

HOW TO
MAKE **P**  **RTNER**

Guide for mentees





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How and when to use this guide

All throughout your career, you will need influential partners in your firm who will look after your interests in partnership reviews regarding your perceived potential and current performance. Almost always, these advocates for you and your career will already be supporting you in a formal or informal mentoring capacity. Having someone in your firm, i.e. a mentor, who is more experienced and can act as a sounding board, and provide objective guidance and feedback is essential if you are going to make partner.

This guide helps you get the most out of your relationship with your mentor.

Why have a mentor

Every athlete who aspires to win a medal at the Olympic games has a coach; and when they win a medal, the first person they thank is their coach. We will state quite simply that in the professional services sector, a mentor is essential, and is the equivalent of the athlete's 'coach'. The right person will guide you through the maze, assisting you to grow and develop. Where your university and professional qualifications involved studying to gain technical knowledge, that knowledge is only half of the journey on your way to partnership or successfully running your own practice. Your mentor will provide you with business

and social opportunities, which help you make partner.

When mentoring works well, it provides mentees with an ally in the firm and a further reason to stay the course. Within professional firms, a mentor is normally a partner, and can 'champion' and speak up in support of a mentee as appropriate. That said, we have known mentees to also have external mentors particularly where the skills and guidance that they require is unavailable within their firms. Very often partners who run professional practices will pay to work with an external 'professional' mentor.

The difference between a coach and a mentor

Coaching is a way of using everyday work situations as a vehicle for learning. It is about unlocking an individual's potential to maximise their own performance, and about helping them to learn rather than teaching them. There are two main forms of coaching: either helping the learner to change behaviours or to acquire new skills. It is performance-oriented, job-focused and task-related, and tends to concentrate on personal development in the short-term.

A mentor is a trusted adviser, usually someone more experienced or in a more senior role, who acts as a sounding board and helps the mentee to find his/

her own direction. It focuses on long term career development and personal growth. The flow of learning is two-way, as the mentor also benefits from gaining a different perspective. The relationship often develops into a strong, long term friendship.

The two approaches do, however, overlap in many ways, and should be regarded as complementary rather than mutually exclusive. Your mentor may be a skilled coach, and you may find times when you want to tap into the benefit of your coach's experience. Normally you will find that most professionals have a mentor who is internal to their firm and a coach who is external to their firm.

Mentoring and diversity

Mentoring is often used as a means of increasing diversity in organisations, helping female employees and those from black and ethnic minorities to break through into senior management roles. One of the commonly stated benefits of mentoring is that it gives individuals greater access to senior management and influential figures within the firm, increasing the individual's exposure and visibility and so enhances their career prospects. It also introduces individuals to the power structures and information networks within a firm, and can provide an insight into the 'hidden' or unwritten aspects of a firm's culture.

Recent survey results presented by David Clutterbuck, showed that a comparatively large proportion of women found that mentor relationships had been beneficial in their rise to the upper ranks of a firm. Reasons given were that they felt that having a mentor improved their self-esteem and confidence to seek advancement. Most women also felt that they became more visible to top management as a result of their participation in the schemes.

What Do Mentors Do?

Mentors can play a wide range of roles. Some of the most common roles are:

- **Role model**, providing an example from which the mentee can learn and emulate.
- **Coach**, helping a mentee to acquire new skills and abilities
- **Career counsellor**, listening and helping a mentee work out solutions to their career problems
- **Networker**, helping a mentee develop the connections they need to gain experience, get a job, promotion and so on
- **Facilitator**, helping set and achieve goals
- **Critical friend**, telling the mentee the uncomfortable truth that only a true friend can
- **Sounding board**, giving the mentee the chance to try out ideas and approaches in a safe

environment

This is a two-way relationship. A mentor provides informal support to improve your development which benefits not only you but, also the mentor and the firm. When your mentor is internal to your firm, the focus is on supporting and progressing your career.

For the relationship to work most effectively, the mentee needs to be open and honest when working with their mentor. Normally, a mentor has no direct line management responsibility for their mentees.

