

Career Mentors

LEANNE RALSTIN: Hi, everyone. My name is Leanne Ralstin and I'm going to talk about career mentoring with you today.

I am a career consultant at the Carson College of Business. I help students with finding jobs, but one of my passions is mentoring. I think mentoring is really important for everyone in all levels, whether it's being a mentor or being a mentee.

And we're really happy to have you here today. So start thinking about what your interests are as far as mentoring goes, why are you interested in mentoring? And one of the things about career mentoring is getting started in a career IS sometimes overwhelming. You have the education, you maybe have some experiences in an internship or in other work experiences, but then getting started in that dream job can be just overwhelming.

Or maybe you're a student, you're a new student, a freshman or sophomore and you just don't know what the ropes are as far as college goes, how do you become a successful student? Or how do you find those experiences out there? So that's what we're going to talk about today is how to get you from point A to point B, wherever that is for you.

Sorry.

So what is mentoring? Mentoring is a relationship. It's like a friendship, only it's on a professional level. Some of the things that you might do in a mentorship is learn about your field, more about your field. Let's say you're in accounting, who do you know that's in accounting? Maybe you'll talk-- if you're a freshman or sophomore, maybe you'll talk to upper division students. That's really a peer mentoring situation. Or maybe you just want to explore the field. So talking to people that are working professionals in the field. That's a form of mentoring, too.

Mentoring situations could also help you with professional growth. How you become that professional in your field? It could also just support you and help guide you in different avenues, maybe with study skills, or perhaps, you know, like I said, knowing the ropes around a new company. And then just networking. So much of career building is about networking. And this could be the start of a very great professional network for you.

So the different types of mentoring. There's mentoring that is done in a group, there's mentoring that's one-on-one. That's typically what people think about is one mentor, one mentee chatting with each other. That's your traditional. But it could also be done in a group. It could also be sponsored by a specific company. For instance, I facilitate the bowling mentorship program for the Carson College of Business. And in that one, it's specifically to bowling. And they like to find students that are very interested in bowling and they assign the mentors in the company. Very company-specific.

It could be part of a department at your college or maybe a student group. I know that there's some student groups in the Carson College of Business that find mentors for their members, professionals that are out in the field. Your department might have mentorship programs. Alumni are really excited about being mentors a lot of times. And a lot of alumni programs will have mentoring programs.

There's peer mentors, like I mentioned. For instance, a freshman or sophomore being mentored by a junior or senior. That's a possibility. Peer mentors. People that are kind on your same level or maybe they're an employee that's only been at the company for maybe a year or two mentoring someone that's brand new. I mean, those are peer mentors. People that are pretty much on your level and helping you out.

Or it could be just something kind of informal. You know someone that you admire and you ask him to be that your mentor. It's just kind of an informal situation. Or it could be a mix of several of these. You could be maybe one-on-one most of the time and then at times meet as a group. You know, all the mentees and all the mentors meet as a group. It could be a mix of a lot of different things. But these are typical different programs.

Now, you're probably saying, well, what kind of time will that take? Typically, if it's a formal program, it's a predetermined length. I mentioned the example of the bowling mentorship program, which is a very well-established mentorship program that's company-specific. It lasts one school year. If the mentor and mentee decide that they want to go longer than that, that's up to them. But typical mentorship programs are usually six to 12 months, somewhere around there. And a school year is about nine months. So it's right in the middle there.

Typically discussions held with-- if you're a mentee and mentor, you'll have discussions maybe at least once a month, typically by phone or email. Could be in person. However you want to have those discussions. It's up to you. But usually at least once a month. Sometimes some mentorship programs, they speak a lot more often than this. And others it's only once a month. It's kind of up to the two people involved. So it's not a lot of time commitment, really. It's kind of up to the people involved.

So why should you be a part of a mentorship program? Well, the four biggest things that I come up with here, it eases your integration, whether it's into school or college, into a company, a new job. If you have a mentor that's there, they could help ease that integration for you. They can make it easier for you.

Develops professionalism. That's the goal of the program that I facilitate. It helps these students develop professionalism. They talk a lot about resume development, interview skills, how to search for jobs, how to dress professionally. All of those things are part of professionalism. Basically, how to act, you know? How to act like a professional instead of someone who's not professional.

It helps you build that professional network, like I said before. Now, I mention networking a lot because networking, it is about who you know. Who you know is going to help you get your foot in the door in different jobs or opportunities. Now, your skills, your abilities, that's going to get you the job. That's going to get you the opportunity. But the network is going to help you get there, as well.

