

How to find and develop mentoring relationships

Good mentors are all around if you know what to look for and how to initiate a mentoring relationship.

Below is a list of qualities to look for in a mentor. Don't wait to find a mentor who meets all the suggestions below. There is no person who can answer every single question you will have about your career.

This [article](#) from the Effective Altruism Forum (which is a follow-up to an [earlier article](#)) discusses the nuances of having agency in your career and is worth reading.

What to look for:

- Someone you **admire** and whom others respect.
- Someone who may have **insight on obstacles and challenges** you have or expect.
- Someone with **deep expertise** in your desired field. This person will know what education or training you need to be successful.
- Someone with **broad experience** in your desired field. This person has a good understanding of the industry landscape, what companies are strong in your areas of interest, and the "brand" power of different companies in the field.
- Someone who can help you think through your **personal fit** and interests.
- This doesn't have to be someone who knows you well. It just needs to be someone who can ask you good questions about your plans and make you examine the assumptions and beliefs about limitations you may not realise you have.
- Someone who has changed industries or roles may have a good perspective even if they're not in the same field.
- Someone who had multiple kids while advancing their career likely has insights that apply across fields.

Now that you've identified a possible mentor, you need to establish a mentoring relationship.

You may be able to skip some of these steps if you already have a relationship with a possible mentor.

Step 1: Introduce yourself.

Warm introductions via a colleague are always best if possible, but many people are quite receptive to a short meeting on LinkedIn or another professional networking forum.

Step 2: Ask for a short 15-minute call.

Give a brief bio and the reason for your message: Phrasing like "I admire your career trajectory and would appreciate hearing more about how you approached your current role" is helpful. Make it clear you are not looking for a job.

Step 3: Be impeccably prepared for your call.

Show up on time, and be knowledgeable about the person's job, history, and industry. Have 2-3 specific questions for this person. Be aware this may be the only time you interact with them. Prepare yourself to receive critical feedback. We found [this article](#) worth reading.

Step 4: After the call, **ask if you can keep in touch** as you continue your career journey.

Step 5: Send regular updates (2-4x/year, or if something significant happens) and thank them for their help in getting you to this point.

Step 6: Ask for another call and repeat the above steps.

Step 7: If there's rapport, **ask if they would consider being a mentor.**

- Be sure to include what that means to you: being willing to periodically discuss your career trajectory during 30 min phone calls a few times a year, meeting to discuss your progress on technical projects, reviewing your grant applications, etc.
- This concept may be very common in some cultures and unfamiliar in others. Giving them some idea of what you're looking for can help alleviate concerns that being your mentor will take a lot of time or require them to try to get you a job.
- Give them an "out" if it feels appropriate, acknowledging that they're busy and it may not be possible for them.

Step 8: Handle any response gracefully.

Some people you approach will say no. That's totally expected and not personal. These are busy people who may just not have time for another commitment in their lives.

Step 9: Make a spreadsheet of professional contacts.

Add anyone to it who may be interested in your progress and career path.

- Once or twice a year, write a personalised email to everyone on your list, even if (especially if!) you don't need anything from them. If you know from LinkedIn or other sources that they've had professional success, congratulate them.
- Keeping the lines of communication open may benefit you in unknowable ways in the future, plus you get the general benefit of maintaining a genuine connection with others.

Our best wishes for thriving mentoring relationships!