

Finding Your Way in the Work World

by Deborah J. Hodges and Barry Koren, AIA, PhD

This is the second article in the series of articles addressing the value of mentoring and career development. Every good mentoring program will involve listening and coaching. It will address your thoughts and feelings and help you move toward goals. This article helps you select a mentoring program that will fit you and your goals.

Considerations in Determining the Right Mentor for You

To find the one that's right for you, start with your goals.

Goals. First decide what you want from work and define your goal. Knowing where you want to head is a good way to find your way in the work world.

You may have a particular goal in mind, such as becoming a Director of Marketing or Principal or President of a firm. If so, select a mentor who has reached the career level that you are seeking. This choice will help you focus on developing your leadership skills.

But if you don't know what your goal is, then the task becomes finding your goal. What are your dreams? What do you enjoy the most in marketing and business development? What is your ultimate career goal?

Fear and aiming too low are common pitfalls. You can avoid this situation by asking the following question. If somehow you knew that you would not fail, then who would you want to be? A mentor, even a potential mentor, can make a difference in helping you determine your goals.

Strengths and weaknesses. Determining your strengths and weaknesses is useful when selecting a mentor because it will help you assess where you are now, where you want to be in comparison to your goal, and if there is a good fit between you and your mentor.

A good analytical approach to determining your strengths and weaknesses is to complete the SMPS Gap Analysis. This is a simple, effective assessment tool that compares your results with the industry's standard. You can access the GAP Analysis by clicking here [<http://www.smeps.org/education/gapanalysis.pdf>] or go to www.smeps.org.

Personality. When selecting a mentor, personality is another key consideration. Consider the people you've worked most effectively with and the people with whom you enjoy a good relationship. Also, consider what you want from a mentor and from your relationship with that person.



Do you want a mentor who will-

- provide you with structure and push you to grow?
- help you harness and organize your ideas?
- align with your personality?
- be available so they can push you harder when you need it?
- help you find your way when a situation or idea overwhelms you?

Keep in mind that your needs will likely change over time and that it is common to have different mentors at different stages of your career. Whether for a short or for a long time, a mentoring relationship offers you--as well as your mentor and your company--a valuable, memorable experience.

Here are a few questions to ask when selecting a mentor:

What mentor is right for me?

Evaluate goals, personality, availability, and expertise.

Type of Mentoring

Skills or career development?

Type of Relationship

One-to-one or group mentoring?

Type of Program

Structured or unstructured mentoring?

Types of Mentoring Programs

It is important to know the differences among mentoring programs so that you will have the best chance of selecting a mentoring program that meets your expectations. Mentoring programs can be divided into two types: career-related or job-related.

A **career-related program** focuses on building your leadership skills and helping you make important decisions. It helps you reach goals like becoming a Director of Marketing or

President of a firm or earning credentials such as CPSM, AIA, or a MBA. Skill development is important and necessary but not the main focus.

Career-related programs focus on continuous learning and cross-disciplinary experiences and encourage you to stay informed of trends and developments in the profession. They inform you about the realities of organizational life, counsel you on how to engage in career planning that will enhance your marketability, advise you about obtaining information on career opportunities, encourage you to become involved in your profession, and discuss how to prepare to exit from a company, if necessary. SMPS has been encouraging this kind of leadership development in the profession, for example, in its Flying-with-Eagles series in the Marketer, SMPS's monthly newsletter.

A **job-related program** is connected to career development but is more job-specific. It focuses on helping you perform your job more effectively. It helps you clarify your job responsibilities, provides you with advice on how to complete your assignments more quickly and efficiently, provides information about your job opportunities within the company, helps you get challenging job assignments that enhance specific technical and other skills, and encourages you to experiment with new ways of approaching tasks.



Thus, a job-related program emphasizes training, so that you master the details of your job. In contrast, a career-related program is more of an educational process that helps shape your potential as a developing professional.

Structured versus Unstructured Programs

Another important distinction among mentoring programs is the amount of structure within the program.

A **structured program** will meet at specific, regular times. A formal relationship is defined between you and your mentor. The program is for a specific period of time which is often one year. You and your mentor define an action plan. The two of you may also define a learning program, for example, attending a series of workshops or discussing a series of articles.

An **unstructured program** will have a more casual schedule. You and your mentor informally plan your meetings. Often there is no action plan. This type of mentoring works well when you want occasional advice or help for a short period of time.

In both the structured and unstructured programs you may participate in group meetings and events.

Make a Conscious Choice

One of the best ways to navigate the work world is to find a mentor and a mentoring program that suits you. Inform yourself about the people and programs available and consciously choose those that will best guide **you** in the work world.

Supplemental Readings:

Collins, Jim Collins. Good to Great: Why Some Companies Make the Leap and Others Don't. New York: Harper Business, 2001.

Johnson, W. Brad and Charles R. Ridley. The Elements of Mentoring. New York: Palgrave Macmillan; 2004.

Jim Collins and Jerry I. Porras. Built to Last: Successful Habits of Visionary Companies. New York: Harper Business Essentials, 2002.





ABOUT THE AUTHORS

Deborah J. Hodges is Past Chair of the SMPS National Mentoring Committee. She is Director of Business Development at Bovis Lend Lease in Chicago and can be reached @ djhgoldensquare@aol.com.



Barry Koren, AIA, PhD, is a member of the SMPS National Mentoring Committee and President-Elect of SMPS Chicago. He is founder of Koren Network, a firm that helps architects, engineers, and contractors build their businesses. He can be reached at BarryKoren@KorenNetwork.com.

The next article in the series--“The Mentoring Relationship: You have to want it!”--will help you develop a good mentoring relationship. You can read and obtain copies of the full series of articles on mentoring and career development by going to Mentoring Pathways on the SMPS website: <http://www.smps.org/mentoring>

99 Canal Center Plaza
Suite 330
Alexandria, VA 22314

PH 703.684.2263
TF 800.292.7677, x224
FX 703.549.2498

www.smps.org

