

The Best Mentorships Help Both People Grow

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Summary. A transformational mentorship is a relationship that offers something powerful to both the mentee and the mentor. As a mentee, the trick to fully engaging your mentor lies in finding the right person: someone with whom you can build a relaxed, inspiring camaraderie, driven by curiosity as opposed to the binary instructor-student exchange we normally teach. How do you find this person? Try following these steps:

- Look beyond the obvious places. It can be challenging to avoid the traditional teacher-student approach to mentorship when your mentor is a leader within your own organization. Instead, try looking for potential mentors in ecosystems tangential to your work and your interests.
- Ask to meet before you ask for mentoring. While someone may seem perfect on paper, they could easily end up being a bad fit once you engage directly. You need to make sure there is a genuine connection, so start small with (virtual) coffee or lunch.
- Test the waters. Your ideal mentor should be someone who resists providing you with quick answers, and prefers engaging you in conversation through which you can both learn and grow.
- Don't limit yourself. Just as you can teach and influence your mentor as the mentee, you can mentor others. By teaching someone else, you will also learn to clearly express and communicate your ideas, which is essential to your professional growth.

Full Article. Businesses are now transforming at an accelerated pace and your industry may look very different five to 10 years from now. Your ability to grow and develop the skills you need to thrive will depend largely on your adaptability and willingness to learn and collaborate with others. Mentorships are great conduits for this kind of growth, particularly if both parties are benefiting from the relationship.

Traditional mentorships involve employees with different tenures. The more seasoned mentor provides their mentee with ongoing advice, including guidance around [career decisions](#) and challenges. If you are on the receiving end of this relationship, you may find it useful for incremental improvement. But in my experience, if the mentorship has a transactional nature — meaning you are the only one learning something new — it will eventually fizzle and be less valuable in the long term.

Mentorships with a transformational nature, on the other hand, can help both you and your mentor prepare for a fast-paced future, no matter what career path you want to pursue.

Transformational Mentorship

Transformational mentoring is a term I use to describe a relationship that offers something powerful to both the mentee *and* the mentor — and it requires an equal amount of work from both. As a mentee, the trick to fully engaging your mentor lies in finding the right person: someone with whom you can build a relaxed, inspiring camaraderie, driven by curiosity as opposed to the binary instructor-student exchange we normally teach. These mentorships can be formed with people senior to yourself or peers of equal stature, as long there is a mutual desire for personal and professional growth.

Consider one of the greatest examples: Albert Einstein and his relationships with Werner Heisenberg and Niels Bohr. Though they varied in age and experience, they shared a joint fascination with theoretical physics. Their genuine curiosity and honest conversations enabled each of them to make impressive advances in the field in a time similarly affected by fast-paced technologies and innovation. For many years, the three physicists met and corresponded. They didn't often debate or advance a specific view; they weren't trying to one-up each other. Instead, they proposed ideas, asked questions, offered thoughts, and supported each other's seemingly wild notions.

That spirit is key to attracting and maintaining transformational mentor relationships. Here's how to get started.

Look beyond the obvious places.

It can be challenging to avoid the traditional teacher-student approach to mentorship when your mentor is a leader within your own organization. This is largely due to the difference in your seniority levels. Instead, try looking for potential mentors in ecosystems tangential to your work and your interests.

Start by thinking about your passions, hobbies, and curiosities. Maybe you are a content creator who has always been interested in new developments in the technology sector. Is there someone in this field whose work you particularly admire or who posts ideas on social media that inspire you? Don't overlook them — even if their job is seemingly unrelated to your own. The people who spark your curiosity are the ones whose journeys, knowledge, and behaviours may serve as a roadmap for all the places your career can go.

Innovators in other fields are particularly good candidates for transformational mentors. When you exchange ideas with one another, you may each discover insights you never considered before, things that inspire both of you to think beyond your immediate purview and better position yourself to take advantage of future trends in your fields. To find these people, leverage your professional network — but push yourself to reach out to entirely new connections as opposed to the most familiar names on LinkedIn.

Remember not to limit yourself to a single individual. As with Einstein, sometimes the process works better with multiple peers. Even if they don't mesh as a group, you may find each mentor valuable at different times in your growth journey.

Test the waters.

You may find a potential mentor who seems perfect on paper, but they could easily end up being a bad fit once you meet (whether virtually or in-person). You need to make sure there is a genuine connection in order for the relationship to bloom, so start small.

Gauge their comfort level to meet for coffee or lunch. Beforehand, do your due diligence by looking into specific topics that may interest them. Check out their social media feeds, podcast interviews, presentations, or any work they have published. Keep in mind that this first chat doesn't need to be grandiose. (I once connected with a mentor over our love of photography.) Whatever you talk about, you should find ways to add value by brainstorming interesting articles you might share on the topic or considering how you will present your own related interests and perspectives.

During the actual conversation, remember to let those interests drive you — but don't try to impress your potential mentor. You can convey your credibility and fascination with their work through the questions you ask. To determine if the discussion is mutually valuable, pay attention to their level of engagement and the questions they ask you in return.

Over time, try to move the discussion to issues tied to your career: How might digitization affect the global supply chains? Will rising international tensions diminish global trade? How do knowledge workers want to be managed, and how should we measure their outputs? (Or other questions relevant to the future of your field.) Listen carefully to their opinions, viewpoints, and responses. Do they inspire you? If so, it may be a match.

Be selective.

Your ultimate goal is to build a connection with someone who energizes you and whom you equally engage and influence. Your ideal transformational mentor should be someone who resists providing you with quick answers, and prefers engaging you in conversation through which you can both learn and grow. Above all, they should challenge your assumptions and assertions, and help you think critically about the future.

If you can understand their goals and priorities, you might even become an asset to them. Think of this as a relationship currency investment, an intentional investment in others that often yields their gratitude, reciprocity, and willingness to pay your kindness forward.

This spark is the foundation of a truly transformative mentorship.

Don't limit yourself.

We tend to divide people into two groups: mentors and mentees. But that makes sense only in a reasonably stable world, where past lessons and structures inform the future. Today, novel solutions are at least as valuable as old ones, and everyone can contribute something to solving our greatest and newest problems.

This means mentoring is no longer a one-way street — just as you can teach and influence your mentor as the mentee, you can mentor others. Doing so can help you reflect on your strengths and challenges, as well as share the insights you have gained through your own mentorship. By teaching someone else, you will also learn to clearly express and communicate your ideas, which is essential to your professional growth.

These explorations can take a great deal of time, so make sure you choose people who stimulate your thinking in productive ways. You'll likely need to pull back from the more transactional work relationships you may have formed to free up time for those who genuinely push you forward — but once you find the right person, it will have been well worth it.

Finally, be patient in your exploration. Set the bar high. This is not just a mentorship; it is a partnership, a collaboration that could very well change the course of your career.

David Nour is an advisor and coach to executives and boards, and the author of *Curve Benders: How Strategic Relationships Can Power Your Non-linear Growth in the Future of Work*.