

## **How to choose a mentor: how to set up yours and your mentor expectations**

Por: Aixa Alemán

Choosing a mentor is difficult but developing a growing and mutually beneficial mentorship relationship is even harder. How to set what you want from a mentor? How to negotiate your expectations and your mentor's ones? How to find a mentorship support that will facilitate your growth and development? Finding support, guidance and access to a mentor must be among your top goals for whatever opportunity you want (internship, research, job, graduate school, etc).

No one speaks or teaches about mentorship, what is good or a bad experience but many successful professionals can give testimony that having the right mentor can make the difference between a positive, regular or meaningful experience. A mentor can be defined as someone who goes above and beyond in terms of their advice, support, independence and presence in the life of a mentee. A model for a mentor is someone who is a mentor, a teacher, an investigator, friend and partner is the ideal situation.

As students who are early in our careers, we tend to forget to consider that we are students, mentees, team members, and co-workers; we have as much responsibility to develop a working relationship with our mentors as they have. How to achieve this? It is not easy but as any other relationship is based on trust, shared responsibility and commitment. It is a negotiation.

What are the tools that you have available to establish this negotiation-this mentorship relationship. You have many tools even when you are not able to even recognize them. For instance, one of the first things is to reflect on who you are and how is your work style. Then, consider where you are in life or academic/professional development so you can set ideal qualities, goals and other general expectations that you hope to find in your mentor. Next, you start doing a general search and find out more information about the opportunity and the potential/eligible mentors. After these thought and preliminary early contact exercises, a time comes when you need to make a more formal personal contact (not only email, make sure that you use phone or in person if you can) expressing your strong interest. This formal interaction allows establishing common ground among the two people who may be involved in the prospective activity/opportunity.

Be confident, after these professionals or potential mentors are people just like you. Try to be respectful of their time and their attention but at the same time make sure you present who you are, your interest in their work and their program and clearly state what you want. Be honest. The last thing you want is to lie or hide information because this maybe the start of a long relationship. You have nothing to lose by being honest but to present a mature, well mannered and someone who has taken the time to examine this opportunity and how it fits with your career pathway-a young motivated scholar. Ask. Ask for their plans, their availability and their ongoing projects to make sure this opportunity excites you. This might become your project and you need to feel enthusiastic about it, if not why bother?