Mentoring is a relationship that is established with someone who is an expert in their field. The mentor is usually older and more experienced than the mentee. The mentor shares their experiences, and the lessons they have learned. But the relationship benefits both the mentor and the mentee. The mentor benefits from the opportunity to strengthen their leadership skills. The mentee receives career guidance and helpful career advice to prepare for the next level in their career.

Many companies have formal mentoring programs in place for matching new employees with those already established in their career. If you are choosing your own mentors here are five tips to ensure a successful relationship:

1. **A good career mentor:**
   - Is knowledgeable in their field
   - Is generous and honest with advice
   - Is a good communicator
   - Is committed to the relationship
   - Will get to know their mentee: her/his capabilities, interests and goals
   - Will make recommendations for the mentee’s career development and path
   - Will create learning opportunities and heighten the mentee’s career
   - Will introduce the mentee to key people and professional organizations

2. **Choosing a career mentor:**
   - Choose someone you admire
   - Look outside your immediate work area – maybe your boss’s boss.
   - Choose someone in another area of your organization who has had a career path similar to your goal.
   - Find multiple mentors (I have clients working with more than one mentor in a formal relationship).

To find a career mentor outside of your organization, join professional associations where you can meet senior people and executives in your field.

3. **Setting up the Mentor/Mentee Relationship:**
   - Before seeking a mentor’s assistance, make a plan. What do you expect from your mentor? What do you want to focus on? How much time do want to commit to this relationship? It is important for you to be clear about your expectations for your own benefit and in order to communicate this to your potential mentor.
   - Invite the potential mentor to lunch or coffee to discuss your intention. Mentors appreciate the recognition, and are willing to share their knowledge and wisdom.
At the meeting, effectively communicate your need for a mentor, your vision of the future. Define the relationship and why you would like this person to be your career mentor.

Find out how involved the potential mentor wants to be in this relationship.

Give them a chance to think about it – tell them you will get back to them in a couple of days.

4. The Relationship:

- Set up the parameters of the relationship together, how often, when & where you will meet, and the length of the meeting.
- Respect your mentor's time. Show up on time for your meetings. If you have to cancel your meeting, give at least 24 hours notice.
- Set up boundaries for phone calls. Between meetings call only if absolutely necessary.
- Use your scheduled meetings effectively by organizing your materials and the topics you would like to discuss.
- Pay for your own meals and drinks or offer to pick up the tab for your mentor's meal.
- If you are given an assignment, complete it on time.
- Show your appreciation by offering to help your mentor in any way possible. Send a thank-you e-mail communicating how this relationship has helped you or send a gift to recognize a special day for your mentor.
- Recognize when the relationship is winding down, communicate this, and wrap it up. If you would like to stay in touch with occasional updates of your career successes, clear it with your mentor at the end of the relationship.
- Obtain approval from your mentor before using them as a reference.

There are many benefits to a career mentorship, for both parties. Mentees gain the benefit of someone's experience to help them navigate their career development. Mentors have the opportunity to reflect on their careers. Having clear goals and communicating these will ensure that the experience is positive and productive.