

# Why you should find a mentor - now

Graduates, facing the world of work, often find that this is a challenge, compounded by indecision, options and inexperience.



Wonga Ntshinga

"The best move they can make now is to find a mentor," says Wonga Ntshinga, Senior Head of Programme at The Independent Institute of Education. "What next, is a persistent headache for overwhelmed graduates.

"Although they are probably already looking through newspapers and online career portals searching for a job, one of the best things they can do at this point is to find a mentor in their industry.

"Throughout life, people rely formally and informally on others to learn, grow and gain experience. Elders often fulfil these roles in communities and families. For career development, graduates need similar support, but from a professional who has already walked the path they are about to embark on.

"The benefits of mentorship are well known and some organisations and companies have formal mentoring programmes. However many do not, and in that instance, it is up to them to find a suitable mentor to guide and support them through good times and bad.

"Mentors are ideally positioned to help young graduates with practical, industry-specific advice - whether it be skills or career options."

## Finding a mentor

- **Through your higher education institution** - "Some work-oriented institutions have mentorship programmes. If the institution has such a programme, enrol as soon as possible, so that you can take the same relationship through with

you to the workplace."

- **Through professional bodies** - "Most industries have professional bodies. Join these bodies through social networks, online programmes and networking events. Subscribe to an industry-specific mentoring programme. Or get involved with the industry community, which will allow you to identify someone with both the knowledge and experience you seek."
- **In your new job** - "You can also seek a mentor as soon as you find a position. This further offers a great opportunity to stand out during the interview process, by asking the panel whether they have a mentorship programme or similar opportunities."

## Mentorship models

Ntshinga says there are a number of ways a mentorship can be conducted, including:

- **Regular face-to-face sessions** - Meeting face-to-face with your mentor is important, as regular contact can ensure that things are done. Phone calls and e-mails are convenient, but in-person consultations ensure engagement and drive participation more efficiently.
- **Online sessions** - There are many online tools which can both help you find a professional mentor and enhance the mentorship process.
- **Formal or informal sessions** - "Some organisations have left mentoring in an informal structure, while other organisations are now taking the approach of measuring the success of these programmes via structured mentorship programmes. Increasingly, companies are formalising mentoring programmes, with policies, mentor screening, training and development."

## Mentor and protégé characteristics

"When looking out for a prospective mentor, graduates should find someone senior - at executive level, a consultant or teacher, someone in middle or upper management or in research.

"You need to find someone who is able to make time for you, who is able to listen and communicate effectively, and above all is willing to share knowledge and motivate you. In short, a mentor is someone who is nurturing, protective, honest and has a balanced perspective."

As a protégé, graduates must also possess a certain skills set.

"You must be positive, have a passion for learning and be willing to take advice. You must be welcoming of constructive criticism in order to gain knowledge from your career mentor."

"The benefit of having a mentor early in one's career cannot be stressed enough. Many of history's most successful people were mentored, including great names such as Martin Luther King Jr, Richard Branson, and Alexander the Great. Even Napoleon Hill, the renowned author of literature on personal success, was mentored. Mentoring provides you with a solid and informed support structure as you take your first steps into the great unknown," concludes Ntshinga.