

5 Ways Business Mentoring Fosters Career Advancement

A Quick-Topic Tutorial by Management Mentors



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Introduction:

It's easy to accept the argument that having a [business mentor](#) will likely help a person's career. But it's the "how" that might make us stop and pause.

We can picture what the outcomes are—the improved leadership skills, the promotions, the increased salaries—but what is it *about* mentoring that helps these things happen?

That's the purpose of this quick-topic tutorial: to explore exactly how business mentoring fosters career advancement, and not only for [mentorees](#), but also [mentors](#). We'll look at five critical areas, including listening actively, overcoming challenges, developing crucial skills, appreciating the long view, and improving self-esteem and self-worth.

Here's to your business mentoring success!



Get Active with Your Listening

Active listening involves being a dynamic and thoughtful participant in the communication exchange. When someone commits to actively listening to another person—be it the [mentor or mentoree](#)—he or she is essentially saying, "I care enough about you and the topic at hand to give you my full attention."

That said, active listening isn't something that just happens. And it takes practice to do it well and consistently. The beauty of the mentoring relationship is that it forces two people to come together on a regular basis and listen—*really listen*—to one another.

Active listening involves the following:

- **Attending:** Paying attention to the person's needs, wants, and desires.
- **Understanding:** Making certain that you understand the words and concepts that the other person is using. One way to accomplish this is by verifying your own perceptions. See the resource in the call-out box above for further reading.
- **Listening to what is being said:** Listening involves both hearing the words spoken and experiencing both the verbal and non-verbal messages being sent. Regarding non-verbal gestures, this includes tone of voice, posture, gestures, facial expressions, eyes, and proximity (i.e. the distance between you and the other person).

Further Reading:

[How to verify perceptions in three easy steps.](#)

[Four tips for better mentor-mentoree communication](#)

[Communication styles – which one is best for you?](#)

People who are active listeners, rather than passive ones, are more likely to do the following:

- Get at the heart of an issue faster and with more compassion and tact
- Have a reputation for understanding people
- Become a "go-to" person in the organization
- Develop into a solid manager and leader

As you can imagine, these are all things that people consider when promoting a candidate from within, hiring the next senior executive, or giving references. In other words, by practicing active listening during the course of a nine- to 12-month mentoring relationship, you'll become more adept in this area, making you an even more attractive candidate for that new position within your organization, or a completely new job (active listening is critical during interviews!).



Become a Better Obstacle Buster

One of the things that [mentors and mentorees](#) work on over the course of their mentoring relationship is helping the mentoree face specific challenges.

While the [mentoree](#), of course, will do the heavy lifting, the [mentor](#) plays a role. Both are involved with the following:

- Identifying challenges and obstacles
- Coming up with a strategy for dealing with these challenges and obstacles
- Discussing achievements and setbacks along the way
- Sustaining success in the long term

For the mentoree, this is an opportunity to show how he or she can overcome challenges with reason, dignity, and tact. For the mentor, this process of guiding the mentoree through an obstacle minefield can offer a good "refresher" on how to go about dealing with challenges and obstacles with aplomb.

This experience can serve as a good talking point during internal reviews or interviews that happen outside the organization. When someone from HR or a recruiter asks the all-important "how do you deal with challenging situations" question, both [mentor and mentoree](#) will have a recent real-life example from which to draw their answer.

Being able to show adeptness for dealing with difficult situations is an asset, and one that could lead to career advancement, especially for those who are looking to take on senior management roles within their organization.



Develop Crucial Skill Sets That'll Make You Indispensable

Leadership. Let's face it: [when companies promote from within](#) or when they hire new talent outside of the organization, they're looking for specific skill sets, and, oftentimes, leadership is at the top of the list.

While some people do seem to be born with natural leadership abilities, we believe that most leaders develop the skill over time and with practice. During the mentoring relationship, the mentor can practice the art of "stepping aside"—instilling confidence in the mentoree that he or she has what it takes to lead. The mentoree, in turn, can make the development of leadership skills a major goal during the mentoring relationship. Together, the pair can determine which particular leadership skills—e.g. becoming a better delegator, improving

communication skills, leading by example, etc.—to focus on and what steps the mentoree needs to take to improve upon these skills.

As with every other aspect of the mentoring relationship, this will serve as a refresher for the mentor...and it might even lead him or her to seek out another mentoring relationship where he or she is mentored (remember, [mentoring develops leadership skills in executives](#) as well).

Communication. In addition to becoming better active listeners, mentors and mentorees also improve [communication skills](#) in the following areas:

- Giving and receiving feedback
- Showing genuine appreciation for large and small achievements
- Discussing sensitive topics

Accountability. Sure, a [mentoree and mentor](#) are held accountable for many tasks within their organization. But there's something special about the accountability in a mentoring relationship: *the two are accountable to each other*. Why is this important? Because the mentor and mentoree are not merely trying to accomplish something for the organization, although indirectly, of course, they are. The mentor and mentoree are accomplishing something that's so much bigger than the organization: improving themselves from within and fostering skills and values that they can carry with them in their professional and personal lives, no matter where the journey takes them.

