

# Seek out Mentors in building your Personal Brand

**Rita's Career Corner ...With Rita B. Allen**

Have mentors played an essential role in your professional and/or personal development? As you have advanced in your career, have you taken the time to mentor others whom you have worked with and/or managed? Having and being a mentor are two of the major milestones during one's career and contribute greatly to establishing and building your 'personal brand'.

The typical image of a mentor is of someone in the workplace but mentors enter our lives from a variety of venues, each offering different learnings that speak to our many needs. Those needs can be quite diverse and filled by a variety of mentors, each offering wisdom and counsel in different ways. In fact, it's important to search out multiple mentors to address our multiple needs. Be your own advocate and initiate these relationships rather than waiting to be mentored. Find your authentic self and 'personal brand' by identifying what value you have to offer as well as what you aspire to achieve. Seek out potential mentors, trusted advisors as well as sponsors for support throughout the different phases of your career. In addition, welcome opportunities to mentor others throughout their careers.

## **A Five Step Model for Developing Mentor Relationships:**

### **Step 1 – First and foremost, identify what you need**

Set goals and objectives that you would like to achieve with each specific mentor. Be realistic and practical with your expectations being thoughtful and mindful of their time. Make sure that you are creating a partnership that is one of give and take. Offer your assistance, knowledge and resources to your mentors just as frequently as you ask for their help. It is all about relationship building – what you put into the relationship is just as important, if not more so, than what you get out of the relationship. Approach each mentor in a sincere and authentic manner. Be clear

and concise in communicating your needs and expectations. Ask them for their input and feedback.

## **Step 2 – Reach out to a variety of mentors to meet diverse needs**

Establish mentor relationships with multiple individuals across many parts of your life. Mentors come in all shapes and sizes from all faucets of our world – both personally and professionally. They can come in the form of role models, peers, colleagues, managers, leaders, professors, teachers, family members, friends, relatives, coaches and other contacts. We enter into these mentor relationships as well as maintain them in formal and informal ways. The key is to be diligent in establishing and nurturing long lasting relationships with all of the mentors in our lifetime. Be pro-active and strategic by identifying mentors that cross all of the different paths of your career and enhance your ability to develop and grow both personally and professionally.

## **Step 3 – Create a strategy that offers your value-add and keeps mentors engaged**

Identify your personal brand and articulate it effectively. Prior to entering into any mentor relationship, do your homework. Prepare yourself for the difficult questions a mentor will ask you and be ready for the challenge. Enter into the relationship confident and empowered. Know yourself – your strengths, weaknesses, skills, competencies, interests, values and priorities. Assess your short and long term goals for your career and life. Invest in your education and continued advancement. Be active in professional associations and involved in your community. Take on leadership roles that nourish and feed your passion(s)!

## **Step 4 – Stay true to your vision and your goals**

Keep a formal plan that you update and visit regularly. You cannot stay true to yourself if you do not keep yourself accountable. The mentee is the driver for any mentor relationship – it is important to be mindful of this and be diligent with your initiatives. Have a vision that spans over ten years at a minimum and revisit your goals on a regular basis. Make changes and adjustments as necessary. Keep an open mind to new possibilities while staying focused on your track.

## **Step 5 – Communicate, Communicate, Communicate!**

Keep the channels of communication open throughout the entire mentor relationship and beyond. Let your mentor know of your progress – your struggles, lessons learned, and successes. Be sure to give your mentor feedback on a regular basis by sharing the ways they are positively impacting you. Show your gratitude and appreciation. Be an active listener – reflect on the feedback you receive and incorporate it into your strategies. Keep an open mind and be flexible to new

opportunities and possibilities. Accept constructive criticism and offer concerns. Don't be afraid to show vulnerability and take some risks. Open and honest communications will set the foundation for building a trusting relationship and rapport for both mentor and mentee.

Mentors are an essential ingredient for career success! Be sure to include this important and valuable resource in your career planning and development strategies. Remember, it is every individual's job to manage their own career – not their mentors!

### ***Ask Rita...***

**Question:** I am a working professional considering making a change and transitioning into a new field which will require additional education and training. Is it worth the time and expense to pursue such a change?

**Answer:** This is a great example of a time in your life and career where support from a mentor would be valuable. Before you reach out to a mentor, however, you want to make sure you have done some personal exploration to assess what you really want to do and what strengths you have to be leveraged. Make sure you are considering this change for the right reasons and it is part of a bigger plan. Investigate the new field and role, interview individuals in that industry and specifically in the position you are interested. Research the skills, competencies and experiences expected and then assess how they align with your own experiences, strengths and weaknesses. Lastly, get feedback from others – from your trusted advisors, supports and mentors. Ask a lot of probing questions and try to understand exactly what that transition requires of you and how well you could adjust. Visualize yourself in this new career and see if it matches what you have to offer and what you truly want. Reflect on your ability to challenge yourself and to be pushed out of your comfort zone. After you have done your homework, it is up to you to determine if you believe it is the right match for you and fits into your short and long term career planning. It's important to be true to yourself. If this transition will allow for that, then it is always worth the time and expense (economics provided)! It has been said it will be commonplace for people to have more than one career in their lifetime within our current market. Change is not easy but it is possible if you want it and are committed to being successful. Be true to yourself and follow your passion! Best of luck!

**Send your questions to: [Rita B. Allen](mailto:rita@ritaballenassociates.com)**

*Rita Balian Allen is the President of Rita B. Allen Associates, a provider of career management/talent management consulting and executive coaching services located in Waltham at [www.ritaballenassociates.com](http://www.ritaballenassociates.com) and the President of ACPI – NE ([Association of Career Professionals International – New England](http://www.acpi-international.com))*