And support. Now, this support could be just simply emotional support. Maybe your mentor is very good about saying things like, hey, you can do it. They encourage you. They're like a cheerleader. That's a great mentorship, as well. So someone that supports you and says, hey, you can do this, get up, go do it. That's what we all need sometimes. And it's great to have someone that will do that for you. So in general, those are the top four reasons that I see for getting involved in a mentorship program.

Now, the motivations for most mentees fall under these sort of things. But if you ask yourself these questions, maybe a mentorship would be good for you. If you're thinking of finding a mentor. Do you want to explore a field more? For instance, let's say your history major. What can you do with a history degree? Well, find someone who has a history degree and start talking to them. Maybe that could develop into a mentorship program and they can tell you about opportunities and ways of getting into the field that you never even thought of before. That's what's great about mentors, if you want to develop professionally.

Do you know all there is to know about being a professional in your field? Well, I think we're all learning and growing, hopefully, but certainly someone that's just starting out, maybe they don't know the right pathways that go within a company to get things done. And that could help.

Do you want or need emotional support? Like I mentioned before, just someone who's like a cheerleader, you can do it, you can do it. You know? Go get them, I believe in you. That's so powerful when someone says, I believe in you. It makes you-- I don't know about you, but it makes me want to do more and do better.

And understanding the company. And I've mentioned this before, that integration into your new company, into your new organization. How is that accomplished? So much easier if you have someone that's been there a while and can say, OK, so this is our processes, this is how we do things here. Now, you may change those processes later, but how do the processes unless someone is teaching you what those are? And that's part of being integrated into your new job or your field.

Mentors can help with all of these things. And those are classic motivations to be a mentee. But there's responsibilities that go along with these motivations. If you're going to have an effective mentorship, these are things that you want to think about. This is something that in the past I didn't really think about, but most mentorships are driven by the one being mentored, the mentee.

So your discussions should be led by you if you're a mentee. Think about what you want, what are your goals, how do you establish those professional goals? And that can be what your discussion topics are about. And today I want to talk about how to improve my resume, for instance, and that's what you and your mentor can talk about, perhaps. You want to plan your time efficiently. Mentors are usually professionals in their field, they have lots of responsibilities, are very busy people. Keep that in mind. Don't waste their time.

Now, there's a certain amount of just chit chat, getting to know each other, and that's perfectly fine. But if you set aside, let's say, an hour for a conversation with your mentor, that's what you should be aware of. When the hour is up, say, thank you very much. If the mentor wants to stay and has time, that's a different story. But be cognizant of your time. And show up when you say you will.

One of the biggest frustrations I've heard from mentors is, we have this time scheduled and the mentee didn't show up or they kept canceling on me. So try not to do that. Always show up when you say you will. Really plan out your time. Put it in your planner. However you plan your time, put it on your calendar and that's set in stone. Be respectful of this professional's time and show up and listen. I know that seems so simple, but do listen to what they have to say. How much of the advice that you take is up to you when you reflect.

And we're going to talk about reflection in a little while, but reflection is very important when it comes to mentorships. If you're not reflecting upon what was said, the advice you've been given, it's just going to fly out of your head later. It's not going to do you much good. So reflection is very important.

Now, there might be some of you that are thinking, maybe I want to be a mentor. So what motivates a mentor? Some mentors want to help people in their field, some mentors want to help students from the college that they graduated from. If you're an alum of WSU, maybe you want to help an undergraduate at WSU. What do you want to give back? What is your motivation? So what is it you want to give? Do you want to give advice? Do you want to be a cheerleader-sort of mentor? What do you want to give back? Time is a precious commodity and that's mostly what mentors are given is their precious time because they're professionals.

How can the relationship be mutually beneficial? This is something that the mentors should think about. Yes, the mentee will grow into that, but mentors should think about, how can I make this go both ways? Well, there's a lot of ways to do that. The mentor is giving advice, so sometimes maybe they have to go out and do a little research. It makes them more cognizant of how they do things, how they approach problems and issues and different things as far as their career goals and articulate that.

And that can help the mentor grow, as well. And what do you bring to the table? Experience is usually the biggest thing and advice that comes from that experience. Those are the precious things that the mentees typically look for. But there are responsibilities, just like there are with the mentee.

Some responsibilities. Well, again, meet on a regular basis. Usually, there's not a problem with the mentors not showing up. It's usually the mentee that tends to not show up. But it can happen on both sides. But if you make sure, hey, when can we meet next month, or next week, or however often you determine. Set that down, make sure that it happens on a regular basis.

