

## Looking to Start a Mentoring Plan?

As a business owner, you'll have various needs for mentoring. Identifying these needs and seeking resources can help fast track your business growth. You can have more than one mentor, and mentors can change over time. But first, do you need a mentor, advisor, consultant or coach? It might help to ask yourself "What do I really need guidance with right now and over the long-term?"



**Coach**

There are two kinds of **coaches**. If you're feeling stuck and are looking for accountability and someone to help you draw motivation to take the necessary actions towards the future, you may consider hiring a coach (sometimes called an "executive coach"). This coach may not be a subject matter expert in your business area, but they are experts in getting you to determine what is important to you and move forward with your goals. Another type of coach can provide you training for specific skill development, such as public speaking or negotiating.



**Consultant**

If there are specific challenges you're trying to address, consider bringing in a **consultant**. A consultant won't necessarily train you in the knowledge and skills required to achieve your desired results, but will use their own expertise to address the challenges.



**Advisor**

**Advisors** can be both formal and informal. Your company may have a board of advisors that meets regularly to discuss agenda items relating to your business. There are also informal advisors to whom you can turn for advice on specific problems. Informal advisors may often double as mentors; however, in an advisor relationship you're often looking for clarity on a specific decision. Different from a mentor, an advisor won't necessarily focus on you, but will focus on the issue or decision around which you're seeking their advice.



**Mentor**

What can you do to refine and further accelerate your leadership and entrepreneurial skills? Consider working with a **mentor**. A mentor is a trusted guide who has already had great successes in a path similar to the one you are traveling.

*“Mentoring is as vital a training tool in the small business arena as it is in the corporate world. Established women business owners who share their knowledge and expertise with the next generation of women entrepreneurs are providing them with real-world experience that simply cannot be taught in the classroom or a textbook.”*

—Sheila Wellington<sup>1</sup>

In this tool, we’ll focus on working with a mentor. To make the most of your mentoring relationship, it’s useful to have a plan. It’s OK if you don’t have one yet. Use this tool to hit the ground running. A mentor plan will provide a blueprint of how you’ll manage and monitor your mentoring experience.

## MENTOR PLAN

This tool contains five sections. In each section, you’ll find guidelines, guiding questions, and/or tips that will help you complete the sections.

### SECTION 1: WHAT IS THE PURPOSE?

It’s best to begin your plan by defining what you want, and stating the purpose for your mentoring relationship will do just that. Stating the purpose will guide you in finding the right mentor. And when you find your mentor, having a purpose will make sure that both you and your mentor are on the same page regarding the mentoring relationship.

#### Guiding questions:

- Why do you want a mentor?
  - Consider outlining how this mentoring relationship will not just personally and professionally benefit you, but also your mentor.
- What are your desired outcomes?

*In the space below, briefly but clearly describe the purpose. Write no more than three sentences.*

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## SECTION 2: WHAT ARE MY GOALS?

You're developing this plan because there are certain goals that you want to achieve—for example, a safe place to talk through your perspective and ideas about your career, with guidance from your mentor. Take responsibility for identifying and clearly communicating your goals.

Your goals, along with your purpose (you identified in Section 1), will: a) guide you in finding the right mentor and b) give your mentor a great starting point to share meaningful and actionable feedback. Mentors will highly value the work you put in to clearly articulate what you need guidance with.

**Tip:** Although it's your responsibility to be proactive and identify your goals, once you start working with a mentor, be willing to let them contribute to your goals. They may help pinpoint specific goals you need to hit in order to meet an overarching goal.

*In the table below, write your overarching goal. Then, list specific goals in a timeline format.*

**Overarching Goal:**

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3-month goals	
6-month goals	
1-year goals	

## STEP 3: WHO IS MY MENTOR?

Identify your mentor(s).

### Guiding questions:

When looking for mentors, start with these questions:

- What are the areas with which I'd like some insight from a mentor?
  - Does this person have experience in this area?
- Does this person seem willing and enthusiastic about guiding me through my learning and development needs?
- Do I respect them and feel like I could work with them?

### DID YOU KNOW?

*According to a global study of businesswomen and mentoring, nearly 80 percent of the women in the study served as formal mentors during their career, but very few of them were mentored—63 percent of women in the study had never had a formal mentor. All of them viewed mentoring as a valuable tool.<sup>2</sup>*

*As an entrepreneur, don't hesitate to ask for guidance. You may be thinking that you're imposing on someone's time, but consider putting that worry aside. It's true that you'll likely benefit from a mentorship relationship, but so will your mentor—mentoring will give them an opportunity to sharpen their skills, including leadership skills, and they'll feel good knowing that they helped someone.*

*So, is there a person in your industry whom you admire? Is there someone you think of as a role model? Build up the courage to seek their mentorship. A majority of people will be more than willing to mentor you if you just ask.*

**Here are some tips on how you can go about finding your mentor:**

- To find a mentor locally or to connect with them via e-mail, check out SCORE:  
<https://www.score.org/find-mentor>.
- SCORE is a nonprofit resource partner of the U.S. Small Business Administration that provides free and confidential mentoring services.
- To find someone who can provide management and technical assistance, check out the Office of Women’s Business Ownership (WBO): <https://www.sba.gov/offices/headquarters/wbo>.
- Ask trusted friends for suggestions—do they recommend certain individuals or any professional mentoring programs?
- If there’s an organization whose evolution you’ve closely followed as they became the next big thing, seek out mentors from that organization.
- If there’s an industry expert you’ve identified, try connecting with that person, as they could share a particular set of knowledge.

