

# Get ahead with a mentor

Have you ever felt you're hitting your head against a brick wall at work? Maybe you want a pay rise. Or you want the organisation to do something differently. But no-one listens. A mentor may just be the answer.

A mentor is quite simply an advisor. Someone who can help you make head or tail of the sometimes confusing world of work. A good mentor can teach, promote, and encourage you.

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## Nine benefits of having a good mentor

Mentors have lots of benefits. They can:

1. Assess your strengths and weaknesses
2. Help you understand your career path
3. Give you new perspective on your future
4. Teach you to make better decisions
5. Debrief you when things go wrong
6. Open doors for you with their contacts
7. Help you develop career and life skills
8. Provide you with insights that are different to your own
9. Listen when no one else will

## Sniffing out a good mentor

You need to click with your mentor. Take these tips to find a match made in heaven:

- **Mentor tip 1: Know what you want.** Do you need a mentor who knows your industry? Or are you looking for someone who can guide you in the finer details of interpersonal relationships? Shannon Roberts of Chandler Macleod says mentors are usually "general" or "specific". If you need life skills advice then go for general, says Roberts. Or if it's technical expertise then you may need a specific mentor. It's possible to have both.
- **Mentor tip 2: Where to look.** Your mentor may be right under your nose, or someone you've not yet met. "Start by looking at your informal mentors you naturally look to," says Roberts. A mentor could be a member of your family, a lecturer from university, or you

could find the ideal person in your organisation, says Pete Noblet, Senior Regional Director of Hays. Other places to go looking include industry bodies.

- **Mentor tip 3: Know yourself.** To find the right mentor you need to understand your own personality, says Noblet. Consider the people you aspire to be like and reflect on your style. If you're introverted, it may not be a good idea to go for your organisation's most outgoing executive. "It needs to be someone you feel can advise you on your career path," Noblet says.
- **Mentor tip 4: Understand your needs.** Ask yourself: "what are my goals", "what do I think a mentor can help with", "do I need a sounding board" "how often do I envisage meeting", and "will we meet face to face or over the phone"? says Noblet. These questions can help direct you.
- **Mentor tip 5 : Qualities of a good mentor.** Whoever you choose, make sure you can respect them, says Noblet. They need to be able to listen and coax ideas out of you. "And choose someone who has achieved similar goals to you."
- **Mentor tip 6: Give back.** Mentors are often very busy people, says Roberts. You may be asking for a meeting – in person or on the phone – every month or quarter. Think about what you can give back. Whatever you do, take the time to prepare before your meetings. It shows you respect your mentor's time.