Help the mentee establish smart goals. Now, many of you have probably heard of smart goals. And we'll talk about that a little later, as well. But goals that make sense for that person. That's what it boils down to. You don't want goals that are just unachievable.

Assist with industry knowledge. That's where you're the expert if you're a mentor. Model professionalism. So what does professionalism look like in your field? Model that for the mentee because the mentee is looking up to you. And what does that look like? What does a professional in the field look like? Oh, like this. OK. You know? So they'll model after you. Encourage and support. Be that cheerleader. Absolutely, if you're a positive-thinking person, being a mentor might be perfect for you. Now, these are also things. Maybe you're not thinking about being a mentor, maybe you want to think about being a mentee. These are things you might want to look for in a mentor. Some of the things. So keep these in mind.

Now, how to find a mentor? The big question. How do you find one? It can be sometimes a little challenging. You can look at your college department, which includes the faculty and the staff. A lot of times, the different colleges and different departments will have established mentor programs. Check with your college. I know the College of Business has several mentorship programs. I know the College of Communications has one, the Voiland College of Engineering has one, multicultural students have one. There's a lot of different ones at WSU. Lots of different programs.

Now, maybe when you look, there's not necessarily one that fits you right now. That's OK, too. Maybe look at the Alumni Association. Cougs make very active alumni from what I've seen, and they're just waiting to meet with you and help you. Human resources department, where you work, maybe you're looking for a mentor at work. Talk to the human resources department. Ask, is there a formal mentorship program?

I know that some companies-- and I'm mentioning Boeing again just because they were on campus recently and I've talked to them, but they said how they assign a established professional as a mentor for every new employee. Now, not all companies do that, but a lot of companies do because they know that it makes for better employees. If a person is eased into a company, they're more likely to stay there because they understand what's going on, they know processes quicker and better. Studies show that employees are more satisfied. So they have a big reason to do that.

Now, another place is LinkedIn. If you're not already on LinkedIn, get on. No better way to say it. Get on there. It's professional networking. It's meant for this. Yes, it's virtual, but those contacts that you make could be the beginning of your professional network. They are people that, well, they're already networking with you if they've connected with you.

And maybe there's some that you really admired, someone that you admire in your field. You might start talking with them and asking them questions and perhaps you might develop into a mentor program. And generally, people that-- it doesn't have to be on LinkedIn, it doesn't have to be part of your college or your company, could be Uncle Joe, who's a professional engineer somewhere. That could be a mentor, as well, people that you know.

Now, let's say that you do find someone. What are you looking for? Look for someone that you want to be like, as well as you like them. I mean, they don't have to be your best friend, but they have-- it is a type of friendship. So if this person can't be a friend of yours-- and I'm not saying like, you know, a drinking buddy. Not that kind of friend. I'm talking about a professional level friendship. If you can't have a professional level friendship with them, they're probably not a good mentor for you, probably not a good match. But look for someone that you admire, that you are like, I want to be like that person. That might be a good mentor.

And then study them a little bit. Think about them. What have they done? What do you admire about them? Especially if you don't really know them. And especially if you're doing an informal program, these are steps that you need to take. You might want to start-- don't start right off, the first discussion you have with them, hey, you want to be a mentor? It's just a little creepy. [LAUGHS] A little too much too soon. But if you study this person, you know what they're about, you know what they're publicly displaying, you admire their professionalism, you admire their knowledge, their skills, whatever it is, that's fantastic. Then maybe you want to start out with an informational interview.

Now, that interview is just-- you can go ask them and say, hey, I just want to maybe buy a coffee, spend 30 minutes, and just chat about what it is you do. You know? I want to know more about your field, I want to know more about what you do because that's my major in school. Or whatever connection you have with them. Start with that informational interview. Be very strict about the time frame that you allow. Yeah. Spring for the coffee. I mean, seriously.

And then think about it. After you've talked to them a little bit, maybe it will lead to a mentorship or maybe it won't. Or maybe they'll say, hey, you know? You might also talk to so-and-so. And maybe that person would be the perfect mentor for you. Do the same thing, informational interview, think about what the person's done, what you admire about them, and just kind of take it from there. Sometimes it's a process. Especially if it's an informal mentorship like this.

When you do decide, let's say, this person over here-- we'll call this person Tom-- Tom seems like a great match for you. You admire what he's done, after the informational interview you admire him even more, and he seemed pretty open to have more discussions with you. Then just ask him. Say, hey, I'd like to talk with you more about this. I'm looking for someone that could be a mentor for me. See where the discussion leads you. Follow up on it. But one of the follow-up things, always thank them for their time.

