



Supervisor NEWSLETTER

Employee Assistance Program
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Why You Should Seek Out Short-Term Mentoring

Adapted from Allison E McWilliams Ph.D.

At the start of a new year, you might find yourself engaged in goal-setting. Maybe we have all bought into too many “new year, new you” mantras, but there is something about the start of the year that signifies a clean slate and optimism. This is the year I’m going to build healthy habits, invest in my relationships, etc. It’s easy to tell ourselves these things on January 1. There’s a whole planner industry that’s been built around it. And certainly there’s nothing wrong with setting some intentions and doing a bit of dreaming.

And then February rolls around, and little to no progress has been made. Healthy habits have given way to old routines. Job searching is frustrating and lacks quick wins. Investing in relationships requires unavailable time and energy. The easy choice, at that point, is to give up, and most people do. Why? The goals were too big, too vague, too unrealistic, and they lacked commitment.

Set yourself up for success from the outset, so that you can see real, tangible progress and keep moving forward

First, set realistic, specific, short-term goals. Make them something you personally care about. And, for each of those goals, find a mentor to support your progress. But not just any mentor. Just like with those New Year’s resolutions, it can be daunting to ask someone for the deep, ongoing commitment that effective mentoring typically implies. Instead, make this the year you reframe

your ask in terms of specific, short-term mentoring with clear expectations for success.

What today’s mentors do

In this age of boundaryless career paths, hybrid or fully remote work, and uncertain economies, it’s more important than ever that you take ownership of your career decisions. This means not only figuring out what next steps may look like, but also finding the people who can help you get there. We all need broad, diverse networks of strong and weak ties who can provide access, feedback, and guidance. But sometimes knowing that you need something and figuring out how to get it are two very different challenges. Traditionally, mentoring is built upon apprenticeship models, wherein someone with all the knowledge, expertise, and experience works to recreate themselves through someone else. These relationships might last months or years, and the mentor decides when the mentee-apprentice is “ready” to move on without them.

Mentoring is a two-way conversation and collaboration

It is always focused on the mentee’s growth and development. The mentee comes into the relationship with their own knowledge, expertise, and experience, and may have multiple mentors at the same time. And, while mentoring relationships can last for years, they don’t have to. Because mentoring is experience-based — you want to find someone who has experience or expertise in the area in which you are seeking mentorship — it’s important to get clear on your goals.

In general, mentors support three main types of goals

1. Short-term career (socialization, or how to be successful in a new role)

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2. Long-term career (how does this role fit into your long-term career goals); and
3. Psychosocial (what are your values, strengths, interests, and other identities, and how do these affect your career and life decisions).

As a mentee, you might think of your goals as falling into one of these areas as well. These might include things like:

- Learning a new role or organization (short-term career)
- Identifying strategies for work-life balance (short or long-term career)
- Creating a career plan for next steps (long-term career)
- Filling specific gaps on one's resume (long-term career)
- Gathering feedback on EQ, leadership acumen, interpersonal skills (long-term career or psychosocial)
- Reflecting on meaning and purpose in work and life (psychosocial)

Once you have identified a specific goal, think about who you already know who has experience or strength in that area. For example, if you're working on work-life balance, you might think about who you know who seems to do this particularly well. Or if you are reflecting on meaning and purpose, who is that person you find yourself going to for advice and deep conversations? You may identify a gap or two in your network. That's OK! It just means you need to do some relationship-building work, which will, in turn, help to diversify your network.

Overcoming barriers to mentorship

One of the challenges with asking people for mentorship is that it feels like an enormous expenditure of time and effort on their part. And that's because it is. Great mentoring is intentional, consistent, and ongoing. It doesn't have to last forever, but there is an expectation of a commitment of time and relationship built into the ask, and most people simply don't have it. On top of which, many potential mentees don't do the work, first, of getting clear about their goals and why they are asking. Instead of asking for lengthy amounts of time and engagement, think instead in terms of no more than six to eight weeks. Be specific in your ask: "I'm seeking a short-term mentorship to help me identify some strategies for better work-life balance, and I've noticed

that you seem to do this well. What I am asking for is four 30-minute conversations over the next eight weeks. I will set the schedule according to our calendars, bring questions and challenges I am working through, and ask for your feedback on my actions. If you have any strategies or resources that have worked well, that would be helpful, too." See how much better that is than, "Will you be my mentor?" It's specific, it's intentional, it's time-limited, and it's clear about the expectations. You never know; a short-term mentorship could easily develop into a long-term relationship. But it doesn't have to. With a clear end point and specific goals to accomplish there is an easy out for both parties. Then you, as the mentee, can seek out your next short-term mentorship and continue your journey of growth.

First Choice Health EAP is here to help

Reach out to First Choice Health EAP when you and your employees need support. One of the many benefits of our program is that our team of qualified clinical experts are available 24/7 to assess specific concerns and develop tailored plans of action to individuals reaching out for assistance.

References:

<https://www.psychologytoday.com/us/blog/your-awesome-career/202301/why-you-should-seek-out-short-term-mentoring#:~:text=Today%2C%20mentoring%20is%20a%20two,mentors%20at%20the%20same%20time.>