

# *Finding Mentors*



# *Finding Success*

A guide to finding—and engaging—supportive adults throughout your life

# Introduction

Welcome to the *Finding Mentors, Finding Success* guide!

We all need mentors, role models, and wise advisors as we move through life. This guide can get you thinking about the ways a mentor can help with your immediate and long-term goals, while also teaching you about how to ask for, and make the most of, this support.

Use the tips and worksheets on the following pages to figure out how to find mentors to support your goals and dreams as you transition out of YouthBuild (and beyond)!



*“A mentor is someone who allows you to see the higher part of yourself when sometimes it becomes hidden to your own view... I don’t think anybody makes it in the world without some form of mentorship. Nobody makes it alone. Nobody has made it alone. And we are all mentors to people even when we don’t know it.”*

*—Oprah Winfrey*

# Why should I get a mentor?

As much as people like to think we've got it all figured out in life, the reality is that we always need wise friends and trusted guides throughout our lives to help us make good decisions, take advantage of opportunities, learn from mistakes, and find our positive path in life. No one succeeds without this kind of support.

You are at a critical point in your life. There are many supportive adults surrounding you while you are in YouthBuild, but the journey gets harder from here. Soon you will be moving on and beginning the next phase of your adult life. As you do this, you will need to find mentors along the way.

You may have had mentors before joining YouthBuild, or had one while in the program. But the mentors you find now will be different. There will not be a program helping pair you with an appropriate mentor, no mentoring coordinator there to help manage the relationship. You must take ownership for finding the support you need.

Finding a mentor can be intimidating, but it will also be one of the best things you can do to secure a positive future. A mentor can help you find a meaningful career, teach you to handle problems more effectively, and provide perspectives that you may not have considered otherwise. Your relationship with a mentor can be short-term and focused on figuring a few things out, or it can become a deep friendship that lasts a lifetime.

Making it happen is up to you. A good place to start when thinking about finding a mentor is to focus on where you are right now in life, taking some time to make an inventory on how you feel about your future in some critical areas. Use the worksheet on page 4 to jot down some thoughts about different aspects of your life and the areas in which you might need a mentor's help.

## *Your responsibilities as a “mentee”*

It's easy to think about what a mentor might do for you, but don't forget that you also need to bring things to the relationship. All relationships are a two-way street and you will need to share who you are with your mentor and do some things that will strengthen the relationship. You can become a “mentor magnet” who attracts mentors and builds strong connections by remembering these responsibilities:

- Be eager to learn new things from new people
- Volunteer to help your community; join community groups
- Open yourself to new people and new conversations
- Be willing to take on difficult tasks, assignments, and responsibilities
- Decide what you want to focus on and do what it takes to master it
- Speak positively and take negativity out of your conversations
- Take advantage of little moments and small opportunities
- Help others achieve their goals
- Make an effort to interact with potential mentors
- Thank your current mentor after every positive interaction
- Show your passion and enthusiasm for life

The worksheet on page 7 can also help you determine what you can bring to the mentoring relationship.

*“When you leave YouthBuild, you’re going to come across the highs and the lows of life, and not everything is going to work out as planned. But know that you have this wonderful foundation—the things that you’ve learned, the relationships that you’ve built—that you can fall back on. Reach out to your mentors, your instructors, your leaders. Know that none of us survive without a community of support and networking.”*

*—Michelle Obama*

# Worksheet: How Could a Mentor Help Me Out?

Use the worksheet below to figure out the areas of your life where you could use some support or where a mentor's advice could be most beneficial.

<i>Life area</i>	<i>I'm feeling confident about...</i>	<i>I'm feeling nervous about...</i>	<i>I have these opportunities...</i>	<i>A mentor might help with...</i>
<i>Career</i>				
<i>Family/Home Life</i>				
<i>Education</i>				
<i>Health and Wellbeing</i>				
<i>Money and Finances</i>				
<i>My Community</i>				
<i>My Friends</i>				
<i>Other</i> _____				
<i>Top 5 things I think a mentor could help with are...</i>				

# Who might make a good mentor?

You should also think about the personal and professional characteristics that you'd want a mentor to have. Not just anyone can be a good mentor to someone like you. You'll want your mentor to be a good fit for you and provide the support you need. Think about mentor characteristics such as:

**Personality** – Since you will be forming a strong relationship with your mentor, their personality is a big consideration. In thinking about a mentor's personality, ask questions like:

- Do you need a mentor who can make you laugh?
- One who is a good listener?
- Do you need someone you can be totally comfortable around? Or someone who really pushes you to do better?
- Do you want a mentor who is active and takes you places or someone who is more comfortable just sitting and talking?

