



Level Up Your Career: The Best Ways to Find a Mentor in Gov

- Posted by [Jessie Kwak](#) on April 16, 2014 at 11:00am
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How do you find that person who will give you a hand in your career? These mentorship tips will help.

Have you ever wished you had a career guidebook? Something to help navigate the tricky byways and translate signposts? No matter which stage of your career you're at a mentor act as a guide, offering their experience and judgement to give you a clearer path.

A mentor will not only give you the benefit of her expertise, she'll also act as a sounding board for important career decisions, challenge you to improve your skills, and bring with her a network of contacts and new ideas.

But how do you find this person?

Qualities of a good mentorship

Chances are you already know the perfect mentor. Think of a person in your field you admire, whose career you might even like to emulate. He may be a close colleague, or it may be a person you've never met before. She may occupy in a position where you see yourself in one year, or where you hope to be in ten.

A good candidate will be someone with whom you feel comfortable being open about your fears and concerns, and whose interests and goals align with yours. He should be respected by his colleagues, and possess expertise and experience you can learn from. Most of all, he should be willing and able to spend time with you.

As a mentee, you need to be willing to take advice and criticism with humility. Be respectful of your mentor's network and her time, and show her you're serious about following through on her suggestions and ideas.

When establishing a relationship with a mentor, agree ahead of time to the basics. Will you meet monthly or quarterly? Will you catch up over the phone or email in between meetings? What goals are you hoping to achieve? You'll also need to discuss discretion, as you'll likely be talking about sensitive subjects.

Finding a mentor in government

Know what you want. In order to decide who to approach, you need to know what you're hoping to get out of the relationship. Are you looking for job-hunting tips? For advice on becoming more assertive? For someone to help you strategize your next moves? The answers to these questions will help you decide who to ask.

Expand your network. If you can't think of a potential mentor in your organization or personal circle, try joining industry-related groups or professional organizations within your field or demographic. Many professional organizations, like [Blacks in Government](#), run mentoring programs that match mentees with those looking to impart their knowledge.

Look for programs already in place. Many formal mentorship programs already exist within government agencies. [This wiki](#) from the Office of Personnel Management lists mentorship programs by government department – talk to HR to learn how to get involved.

Go virtual. The [GovLoop Mentors Program](#) pairs public sector professionals across agencies in mentorship relationships for a four-month duration. Formal training is provided to help each pair realize their goals.

Consider speed mentoring. Flash mentorship programs like the one run by the [Senior Executives Association](#), allow mentors to impart their knowledge in a quick meeting that takes a page from the books of speed daters. Mentor and mentee commit to a single one-hour meeting to allow the mentee to get guidance from the more experienced mentor.

What about you? Do you have a mentor -- or are you one? Leave your tips about how to find the right mentor in the comments below.