

To Be Successful – Have a Mentor

Dr. Sheila Murray Bethel

During my first years as a speaker and author, the most important factor in my success was the wisdom and experience of my mentors. It would have taken years of research and experience to acquire all the minute details involved in the success I was seeking. Instead, I cut my learning time by at least one half through the guidance of my mentors. The late Cavett Roberts, the dean of professional speaking and founder of the National Speakers' Association, originated the quote, "O.P.E." (Other People's Experience). That's what the mentor-protégé relationship is based upon: other people's experience.

I've found that most people who have become successful in life and/or business are proud to share their knowledge and experience. If you find someone who can act as your mentor, it would be a wonderful experience for both of you. I now act as a mentor for several people. Having discussed mentorship with several friends who are also mentors, we have agreed that there are some tips on the mentor-protégé relationship that would be helpful to pass on. I have listed them in the hopes that you can make the most of one of the best resources available to you—a mentor!

1. **As defined by Webster's, a mentor is an adviser, coach/teacher—not a partner or replacement for your active participation.** Look upon your mentor as a source of inspiration and information, not a replacement for action.
2. **Be very careful of your mentor's time.** The quickest way to alienate a mentor is to be on the telephone, e-mail or in his or her office for repeated information and unimportant details. On the other hand, don't be afraid to ask what you may think is a dumb question. There are no dumb questions, only uninformed, unprepared people. If you have already covered the material or problem and you still have questions, make sure you aren't just being lazy. If you do need further clarification and help, then certainly contact your mentor.
3. **When working with a mentor take careful notes so you don't have to go back for repeated information.** Always take notes; they will help you in preparing intelligent, meaningful questions and in retaining the information.
4. **If you are asking advice of a mentor—take it!** Protégés, in their enthusiasm, often ask advice and then argue the point. Don't reinvent the wheel.
5. **When you receive advice and suggestions from you mentor, report back on the results or action taken.** Your mentor may see that you need a slight adjustment or correction. Small game-plan refinements can be extremely helpful. If you are proceeding correctly and all is well, you need to know that also. Reporting to your mentor will give you this knowledge.

Finally, once you have had a mentor, pass on the legacy. It is a wonderful and rewarding endeavor. One of the fastest ways to go from success to significance is to be a mentor to someone else!