**Time availability** – Meeting with your mentor obviously requires a time commitment, so consider factors such as:

- How often do you think you'd like to talk with your mentor?
- Do you need someone who is nearby and available frequently? Or would you be more comfortable with someone you just “touched base” with every now and then?

**Skills and connections** – A potential mentor might have a great personality, but if he or she doesn't understand you or can't provide you with the right support, they may not be the best fit. It's good to think about what you really need them to provide:

- Connections to career opportunities?
- Advice about making your way in a job or field?
- Tips for dealing with issues at home or working through personal problems?
- Someone who has a similar background and life history to yours?

**Level of familiarity** – You will get to know your mentor over time. But what about at the beginning of the relationship?

- How important is it to you that you know your mentor a bit before asking him or her to help you in that way?
- Could you be comfortable asking someone you don't know very well to mentor you?
- Or would you prefer to ask someone that you already have some level of familiarity with?



## *Worksheet: What can I bring to the mentoring relationship?*

In addition to thinking about what traits you'd like to see in your mentor, spend some time outlining the things about you that your mentor will find to be positive or meaningful as you build your relationship.

- Personality traits:

- Life experiences:

- Skills/ Knowledge:

- Hobbies/Interests:

- Goals/Dreams/Passions:



# Where can I find mentors?

Now you have several ideas about what a mentor can do for you and the type of person that would make sense for where you are in your life. But how do you find that person?

Start by being open to the choices that already surround you. What connections have you made through YouthBuild that could lead you to a potential mentor? How about your network of family and friends? Is there already someone in your life who is connected to an industry you're interested in or knowledgeable about something that relates to your goals? Don't be shy, let your network know that you are looking to find a mentor and be specific about the type of person you are looking for.

What if you can't think of anyone? Or want to find someone outside of your circle of friends and family? Identify places you can make connections with people, such as community events, religious organizations, school and trade programs, family gatherings, industry events, online social media, and hang-outs. Remember that people are busy these days — career experts<sup>1</sup> suggest you try to “corner potential mentors in their natural habitat.” This is especially critical if you want to find a mentor that can connect you to career opportunities. If there is a training, charity event, or even favorite local lunch spot for people in your industry, learn about it and start making connections.

## Sources of connections

If you are unsure where to look for potential mentors, try some of these sources.

- YouthBuild Alumni Network
- Sports leagues
- LinkedIn
- Local coffee shops
- Facebook
- Places of worship
- Volunteer opportunities
- Friends of friends
- AmeriCorps Alumni Network
- School and college counselors
- Career Centers
- Meetup.com
- Clubs and groups (cars, parenting, crafts, book clubs, etc.)
- Salons and barbershops
- Conferences
- Neighborhood groups
- Trade shows
- Networking events
- Job fairs
- Public speaking groups, such as Toastmasters

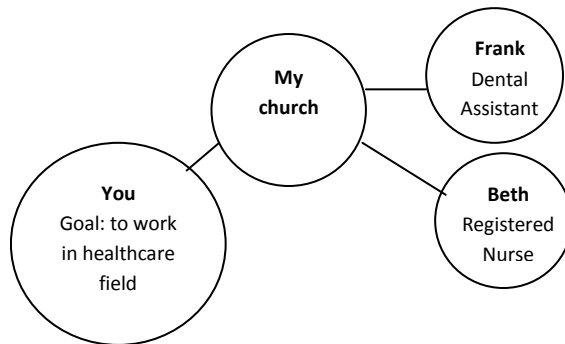
<sup>1</sup> <http://www.forbes.com/sites/jmaureenhenderson/2013/03/15/three-ways-to-find-a-mentor-when-you-lack-connections-clout-or-even-a-job/>

## Worksheet: map your connections

### Directions:

Step 1 – Go back to your list of goals and mentor characteristics and keep these lists in mind as you map the connections that you already have through people and activities. In the space below, for each person or activity create a circle and draw a line to that connection. If those people have other connections add a circle and draw a line to them.

Step 2 – Once you finish mapping your current connections, make a list of the activities that you can participate in that will increase the number of circles in your map over time.



Your map:



Activities to Increase Connections:

- 1.
- 2.
- 3.
- 4.
- 5.

# How and when should I ask someone to be my mentor?

Imagine you have found someone that you admire, a person that has a lot to share, and who seems open to showing you the ropes. Is now a good time to ask that person to be your mentor? How exactly does that work?