That first informational interview, send a thank you note right away, probably an email, just a quick email. Thank you for your time, really learned a lot. And then maybe it's the next time you talked to them that maybe approach the subject of mentorship. Some people are just too busy. Don't take that as rejection. Some people are uncomfortable with the idea. Don't take that personal, either.

But when you find the right person, you'll know it. I mean, it's just like when you were first making friends in kindergarten. Maybe at first it's a little awkward, but as you get to know each other, it's better. You want to make sure that the person that you pick is a good listener, as well, because they need to listen to what it is that you're saying, what it is that your needs are so that you can set good goals for what you want to accomplish in this mentorship.

And if they're not a good listener, they're all about themselves for some, probably not a good mentor. But if they're able to listen to you and then make thoughtful responses, fantastic possibility for a mentorship. So do we have any questions yet?

OK. So formal programs are a little bit different. In formal programs, you'll probably fill out an application. They'll probably ask you questions about who you are, things like your major, maybe something about your experiences, what you're looking for. That sort of thing. And these, you'll probably be matched with somebody that matches your interests or your goals for the mentorship. For instance, if you're a marketing major and if you're part of the mentorship program that I facilitate, if you're a marketing major, you'll be matched with a marketing professional, for instance. They match them by major. Other programs might match them on other things.

What's great about formal programs is there's lots of checks and balances. If you find that, hey, I'm just not connecting with this mentor, good, there's probably someone else that could probably take their place. They can match you with somebody else. And that's what's nice about these bigger programs that are more formal is they can do things like that.

In informal programs there's cool stuff like maybe you'll get a company tour as part of it, maybe you'll get some other kind of fun things to do as a group with the big group of mentors and mentees. In informal programs, like I was mentioning how you go through that process, it's more self-directed. But sometimes it's very beneficial because you can make these relationships as short or as long as you want, you're not bound by limits or anything. But at the same time, you want to be smart. You want to pick someone that you connect with. And be professional. Always stay professional with this.

OK. So when you establish the mentorship, keep in mind it's not an internship. It's not a job. It's just a relationship that's outside of both of them. You're not getting paid, you're not expected to show up at certain times except in your agreed-upon appointments. When you establish it, one of the first things you should do is just simply get to know each other, just like you would any new friend. Hey, so what do you do in your spare time? What are your interests? Where did

you go to school? Why did you pick this field? How did you get into it? Things like that. Just get to know each other. Find out where you have some common ground.

The main thing is show an eagerness to learn. If you're not willing to learn and grow as a mentee, it's going to discourage your mentor. How can they cheer you on if you're not willing to do anything or be involved? I would say, those goals I talked about, set those within the first meeting or two. Get to know each other a little bit, but within the first two meetings you need to set your goals for the mentorship.

And take the time to reflect. And both of these things, we'll talk about a little bit more. And set regular times about how you're going to talk. What I mean by that is, is it going to be on the phone? Is it going to be by email, text, are you going to Skype each other? How are you going to talk, is it in person? And figure out those regular times. Is it going to be once a month? Once every two weeks? Once every three weeks? What's it going to be? So set those times. Agree upon those times.

And the main thing is, let your relationship just grow naturally and organically. Don't try to force anything. It's really-- it boils down to-- it's a friendship. And so you want to keep your conversation pretty informal, but you let it flow the way it naturally flows, but still keep it on a professional level. One of the things is, if it's a good mentorship, you might be challenged if you're mentee. Don't let that discourage you. Be challenged. Rise to the challenge. That's what your mentor is for is to encourage you to do better and more.

And ask for that feedback, too. Can they give you some good feedback? I used the example earlier about resume. If they're looking at your resume, don't expect them to just say, hey, that's great and then move on to other things. Expect them to go through it to critique it. It might be kind of uncomfortable a little bit. They might ask you questions that are challenging. Don't let that discourage you. Let it encourage you because they're helping you to be better. And the main thing, commit.

If this is a six-month program, commit to the six months. If you just simply can't do it, it's better if you tell them right up front so that they can move on and be with another mentee or if you're mentor, be with another mentor.

So I said I was going to talk about SMART goals. Probably most of you have heard of the term SMART goals. And sometimes different words are used, but these are commonly used words, specific, measurable, achievable, realistic, and timely. Now, your goal, if you're setting a goal, should be as specific as possible. Don't just say, yeah, I want to graduate. That's great. But what do you want to graduate in? What is your major? When do you want to graduate? How are you going to do it?