What to look for in a mentor

Choosing a mentor can be a great way of getting an ally for yourself, and what you do. When a mentor agrees to take on a mentee they will (if the relationship works) invest emotionally in you and your career success. This means that they will automatically start to speak for you in meetings and make sure you are considered for the opportunities that you need to shine and expand your capabilities.

We don't recommend picking just anyone as your mentor. Your mentor must be someone who is already influential within the partner group in your practice area. There is no point in having someone fight your corner who isn't listened to by other partners! As well as the influence that your mentor can exert on your behalf, you also need to select someone whom you respect and like. If there is no positive chemistry between the two of you, it will be difficult for your mentor to emotionally invest in helping you succeed.

Mentoring and diversity

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Sometimes by the very nature of who has taken you under their wing – particularly if they are a very prominent partner in the practice – you will be seen as a contender and one to watch for the future.

Tip:

An effective mentor is:

- ✓ A partner
- ✓ A good role model, respected within the firm and by you
- ✓ An open-minded and good listener
- ✓ A strong coach, with a willingness to help the mentee grow
- ✓ A person who challenges the mentee.

What should you expect from a mentoring relationship?

Your relationship with your mentor is personal to you and your mentor. Before you embark on your relationship you need to set expectations regarding what you want from the relationship. These expectations, from both sides of the relationship, ideally need to be written down and referred to over time to see whether you and your mentor are meeting these expectations. Use the mentoring agreement contained in this guide to help you structure this conversation.

Regardless of your individual requirements for your mentor, you should, as a minimum, ask for and expect the following from your mentor:

- They will get to know you at a deep enough level that they give you (almost) unconditional support, and champion your cause
- They will assist you to lift your head out of the detail, up to see the bigger picture as you develop
- They will be an inspiring role model

- They wouldn't provide you with all the answers, but help you to solve your own problems
- They will be a supportive but critical friend who will provide timely critical feedback which is constructive

Unconditional support from your 'champion'

It's a great feeling to know that someone is looking out for you and your career. When you and your mentor's relationship is strong this is what will naturally start to happen.

Often, by having a mentor, you will have greater exposure to opportunities which help build your skills and knowledge; for example going on a secondment to a client.

Helper to see the bigger picture

When you are in the day-to-day grind of a difficult long assignment or project, it can often be hard to see the bigger picture, and easy to lose sight of why you signed up to the job in the first place. This is where spending some time with your mentor can help. Sometimes, all you need is a restorative pep talk with your mentor to help re-ignite your passion for the job, and the focus you need on your professional and career development. You should expect your mentor to never be happy with the status quo, and to always challenge you to continuously improve and perform. This improved performance, should lead to more of the type of assignments, deals and projects, which will enable you to demonstrate your partnership potential.

An inspiring role model

A mentor is someone who you choose (or have chosen for you), who has been there, done that and got the scars to prove it. It's the chance to learn from the experience of your mentor, which helps you to accelerate your own development.

Mentoring and diversity

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However, if you are to gain the most from the relationship, you must look up to your mentor as a role model. Whether you realise it or not, as your relationship strengthens, you will start to emulate your mentor's behaviours. Do not underestimate the importance of being mentored by a someone who sets high standards, produces first class professional advice, excellent service and walks the talk.

Tip:

If your mentor fails to measure up to your standards or the personal chemistry is not there, then find another mentor to work with.

A problem solver

You should expect your mentor to help you deal with existing and potential problems, and confront issues that you may be avoiding. After all, part of your reason for having a mentor is to tap into their wisdom. Equally, if you have a trusting relationship with your mentor, you should feel confident about approaching your mentor for support when a problem arises. Don't expect your mentor to always know what is going on in your world – mentors are busy people!

A supportive but critical friend

You should expect your mentor to provide you with positive and supportive feedback. When you successfully complete an assignment or project a good mentor will acknowledge and praise your achievement. Ideally this acknowledgment will be both privately to you and publically to other partners – after all, this is your champion!

