

GET THE MOST FROM A MENTOR BY FORMALIZING THE RELATIONSHIP

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Asking someone to be your mentor can feel a bit like asking someone to be your date – sort of nerve-racking and filled with worries about rejection. Keeping the relationship implied instead of formalized may initially seem like the best solution, but you could end up feeling like the guy sitting home alone on New Year's Eve because the girl he thought was more than his friend accepted another offer.

"It has been my experience that it is better to ask someone to be your mentor than to allow the mentor relationship to be implied," says Lisa Quast, president of [Career Woman, Inc.](#), in Seattle, Wash., and founder of the [Wing to Wing Women's Mentoring Project](#). "A formal mentoring relationship is where both parties agree to the goals and objectives of the mentoring relationship, the amount of interaction, and the length of time. When a formal mentoring relationship is established, both parties take the relationship much more seriously than if it is merely informal or implied."

When a person knows that you are looking not just for a role model but for someone who can take an active part in your development, it sets the stage for two of the most critical elements to a positive mentoring relationship: mutual respect and confidentiality. As Quast notes, "Both parties must respect each other and feel comfortable that nothing discussed will be shared outside the mentoring relationship; both need to be able to speak and discuss topics freely in a safe environment – this can only happen when a formal mentoring relationship has been agreed upon."

So set up a meeting with your prospective mentor at a mutually comfortable location and see what happens. Yes, it is possible that the person may be too busy or have other reasons for not wanting to take on the responsibilities of being a mentor, but it also is possible that the person will be delighted to play that important role in your career.

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