For instance, maybe you want to get a certain certification in your field. OK. So you want to become certified. Certified in-- let's say first day. It's simple. You can get certified in first date. And so measurable. How will I know? I'll complete the courses. Is it achievable? Yes, it's

inexpensive, it's quick, it's easy, I should be able to do this. Is it realistic? Yeah, I can do this. I am capable of doing first date. Is it timely? When will I finish? I will finish this by next month. That's kind of how you step through the SMART goals. One after the other. Making sure that it's something that's realistic for you.

Some things, like, if I set a goal, for instance, of, let's say, touring the world for a year, that might not be very realistic for me because, well, for one thing, it's not achievable right now because I don't have the funds. But if I win the lottery, it might be achievable. But it's not very realistic for me. Maybe I decide I want to be a pro basketball player. Well, maybe you can't tell, but I'm not that tall. It might be a little difficult. Not very achievable for me. So think about what's achievable for you and that you can do it in a certain frame that it's measurable and specific. Be as specific as you can.

And these are goals that you should set for your mentorship. If you want to go into a certain field, find out the steps that are needed for that, how you can achieve that, break them down into even smaller steps, that's what mentors are great for is helping you with these things.

Another thing that I said that I was going to talk about a little bit was reflection. Now, for me, reflection is very, very important because this is when you take the advice, take the mentorship advice that you were given, and figure out how it's going to work for you. For instance, what were your goals? Did you achieve those goals over the mentorship? What were your goals for the mentorship? What would you do differently?

Would you approach things a little differently or would you do the same? What went well? What didn't go so well about the mentorship? These are things to think about. Did you learn anything new? Well, what was it? What did you learn new about yourself or about the field, or about the company? How can you apply what you've learned? Maybe your application goes back to goals, your overall career goals. Maybe you can apply those things that you learned to your career goals.

And this is a big one for me. How can you pay it forward? In other words, if you're a mentee, how can you someday become a mentor? That might be in a couple of years or it could be now, but how can you pay that forward? I think that's really important-- these are just a few of the questions to help you reflect. But I highly recommend that you do this whenever you're in a program like this.

All right. Do you have any questions?

KAITLIN HENNESSY: Yes. We do have a few questions. And if anyone else has questions, please get those into the chat box now for Leanne. Our first question asks, have you had a successful mentorship relationship personally, and what was your experience like?

LEANNE RALSTIN: Yeah. I would say that I was mentored by a colleague several years ago, who was in my field who had been in it for years. It was more of an informal mentorship, but I

learned so much from her. And even to this day we're still friends. But she was the greatest cheerleader. She was always supportive, she would always point to ways to make things better. It was a wonderful experience. And I'm happy to say that was probably the most positive mentorship where I was the mentee.

KAITLIN HENNESSY: And is it appropriate to use your peer mentor as a job reference? Even if they've never directly supervised you?

LEANNE RALSTIN: Of course. I mean, anyone that knows you could be a reference. Now, if the job is asking for people that-- ideally, if they know you well enough to know what your education, what your skills are, things of that nature, that is a great reference.

Someone who you've worked under. That's a great reference, too. It just depends upon the job. But, yeah, you can certainly use a mentor as a reference. Especially if you've built the relationship over time. Maybe one that's been a mentor for you for just a very short time, maybe not because they don't know you that well. But if they've been around you for a while, absolutely. Yeah.

KAITLIN HENNESSY: And we've got a question that asks, I'm interested in being a mentor but I worry I don't have enough experience. When are you ready to provide this wisdom and take on a mentee?

LEANNE RALSTIN: Well, those are things-- I mean, some of the things that I mentioned here. Let me go back to the-- these are motivations. If you want to help someone, if you want to be that leader, because being a mentor, you could add leadership to your resume and mentorship. Do you have a drive to give back? And do you have something to bring to the table?

So if you have some experiences within the company, within your school, whatever it is, you could be a mentor. Just keep in mind also those responsibilities that you're helping someone else. Help them establish the goals, help them move forward from wherever they are at.

KAITLIN HENNESSY: And we do have someone typing in the chat right now, so we'll wait just a second to see if they have a question.

LEANNE RALSTIN: OK.

KAITLIN HENNESSY: Thank you, Leanne.

LEANNE RALSTIN: No problem.

So I have been mentored and I have been a mentor. And I think both sides of it are very beneficial. I found that when I was a mentor, I grew probably almost as much as my mentee. I think it's a very positive thing. You don't have to be super experienced in your field to be a mentor. You just need to want to give back, to help somebody else.

KAITLIN HENNESSY: Thank you, Leanne. That looks like all the questions we have for this evening and I appreciate everyone coming out. Have a good night.

LEANNE RALSTIN: Thank you. And thank you everybody.

[MUSIC PLAYING]