Tip:

Positive feedback is a great motivator and encourages you to 'go the extra mile' for the firm and its clients. Remember to ask your mentor to provide you with positive and supportive feedback.

In turn, you should expect your mentor to provide constructive criticism if something has not gone so well. The focus should be on learning from the experience and how to improve next time around.

You should build a trusting relationship with your mentor. Often in the professional services environment, people are unsure whom they can trust but, trust is a two-way relationship and unless you take the risk of opening up and being honest with your mentor, you are unlikely to fully benefit. When the relationship works well, your mentor can provide a 'safety valve' by being the person to whom you can express your frustrations and feelings, as well as your ambitions. Building and developing a trusting relationship with your mentor will take time, and it will not happen unless you both put in time and effort.

Others may approach the mentor, if they're unhappy or concerned about a mentees performance or their failure to deliver. While a mentor may 'protect their mentees back' by dealing with the problem at the time, a good mentor will discuss the difficulty with the mentee at an appropriate time.

How to get the most from your mentor

A strong mentoring relationship provides you with an ally in the firm. However, mentors themselves face many challenges. Although mentoring is usually an optional role in most professional services firms, it can impose considerable time demands on the mentor, e.g. 1-2 hours per month. This is unchargeable time, for which they may not always receive credit. Consequently, the easier and more rewarding you are to work with, the greater the likelihood that your mentor will want to spend quality time with you.

To get the most out of your relationship with your mentor, we suggest you do the following before, during and after a meeting with them:

Mentoring and diversity

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Before:

Prepare thoroughly for any sessions with your mentor and go ready to put forward your own views and ideas.

During:

- ✓ Be realistic about what you can achieve when agreeing action items with your mentor.
- ✓ Be prepared to listen to and evaluate new ideas, consider uncomfortable questions, and accept critical feedback; but be prepared to challenge (with facts) your mentor if you do not agree.
- ✓ Be honest with yourself about your strengths and weaknesses.
- ✓ Be honest with your mentor – say if things are not working.
- ✓ Get to know your mentor as a person; after all, this is a two-way relationship. Be interested in your mentor as a person.
- ✓ Write down your action points as the meeting progresses.
- ✓ Finally, give your mentor feedback – we all like to know whether our advice and guidance is hitting the mark. Given the multiple demands on your mentor's time, they will want to know that their time with you is well spent and that they are making a valuable contribution.

After:

- ✓ Make every effort to progress and complete the actions you have agreed to do. Your mentor will want to help you if you are motivated, enthusiastic and do what you say you will do.

- ✓ Make clear notes of what was covered, how the session went, what you got from it and any follow-up action points for you. Think carefully how you can apply what you learnt from the session.
- ✓ Diarise any actions.
- ✓ Agree the date of the next session and make sure that it is in both your diaries.
- ✓ Review and refine your objectives between meetings noting any progress made, problems or opportunities that you would like to raise for the next session.

Action Points:

Think about what you want from your mentor:

- What role do you want your mentor to play for you?
- How long do you want a relationship with your mentor?
- What's the best time or way to ask your prospective mentor to be your mentor?
- How much time do you want from your mentor?

Books and references

Larbie and Townsend, 'How to make Partner and still have a life'.

David Kay and Roger Hinds, A practical Guide to Mentoring: Play an Active and Worthwhile Part in the Development of Others, and Improve Your Own Skills in the Process.

Mentoring contract/ agreement/checklist

We suggest that you use a mentoring agreement/checklist, like the one reproduced below:

Name of mentor:	
Name of mentee:	
Date of 1st mentoring meeting	
We have agreed the following at the first meeting:	
Frequency of meetings (guide: monthly/ 6-weekly):	
Communication preferences (e.g. face-to-face, phone calls, e-mails):	
Proposed length of mentoring relationship time bound, i.e. 1 year, or on-going:	
Boundaries of confidentiality:	
Development objective(s) for mentoring relationship:	
We have agreed to review the mentoring relationship and progress against the above objectives in:	
The Mentee has agreed to update the following people (if appropriate) on the progress of the mentoring relationship and development objectives (guide: quarterly):	

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