

Mentoring...Athena at Your Best®

When Odysseus went off to fight the Trojan War, he asked a friend to watch over his son. This friend, a wise man named Mentor, became a guide, teacher, surrogate parent, confidant, coach and friend to the young lad. Wise, understanding, gentle and firm Mentor guided the youth into successful adulthood.

Thus was born the traditional mentoring stereotype, "...male-to-male, older-to-younger, one-to-one."

What's wrong with this picture? Mentor, that wise, elderly man, was actually Athena, Goddess of Wisdom and War -- disguised as a man! Women have not only been mentoring since ancient Greece, but *a woman started it!*

How can mentoring work for women today?

Unless you run across another super-heroine like Athena, you need to find several people: women, men, younger, older, different cultures, different positions and different jobs. You need to align yourself with deep networks of people who can fill a variety of roles for short and long term mentoring relationships, in both personal and professional situations.

Here is a typical situation: Joan is 32 years old, a wife, mother and computer software designer. She counts at least ten people, male, female, young and old, on her list of mentors. Depending on her current focus, she may call upon two or three to be a sounding board, teacher or coach.

"Mentoring not only saves me time, mentoring makes time. Before I make a decision, my mentors help me see through their eyes and from their experiences how a certain idea might generate potential results. This helps me with my current issue and prepares me for similar situations in the future."

Mentors don't make your decisions. They increase your understanding and awareness of situations from different perspectives. As a result of their input, you'll make better decisions.

Some mentors are very short term. They assist in learning something specific or sharing their experiences in similar areas. In Joan's case, she has known others most of her life. They are her sounding boards and her confidants. They have history.

“I’m always looking for people who can help me avoid the next hurdle or give me a push when I need one. In turn, I mentor others when they ask me. I have at least 10 people whom I consider my protégés in one respect or another. In some situations, I may mentor a person in one area and that same person may mentor me in another area. The most important thing to remember is that, without trust, you cannot have true mentoring.”

How to get started? Mentoring opportunities abound. Look around and take note of people and their areas of expertise. Each is a potential mentor to you. When you need help with a situation, go to some of them and ask if they would be willing to share their insight. In order for mentoring to really work, however, it must be a two-way street. You must be willing to share of yourself when someone asks you and be prepared to keep their confidences.

Mentors should be competent in these essential communication skills:

- ✓ listening
- ✓ giving and receiving constructive feedback
- ✓ setting realistic expectations
- ✓ coaching and counseling
- ✓ resolving conflicts

Today, many companies are recognizing that mentoring helps the bottom line by ensuring better transfer of information, reducing turnover, and helping employees on both professional and personal levels.

Thanks to Athena, we have mentoring. Today, it’s not a myth...it’s all the best people you know.

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