*In the space below, list the name(s) and applicable information—industry knowledge and professional background, for example—about your mentor(s).*

## SECTION 4: WHAT'S THE ACTION PLAN?

Review your goals with your mentor. Then, collaborate with them to come up with activities or tasks you need to do to achieve your goals. You can discuss and review milestones and success criteria for each of the activities or tasks to make sure you're on track.

*In the table below, list your tasks and activities. Write milestones for each, and list a way to assess that you successfully completed the task.*

<b>What do I need to do/learn to achieve my goals?</b>	<b>What are my milestones?</b>	<b>What are the success criteria?</b>

## SECTION 5: HOW AM I COLLABORATING WITH MY MENTOR?

Work with your mentor to establish a schedule and format for your meetings. Figure out what works best for both of you.

### **Tips on making your meetings more focused and productive:**

- Establish a time frame for your mentoring relationship. Doing so will encourage you to set deadlines for achieving goals.
- Consider using the *Meeting Records* table included in this tool.
- Follow up with your mentor. Include a summary of key takeaways and action steps. Be prepared to share your progress and challenges with your mentor during your next interaction or in an update e-mail.

*Fill in the table below to identify your schedule and meeting format.*

<b>How frequently will I meet with my mentor?</b> <i>For example—weekly, biweekly, or monthly</i>	<b>Where will we hold our meeting?</b> <i>For example—in-person meeting location, phone call, or web conference</i>	<b>What's the time frame for our mentoring relationship?</b> <i>For example—1 year</i>

## MEETING RECORDS

Remember, you may use this Meeting Records table to make the meetings with your mentor more focused and productive.

<b>Meeting Date:</b>	
<b>Meeting Duration:</b>	
<b>Start Time:</b>	<b>End Time:</b>
<b>Meeting format:</b> <i>(For example—in person, phone call, video call, etc. You may primarily hold meetings using a specific format (e.g., in person), but say for one of your meetings, your mentor is traveling for work and you both opt for a web conference. It could be handy to document this information in case you'd like to assess if meeting formats greatly influence your mentoring relationship.)</i>	
<b>Meeting agenda:</b> <i>(List topics to cover in the meeting.)</i>	
<b>Action items for mentee before next meeting:</b>	
<b>Action items for mentor before next meeting:</b>	
<b>Date for next meeting:</b>	

Over the course of your time as a business owner, you'll likely have more than one mentor. Based on what you most need guidance with, your mentoring needs, and therefore your mentors, will change over time. When you're participating in a mentoring relationship, observe and evaluate what you most enjoyed about the relationship—how your mentors communicated with you, how well they listened to you and how invested were they in guiding you. Also think about what could be happening differently for the relationship to be more effective. It's all a part of the mentoring experience.

When it's time to move on from a mentoring relationship, take the time to go over why you're considering this transition—changing priorities, evolving goals, trying a different business path or whatever the reason may be. Changing mentors is common, and it doesn't have to imply that your relationship was not valuable. As you transition out of a mentorship relationship, go over your time together—let your mentor know what you've learned from them and how it will benefit you and your business. Your mentor may share how the mentorship relationship has benefited them. If it makes sense in your case, discuss the possibility of remaining in touch and being open to future collaborations.

## Resources

In this tool, you looked at how to approach building your individual mentor plan. If you'd like to explore how to implement a mentorship program for your organization, check out this resource: <https://www.opm.gov/policy-data-oversight/training-and-development/career-development/bestpractices-mentoring.pdf>.

The GROW method is a tool that can guide your mentoring relationship and conversations. Click [here](#) for an example of using the GROW model to achieve a goal.

## Conclusion

Your mentor plan will depend greatly on factors such as what you hope to achieve from your mentoring experience, the industry your business operates in, and your personality, interests, skills and so on. And although there is no single approach that will work for everyone, you can use ideas from this tool to craft your own mentor plan. Research shows that mentoring is valuable and can help transform your business.<sup>3</sup> Taking the time to craft your mentoring plan can help you connect and better collaborate with the right mentors. And with their guidance, you can refine your entrepreneurial leadership skills to propel your business forward.

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<sup>1</sup> Zee Najarian, *3 Ways Women Can Collaborate, Not Compete*, Wanderella, <https://www.wanderella.co/3-ways-women-can-collaborate-rather-than-compete/comment-page-1/> (accessed May 2, 2019).

<sup>2</sup> Stephanie Neal et al., *Women as Mentors: Does She or Doesn't She? A Global Study of Businesswomen and Mentoring* (2014), Development Dimensions International, Inc., [https://www.ddiworld.com/DDI/media/trend-research/womenasmentors\\_rr\\_ddi.pdf?ext=.pdf](https://www.ddiworld.com/DDI/media/trend-research/womenasmentors_rr_ddi.pdf?ext=.pdf) (accessed May 2, 2019).

<sup>3</sup> *Find a Mentor*, SCORE, <https://www.score.org/find-mentor> (accessed May 2, 2019).