

Modern-day mentorships and how to navigate them

It is no secret that securing the right mentorship can benefit the next generation by passing on the wisdom of seasoned workers, despite the changes that are constantly taking place thanks to digitalisation. Some of us might think about mentorship as the typical scene from Hollywood movies where a grizzled veteran naturally takes an eager newcomer under their wing; but in the workplace mentorship doesn't happen by accident. In fact, it takes deliberate planning.



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For many in the next generation, mentorship is key to gaining a foothold for their career and life, explains Lyndy van den Barselaar, managing director at ManpowerGroup South Africa.

“In a country with a competitive employment environment, like South Africa, mentorship becomes even more important to ensure that younger generations are given all the assistance possible in order to flourish and grow in their careers. So, it is important for the new generation of job seekers and employees to think strategically about mentorship,” explains van den Barselaar.

Engage in a matching program

Where do you start? For some, your current workplace or professional organisation may help to match a young person with a mentor that aligns with their interests, needs and personality. A beneficial mentor isn't simply someone who is more experienced – it's someone with the right experience. Get help from management or groups to ensure you find the right match before diving in blindly.

“A good place to start would be to map out your interests, needs and desired growth areas for the duration of the mentorship. This will give you a clearer idea of the kind of mentor you need,” suggests van den Barselaar.

Make the outcomes measurable

Once a match is made, each side should decide on outcomes. Of course, not every interaction needs to be tied to a metric, however it helps all parties to have a measurable goal in mind for the mentorship, such as helping secure a new job, learn a specific skill or make a certain number of introductions.

At the end of the time period, the measurement standards can be assessed to show what helped, and what adjustments can be made to future goals.

Consider multiple mentors

After testing the waters with one mentor, you may find that more mentorship help is required than one person's limited experience can offer. Have a conversation with your mentor about opening the door to more input, such as a personal board of directors for example. Consider how multiple mentors can provide different perspectives, new connections, specific skill sets or expertise in an area that you lack, and decide if this is something you require to reach your personal and career-related goals.

Seek sponsorship

Sometimes, mentorship is not enough. Sponsorship is a critical factor in helping talented, motivated individuals advance in the business world. "What defines a sponsor versus what defines a mentor is often misunderstood – the two are not interchangeable," explains van den Barselaar. "Mentors act as a sounding board and as advisors; sponsors develop talent and help their subjects get ahead. They have open conversations, assist with addressing the way in which work gets done and the way performance is measured. They create a culture of conscious inclusion and support."

ManpowerGroup research shows that women in particular tend to be over-mentored and under-sponsored. Beyond mentoring, it's important to find influential individuals who can help others get ahead in the workplace.

In summary, mentorship needs to be a thought-out activity to help younger employees grow and advance. With the right planning, the arrangement can be beneficial to all.

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