Like all relationships, building a good foundation is important. You probably wouldn't want to ask someone to be your mentor the first time you meet but, as you get to know each other better, asking the person directly is important.

Start building the relationship with casual conversation, meeting for coffee, and following and interacting with your potential mentor on social media such as LinkedIn or Twitter. Share articles or news reports of interest and engage in conversations about topics that you both care about.

Be prepared with questions or feedback requests when you speak. Pose concrete questions to your mentors, asking them about things you would not be able to learn on your own. For example, instead of asking, "How did you become a successful business owner?" you might say, "Tell me what steps you took to incorporate your business and what you found challenging along the way." By asking pointed questions you respect people's time and are more likely to get detailed responses.

You have made a good connection and now it's time to ask. Use your mentoring goals to frame the conversation. Explain why you are asking for support and what you think he or she can offer. The conversation might go something like this:

*Brandon, I really admire that you were the first person in your family to go to college. I will be the first person in my family to go to college and plan to be an engineer. I would like to learn as much as I can about becoming a civil engineer. Would you be willing to be my mentor?*

Most people find it to be an honor to be asked to be someone's mentor. They may have never thought of themselves as a role model or imagined they had something to offer someone else. If the potential mentor you ask says "no," politely thank them for their time and what you have learned from them so far. If appropriate, express your interest in keeping in touch and ask for a referral to someone else in their network.



# How can I get the most out of this mentoring relationship?

All relationships between two people, including mentoring relationships, are somewhat unique—they move to their own rhythm and are guided by their own rules. The relationship you have with your mentor will be different than any other and how you interact with each other is something you will have to work out together.

But there are some simple concepts to keep in mind that can help you get the most out of your mentoring relationship no matter what it looks like:

**Clarify how you will communicate** – Talk with your mentor about how you will communicate and coordinate your meetings. Who is responsible for suggesting times to get together? Who chooses where to meet? Does your mentor prefer texts, phone calls, emails? How often is your mentor available? How quickly can you expect your mentor to reply? You don't have to sort out all of these things during your first meeting together, but make sure that you are both clear on the best ways to communicate with each other.

**Prepare for your meetings and conversations** – Mentors will feel like they are wasting their time if you show up for meetings without an idea of what you want to talk about or if you haven't completed steps you agreed to the last time you met. Make sure you follow-through on commitments you made last time you met. Make a list of questions that you want to ask in advance. This lets mentors know that you are taking their time, and the relationship, seriously.

**Don't ask your mentor to take on more than he or she can handle** – Recognize that a mentor's support has limits. A career-focused mentor might not feel comfortable getting deeply involved in a personal problem, or a mentor who helps you work through personal issues may feel totally out of place helping you with school or career choices. Always keep the main purpose of your relationship with your mentor in mind as you ask for help.

**Ask your mentor to grow your network of support** – Because mentors are limited in what they can provide, one of the best things they can do is connect you to an even broader network of support. Always ask mentors to introduce you to people in their professional networks and groups of friends. You might even ask your mentor to do a mapping activity like the one on page 9, thinking about all of the people he or she knows who might be helpful to you.

**Learn from the whole person** – Even if you want your mentors to help with some very specific things, never forget that you can learn so much more if you pay attention to all of the things that make them the person they are. Watch how they carry themselves and how they interact with others. Listen for the values that helped them succeed. Learn how they balance work and family life, how they handle setbacks, how they set goals, how they show respect to others. These are all valuable things you can take from a mentoring relationship.

# Conclusion

Remember that finding, asking, and benefiting from a mentor is going to be hard work. But mentors are critical to you in becoming a successful adult and finding happiness in a career and at home. Your mentor can help you become the person you were meant to be. And don't forget that having a mentor is a two-way street: you may wind up contributing to their life as much as they contribute to yours!

Don't be intimidated by asking for this support. We know you can do this because you have been through YouthBuild and already have experience overcoming challenges, trying new things, and letting people who care into your life. So be confident in who you are and go find yourself a mentor who can help you achieve your goals. Your mentor will love who you are now and be proud of the person you become.

*"I could never have succeeded in creating YouthBuild and building it up to where it is today without the help of many mentors along the way. For example, Leroy Looper, our founding board chair, was always there for me with advice and reassurance when things got confusing or hard. I could call him anytime. His help was so important because he came from a different background and could explain things I didn't know from my own experience."*

*—Dorothy Stoneman, President of YouthBuild USA*