Patience. We'll be talking more about this in the section below about appreciating the long view. The word "patience" is not something you hear often in our busy world, in a place where business is happening 24/7 and where the concept of "if you snooze, you lose" has enormous resonance. But patience—in mastering skills, in tackling obstacles, in transforming into the leader you've always imagined—is something that's needed. And this is partly why a managed, one-to-one mentoring relationship lasts between nine and 12 months: it teaches and encourages the art of being patient.

In terms of career advancement, recruiters and HR look for tangible evidence regarding the crucial skills sets we've outlined above. What the [mentoree](#) accomplishes during his or her mentoring relationship can serve as evidence of improvement—and even mastery—in some of these areas. And the fact that the [mentor](#) helped the mentoree improve these skills reveals the mentor's own affinity for them. All good things when advancing one's career.



Learn to Appreciate the Long View

We live in a world of instant gratification thanks to emails, texting, smart phones, Facebook, Skype, Twitter...the list goes on and on.

What mentoring does—for both parties—is put the emphasis on the long view:

- Where does the mentoree want to be in nine to 12 months?
- What are the steps needed to get there?

- What might some of the challenges be along the way?
- What are some ways to anticipate and deal with obstacles?
- How can the mentoree plan for little successes and celebrations on this journey (so he or she remains committed and encouraged)?

We all need moments to remind ourselves that some of the most worthwhile things on the job—reaching a new pay level or getting a new title, for example—are things that don't happen overnight.

The mentoring relationship prepares the [mentoree](#)—and reminds the [mentor](#)—that anything worth achieving takes preparation and time and that the journey is just as important as the destination. For some mentorees, this might be the first time in their professional career that they've been encouraged to take a step back, assess, and breathe. And for some mentors, this may be the first time in a long time that they've been reminded about the importance of appreciating the long view.



Increase Your Self-esteem and Self-worth

It's been said that the way to master something is to teach it. Mastering a specific task, of course, leads to an increased sense of self-worth and increased self-esteem, as it should (provided the person doesn't become arrogant!).

The mentoring relationship is often where teaching and mastery freely take place: both [mentors and mentorees](#) learn from each other (teaching goes both ways; it's not always the mentor teaching the mentoree). Accomplishment—both large and small—breeds confidence, which in turn promotes the commitment to go further, to take the next proverbial step. It's not about simply being satisfied where you are but thinking about—and seeking out—the next level.

This sort of "go get 'em" attitude—an attitude that can't be faked—is one that HR and recruiters alike look for when considering candidates for senior level positions.



It's Your Career. Take Charge of It.

By now, after reading this quick-topic tutorial, you probably understand how business mentoring can foster career development, whether it's for you or for people within your organization. The question we most often get at this point is this: *what happens if my company doesn't have a formal mentoring program?*

While we believe that the most effective program is a managed, one-to-one setup, that doesn't mean you're out of luck if your company doesn't currently support that model. Other options include self-directed programs, [where the mentoree goes out on his or her own and finds a mentor](#) (it could be someone inside or outside the organization), and group mentoring where one mentor works with a group of mentorees. The key is mentoring over nine to 12 months,

since the mentor and mentoree need to work together over the long term to experience the benefits that would foster and promote career advancement.

We're providing resources in the call-out box to the right that will provide further reading and insight on [business mentoring](#). If your organization doesn't have a formal mentoring program, some of these resources might be exactly what the decision makers need in order to be persuaded to set one up.

Further Reading:

[Five Ways Mentoring Can Help Your Company](#)

[Corporate Mentoring Models – One Size Doesn't Fit All](#)

[The "Well-Leveraged" Business Mentoring Program](#)

And if your organization *does* have a formal program in place, then what are you waiting for? Sign up to be a [mentor](#), [mentoree](#), or both and start advancing your career today.



About Management Mentors:

For over two decades, [Management Mentors](#) has been designing and implementing world-class business mentoring programs and helping companies attract and retain high potential employees. Based outside of Boston, Mass., Management Mentors' corporate mentoring programs develop future leaders and create a more diverse workforce by removing the barriers to equal opportunity. Management Mentors has achieved a 90% success rate with pairs it matches using a thoughtful, proven process. Current and past clients include Enterprise Rent-A-Car, U.S. Fish & Wildlife, The New York Times Corporation, The City of Tallahassee, Cooper Tire, FedEx Kinkos, Quaker Oats, Schering Plough, TJX Corporation, and Sony Music Corporation. For more information on how your firm can enjoy greater success through mentoring, contact us at 617.789.4622 or visit us at www.management-mentors.com.



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