

## Finding and Keeping Mentors

By: Rhonda R. Hess

Have you ever wished for the advice and support of someone who knows the ropes you are about to climb? Have you ever identified a mentor you'd like to work with and thought about meeting with him or her then chickened-out and never followed through? Ever catch yourself thinking, "They're probably too busy for me anyway?" If you answered 'yes' to any of these questions, you are not alone. Many people wish for mentors, but assume accomplished people are too busy to mentor and that approaching successful people equates to 'being a bother.' Not true.

Mentors are teachers who share their knowledge, lessons learned and connections with aspiring individuals. Mentors are found at every level in the organization. I know administrative assistants who mentor their peers. I know line operators on the factory floor who mentor new operators to teach them the tricks of their trades. And, of course, there's the most commonly identified mentor—the successful executive. Regardless of your level in the organization, finding and working with a mentor is simple if you follow a few rules:

- Know your desired career path or what specific guidance you need to define a path.
- Select someone whose values you admire and respect.
- Plan your questions in advance of meetings. Be clear, concise and ready to listen and learn.
- Respect your mentors' time. Like you, mentors are busy people.
- Ask for what you truly need vs. all you can get. You will acquire more than you can imagine in return!
- Remember this fact: Most accomplished people love to mentor—yet, few are asked!
- Regularly thank your mentor and offer to pay-it-forward as a sign of your appreciation.

Many years ago, I approached a highly ranked executive to discuss my career. I wrote a one-page summary highlighting my values, desires and interests and attached my resume outlining results to date along with a self-reported list of strengths and weaknesses. I remember thinking it was the 'normal' thing to do, and I was actually relaxed as I entered her office. She expressed amazement that I had done so much introspective work and had the *guts* to approach her. That was a true light-bulb moment. It was the day I learned that it is actually a rare occurrence for women to actively seek mentors. Ten years later she is still my mentor and life-long friend. I count on her in tough times, share my successes in good times, and regularly express sincere appreciation for all she does and is for me. She *always* gives the right advice just when I need it most. She is invaluable to me.

Finding a mentor is easy. So, look for one, set your plan, and go for it. Don't wait for some formal system—just do it! You will forever be glad you did.

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