

UNIVERSITY OF MARYLAND ALUMNI ASSOCIATION

FINDING A MENTOR



ALUMNI ASSOCIATION

INTRODUCTION

While **76%** of people say that mentors are important, only **37%** actually have one. This percentage is even lower for women and minority populations.

Meeting the perfect mentor can be a scary and daunting process. But you can take advantage of plenty of strategies and foolproof ways to build a mentor-mentee relationship.

WHAT EXACTLY IS A MENTOR?

A mentor is someone who can act as your cheerleader and guide you in your career. They may encourage you to apply for new opportunities or help you navigate challenging situations at work. Whether you're transitioning to a new role or taking on a new project, a mentor can act as a sounding board and offer valuable perspective.

Your mentor will often be someone working in your industry or the same area of work or in a role you're interested in transitioning into. While it's possible to be mentored by a peer, most mentors will be at least a level or two ahead of you in their career track.

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"I never really understood the impact a mentor would have on my career path and how resourceful they can be. I really enjoyed this program because I didn't get a chance to explore mentorship at UMD, -I didn't know how to ask or approach the subject with someone I really admired. Also I was way too busy in undergrad. After graduating I advised everyone I know to get one because it's so helpful to have a guide when everything is being thrown at you all at once."

- *Olasunbo '20*

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Hard skills refer to specific job-related knowledge and abilities that people need to perform their job duties effectively.

Soft skills are the personal qualities and leadership skills that help you thrive in the workplace.

FIVE STEPS TO FINDING A MENTOR:

- 1 Reflect on whether mentorship is the right fit**
Think about your own career goals. Are they something you would like to discuss with an individual? Or something that may require larger networks?
- 2 Identify your needs (hard skills vs. soft skills)**
Before reaching out to mentors, outline your exact needs. Are you looking to enhance new “hard” skills like learning a new software? Or are you interested in building “soft” skills like leadership skills and communication techniques?
- 3 Consider people you admire and start with your network**
List people you admire and think about what skills and experiences they have that interest you. Start with your own network: Are there people in your life currently that may serve as an impactful mentor?
- 4 Explore other options**
Research professional groups or programs that exist to pair mentors and mentees. For example, the Alumni Association’s Terps Thrive women’s mentorship program.
- 5 Request a meeting**
Whoever you’re contacting has likely been in your shoes before and will be flattered that you thought of them. Reach out to more than one person if a connection doesn’t work out.

Don't forget about your Terp community!

Our online mentorship platform, Terrapins Connect, exists to help you build Terp connections to mentors.

Learn more today at terrapinsconnect.umd.edu.



TIME TO REACH OUT

Here's a sample email to get you started:

1. Share one or two things you admire about their work (show you've done your research)
2. Tell them a little about yourself and why you're reaching out
3. Share what you would like to learn from them
4. Wrap it up with a reasonable ask

Dear X, I've been reading about the work you're doing with Y.

I'm interested in building my career in technology, and I'd love to hear how you rose from a systems analyst to a technical product manager in five years.

Would it be possible for us to have a quick video chat sometime within the next couple of weeks?

YOU'VE SCHEDULED YOUR MEETING! HERE'S WHAT'S NEXT:

Set a goal

- Enter a mentor-mentee relationship with a goal. For example, you may be asking for feedback on a specific project, your resume or even a brainstorm for a new business idea.

Be open to constructive criticism and feedback

- Feedback is one of the greatest things you can take from mentorship. Go into your conversations with an open mind, understanding that constructive criticism is critical to career advancement.

Meet regularly

- The strongest mentor-mentee relationships are ones that are maintained. While you don't have to meet every week or even every month, you should make sure you meet more than once with a mentor.
- If your initial meeting goes well, ask if they would be willing to meet again. Be clear in your expectations. If you would like to formalize the mentorship, you can ask about their comfort level.

Handle the logistics, take notes and provide an agenda

- It is your responsibility to manage the relationship. You should initiate the conversation, send the Zoom link or set the meeting place, as well as determine the topic to discuss. Meetings can be more fruitful if you share questions or an agenda ahead of time. Take notes and later reflect on your conversations.

Send updates

- Did you get promoted at work or reach a milestone on a project? Share with your mentor! This is a great way to make sure you stay top of mind.

Practice gratitude

- Let your mentor know that you are thankful for their support.

NOW THAT YOU KNOW HOW TO FIND A MENTOR, LET'S BUST SOME MENTORSHIP MYTHS:

You can only have one mentor

You are a multifaceted person, which means a single mentor may not be able to answer all your questions. Former Georgia gubernatorial candidate Stacey Abrams wrote in her book "Leading From the Outside" that it can be valuable to have different mentors at various points in your career.

A good mentor must be older than you are

In certain situations, peers can be powerful mentors. Don't let age be a barrier for you to reach out.

Your mentor needs to have your dream job

Mentors may not have the exact position you are looking for to bring a unique perspective, and most importantly, their network to you. Find a mentor who matches your career goals and don't fixate on titles and companies.

A mentor is your mentor forever

Sometimes mentorship doesn't work out. And that's ok! If you feel like you are no longer benefiting from a mentor, it is okay to slow or end communication with that person.

There is a single path to finding a mentor

While we have outlined a process above that has been successful, often finding a mentor can be an informal process, which can make things difficult and unclear. There is no one-size-fits-all method—it's most important that you approach mentorship in a way that feels comfortable to you.



IN THE END...

The best mentorship pairings are ones that are honest and rooted in a personal and professional relationship. Meetings that feel transactional or forced suggest that you may not have the right mentor.

GOOD LUCK!

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"[My mentor] encouraged me to continue with my job search to find my dream job and to be more confident in my abilities and what I can offer as a future leader one day in my industry."

- Jade '20

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