in that devoted parents always seem to have this invisible power that follows after their children, helping them do for themselves what they most need to do to be happy and successful.”

Larry King: My Mentors, My Role Models

“When I was a child, all I wanted to do was be on the radio, and there were two great radio broadcasters who influenced me and whom I admired,” says Larry King in *The Person Who Changed My Life: Prominent Americans Recall Their Mentors*. “Arthur Godfrey was a wonderful broadcaster who exemplified great values—he was a risk taker, had a great personality, and above all, he was always himself.

Red Barber was a Dodger announcer whom I not only listened to as a child, but also tried to imitate. I can remember pretending to be him when I was about 10 years old, doing imaginary sports broadcasts by myself.”

King later met and worked with Godfrey and Barber, “which was like living out a dream.” Both men had great influence and taught him several important lessons. “From them, I learned to be myself, and to take risks. They showed me that in our profession, the only secret is that there is no secret, and that above all I should trust my instincts. They gave me simple advice—to be the best I could be.”



Mark Von Holden/WireImage



Maximizing the Relationship

Mentoring Tips

1. Make meeting with your partner a priority. Follow through on commitments.
2. Frequently review goals, expected outcomes and accomplishments with your partner.
3. Make the exchange of positive and developmental feedback, expectations and concerns regular agenda items.
4. Ask questions and listen actively. Maximize differences in work styles and life perspectives.
5. Take risks and act to build trust.
6. Actively seek networking opportunities. Notify each other of meetings or projects that are learning opportunities.
7. View your partner as a professional resource.

Source: Mentium Corp.



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Mentors in Life

From being a new mom to getting a divorce, mentors are also important in personal aspects of life, says Ensher, co-author of the 2005 book *Power Mentoring: How Successful Mentors and Protégés Get the Most Out of Their Relationships*. “Power mentoring is having a network of mentors offering you variety and flexibility over one traditional mentor. A power mentor can provide emotional support, career support and serve as a role model,” she says.

Both Ensher and Vappie say when considering a mentor, don’t be afraid to think outside the box. Consider a reverse mentor, such as a less seasoned person mentoring a veteran. One example: a Gen Y-er teaching a senior executive about social networking.

For small-business owners and entrepreneurs, mentors lend expertise in launching a business. “It’s the zero to two-year timeframe when you really need specific skills or knowledge in functional areas. How do you get employees in place, run your books or build infrastructure?” Vappie says. Beyond the early years, mentors offer help with skills like leadership. “You’ve figured out what your business is, and how you go to market and now you’re really trying to maximize the business,” she says.

Even seasoned business owners and serial entrepreneurs go on to seek peer mentors. Vappie says it’s common for highly successful, longtime business owners to branch out and expand their networks. “Sometimes it’s a question of learning how to make your business work for you versus working for the business. These people are looking to seek comrades who are good at that.”

Finding Your Mentor

Finding a mentor starts by looking within. “You have to know yourself. Know what you want and what you would offer a mentor,” Ensher says. To identify potentials, look around and see who inspires you and who is visible. Tell everyone you can that you’re looking to connect with the identified sources. Even if you don’t know the person, today’s transparent Internet environment (providing bios, for example) and social networking tools, such as LinkedIn for professionals, ease the burden of finding someone who knows the potential mentor. Leverage any contacts in common to gain an introduction, making it a warm call, Ensher says.



Look at the potential mentor’s profile, work history and functional expertise and make a short list, Vappie says. “Then plug into your network. Most people are flattered to be asked to be a mentor. They may say no or they may refer you to someone else,” she says.

At the start, be honest with your assessment of what you hope to learn, stating how often you’d like to meet and what you can offer the mentor, Ensher says. E-mentoring is a practical option when distance separates mentor and mentee, and is certainly viable for introverts, Ensher says. “Computer-mediated technology can enhance intimacy and self-disclosure.”

To build trust before rolling up your sleeves, getting to know your partner on both a personal and professional basis is critical, mentoring experts say. For business mentoring, changing up venues and activities can help break the ice and promote that personal nature as the mentoring unfolds. Ensher invites her protégé for a beach walk when she walks her dog. “Integrate the relationship into your daily activities,” she advises. “Meals are popular. You can even go to the gym.”

Managing the Relationship

Success of the relationship depends a lot on establishing ground rules and logistics. Vappie says top reasons why mentor relationships fail is lack of commitment by either party and misaligned expectations. “One party may be expecting something and another may not even be aware of that. Covering a lot of the basics up front can really help with expectations,” she says.

Establish guidelines for the relationship, such as how often you’ll meet or how accessible you’re expecting the mentor to be. Duration of the relationship largely depends on goals. Formal mentoring programs often have a set duration such as one year, but many partners report staying in touch over the years, Vappie says. Ultimately, experts say mentees come away with greater self-confidence, willingness to take on responsibility and the ability to take more informed risks.

Because the exchange of information is a two-way street between the mentor and their protégé, mentors benefit, too, often claiming they get back more than they contribute, Ensher says. “Mentors get rewarded with pride, rejuvenation, appreciation and the benefit of a conduit to another part of the organization or a new industry. They’re building a cadre of loyal supporters,” she says. **S**