

Top 5 Lessons from Award-Winning Mentor Pairs

Successful mentor programs feature many [benefits](#) and have been proven to be advantageous for mentors and mentees, as well as their companies. But what makes a mentorship outstanding? After all, most mentor relationships are comprised of a wide variety of personalities, skills sets, challenges and end goals, and what works well for one pairing may not necessarily result in success for another one.

Nobscot recently sponsored a webinar, “The Secrets of Successful Mentoring Relationships: Discussion Panel of Award Winning Mentor-Mentee Pairs.” The featured speakers included the 2011 Mentor of the Year and her mentee, as well as two honorable mentions and their mentees. They discussed many topics that can help other mentor-mentee pairs make the most out of their own mentor relationships.

While every mentor pairing will have their own unique needs and goals, the winning mentor-mentee pairs shared some tried and true lessons that everyone can benefit from. Below are the top five lessons learned from the award-winning mentorships:

Lesson 1: Be True to Yourself

When choosing their mentors, the mentees had to be honest with themselves in regard to their own challenges and goals of the mentorship. One mentee wanted a mentor who was outside her own division so that she would be able to explore different career paths within her company. Another perused through mentor profiles until she found someone who had similar mentorship expectations. Another chose a mentor who had a career he wanted to emulate. No matter the driving force behind entering the mentorship, mentees must listen to their inner voices when choosing the right mentor.

Mentors must be true to themselves as well. After the mentorships were established, the mentors found that they needed to share not only tips for success, but also lessons learned from their past mistakes and failures. Self-reflection is not always easy, but it’s necessary to be a great (and effective) mentor.

Lesson 2: Let the Mentee Drive the Process

Mentorships are relationships in which a junior person learns from a more experienced or knowledgeable person, and many people assume that the more-senior mentor manages the process. Contrary to this, the winning pairs revealed that the mentee should actually be the one who drives the overall process. Mentees should initiate the partnerships and set up the logistics, such as scheduling in-person or telephone meetings. When mentees use a self-match process assisted by technology, they are usually more open to constructive criticism and advice from their mentors. Also, mentees will typically be more engaged in the process, so they get more out of the relationships.

Lesson 3: Find Your Own Unique Approach to the Mentorship

While most formal mentor programs feature strict rules, tips and worksheets, excessive reading materials and formality are not always necessary. In fact, the majority of people do not want lots of reading materials and excessive rules, according to Beth N. Carvin, the CEO of Nobscot Corporation, a global technology firm that focuses on key areas of employee retention and development, to discover the advantages and opportunities that happen as a result of mentoring. She notes, “The best approach is a mix of formal and informal with basic guidelines and resources.”

One award-winning pair rejected the formalized paperwork at the initial meeting and instead set up an informal mentorship atmosphere in which they could be truthful and vulnerable with each other. Another pair held their mentor meetings at offsite venues over sushi and wine, where they could talk about a wide variety of issues in a relaxed, informal environment. The third pair preferred a structured approach, so they used a questionnaire with a wide variety of open questions at their initial meeting.

However, no matter the preferred approach, whether it is formal or informal, all three pairs emphasized that the mentor relationship must be built on trust, respect and confidentiality, essential components of a productive mentorship.

Lesson 4: Mentees Aren't the Only Ones Who Benefit

The award-winning mentors were initially motivated to become mentors because they had all been helped by past mentors, and they wanted to give back. All expected to be on the “giving” side of the mentor relationship, but they quickly learned that mentors are also on the “receiving” side. One mentor said that as she gave advice to her mentee, she realized that she should listen to their own advice for her own work situation. The mentors found that mentoring provided refreshing breaks from the stresses of their own jobs, and they all believe that they've made lifelong friends in their mentees.

Lesson 5: Just Go For It

Some of the mentees admitted that they hesitated before sending their future mentors the mentorship invitations. One felt nervous and afraid that her prospective mentor would reject her invitation, but she received the acceptance reply within a couple of hours. Another was reluctant to participate because she was concerned that a mentorship would be too time consuming for her busy schedule. However, once they began the mentorships, all the mentees didn't look back or regret their decisions. They feel that the mentorships have significantly improved their professional and personal lives, and they are now more committed to their organizations because they feel valued and appreciated.

The mentors featured in the webinar were part of mentoring programs supported by [Mentor Scout](#), a corporate mentoring program technology. Mentor Scout was created to improve the efficiency and automation of corporate and association mentoring programs. Initially a platform to help [match mentors and mentees](#), the program has grown to include a full mentoring administration system for both self-match and administrative-match employee/member mentoring programs. Mentor Scout is a wholly owned division of Nobscot Corporation, the global leader in web-based exit interview management software and systems. Learn more about Mentor Scout at <http://www.mentorscout.com>.