



# Wise up

by Judi Glova

**HOW TO DEVELOP A SUCCESSFUL MENTOR-STUDENT RELATIONSHIP**

**Diagnosis:** You need a mentor to take your career to the next level

**Prescription:** First consider what you need and what you expect ... then go for it

A large portion of your success and happiness will be determined by the quality – and quantity – of relationships you build through your professional and personal activities. The more people you know and who know you in a positive way, the more easily you can find success and the quicker you will

move ahead. You can fast track your career by getting the knowledge, insights and skills from a mentor – a wise and trusted “counselor” or “teacher” who knows the ropes.

“I have my black book of mentors. These are relationships I’ve built over time, the ones I can tap into for advice or input based on each person’s experience or area of expertise,” said Krisi Behrens, a sales training manager at Sanofi-Aventis who was formerly a sales professional. “Sometimes it’s a former manager – or even someone I met on the company softball team.”

“Today’s pharmaceutical environment is so different than it was 20 years ago. With the consolidation of companies and fewer potential blockbusters, more than ever, it’s so important for sales representatives to understand that their value in the marketplace is tied to their skills, knowledge, talents and ability to contribute – not only from a sales standpoint, but from a strategic and overall organizational standpoint as well,” explained Kim Gawart, a regional business director for CV Therapeutics. “The benefit of working with a mentor, and being the best you can be, has never been more important than it is today – the competition

is out there. In fact, today there are too many of us out there in the industry. We all know it. And a sales representative’s ability to be the best is more important now than it has ever been.”

#### **A mentoring roadmap**

In November, 2007, the Healthcare Businesswomen’s Association (HBA) released some very important information for women. They announced the findings of their E.D.G.E. in Leadership Study ([www.hbanet.org/research/edge.aspx](http://www.hbanet.org/research/edge.aspx)). The study provides a clear roadmap for key components women need to reach their full leadership potential in the corporate environment. One point, which clearly builds on a larger theme, is that a structured mentorship and exposure to strong female role models is critical to women’s advancement. In addition, you need not limit yourself to one mentor. This, according to the study, is one of the key factors to success

Be sure you know what you are looking to achieve with your mentor. Anne Camille Talley, consultant and co-chair of the HBA E.D.G.E. in Leadership Study Committee, says it’s best to work with a mentor to create a career strategy and develop specific skills. You don’t want to make the mistake of

expecting your mentor to help you find a new job. That's not your mentor – that's your advocate. This kind of misstep can cost you.

Without a doubt, the relationship between a mentor and student is meant to be built on a foundation of trust. You want your mentor to be a sounding board – listening with empathy to empower *you* to find solutions – as opposed to someone who tells you what to do. It's about guiding, sharing lessons learned and perspectives. Remember, these are not venting sessions. At the same time, the mentor needs to make sure it's a safe environment for you to share your fears or concerns. It's also important that the mentor not get in the middle of the relationship you have with your line manager. And most importantly, don't talk out of school. What you and your mentor talk about stays between the two of you.

"You need to respect the mentor's position and privacy. Don't name-drop to your peers about your mentor relationship," advises Kim Gawart. "Your mentor may be put in an uncomfortable position with his or her peers when it comes time to make decisions about advancement and placement of people within the organization. The mentor relationship is a private and personal relationship, so be sure to keep it that way."

There are many different ways to set up this relationship; some want a formal and structured approach,

## Fast track your career by getting insight and knowledge from someone who knows the ropes

while others like to keep it more informal. "I have both formal and informal mentors. In fact, a few women in my company may not even realize that I consider them to be my mentors, but I call on them from time to time, I seek out their guidance, and I keep them updated on my decisions and progress," described Denise Earley, associate director of integrated marketing and planning for Novartis, and a winner of the 2007 Women in Leadership Mentoring Award from Novartis. She is also a former sales representative.

### The dos and don'ts

A mentor/student relationship is often a special one,

but much like other types of office rapport, it requires a unique set of considerations. With that in mind, here is a list of things you need to think about:

#### Don'ts ...

**Don't** expect your mentor to be your advocate and "promote" your skills to your manager or other colleagues to get you a promotion.

**Don't** brag about who your mentor is and what you are working on.

**Don't** waste your mentor's time by being unprepared for your meetings.

**Don't** forget to follow up on your progress with your mentor. They need to know that you take this seriously.

**Don't** limit yourself to one mentor.

#### Do's ...

**Do** be clear. Always start with the goal in mind. What are you looking to achieve? What does a successful mentorship look like? Be able to explain this to a potential mentor in 60 seconds or less, and provide details when appropriate.

**Do** address your resistance and fears. For some of you, the biggest hurdle is convincing yourself that an executive wants to help you or even has the time. The other common fear is wrapped around not knowing what to say. Prepare for your discussion with potential mentors just like you would prepare for a sales call. Practice with a friend if you need to. Get background information about your potential mentors, run a Google search or scan your company's intranet site.

**Do** define whom you need. Think about the type of mentor you require to reach your goals. To reach your goals, here's what to look for: skill development, relationship building, conflict management, leadership development, job transitioning and strategic career planning. Be careful not to expect your mentor to find your next job for you.

**Do** create a win-win situation. Tell your potential mentor what you bring to the table and what you can do for them. Most mentors just want the opportunity to give back. It doesn't hurt, of course, to point out how you can add value. For starters, you provide him or her with a fresh perspective and an ear to the ground. This can help keep them aware of the issues, struggles and concerns of their direct reports. Your

access to that kind of information can be very valuable to an executive several levels higher than you. Both of you will be learning and building your networks. At the very least, be sure to reassure them that you will treat their time with respect.

**Do** determine your mentor pool. Some companies have formal mentoring programs so be sure to check with your human resources department or manager to see if one exists. Or, you can look for someone outside your company and tap into professional organizations, like HBA or a local chapter of a sales representative organization. There are benefits and drawbacks to internal and external mentors so consider how you can use both. The key is to think creatively and get suggestions from your manager or other executives you admire if your company culture supports this. Use your network. You don't have to do this alone. Get help from others to get introduced. And make a list of the qualities you want your mentor to have.

**Do** outline the mentor relationship you want. Sketch out your ideal parameters, keeping in mind these are not set in stone and a lot will depend on how much time your mentor has to dedicate to the relationship. How formal or informal do you want it to be? What is the best way to communicate and follow up? Do you want to have a status check after a month or two to determine if the mentorship is meeting both your needs?

**Do** build a relationship before you select a mentor. Take your time and meet with three or four mentor candidates. Don't assume the first person you open a dialog with is the best choice or is interested in being a mentor. Fine-tune your approach and determine if your mentor candidate has the qualities you are seeking. You need to find out whether there is enough initial chemistry to make the mentorship worthwhile. Don't rush the process. Think ahead. Set up meetings before a national sales meetings or when you're visiting headquarters, or ask someone who knows your mentor candidate to introduce you. It may take two or three discussions before you find it appropriate to ask about a mentor relationship. As Kim Gawart suggests, "Most important is not to walk up to a VP you just met and say, 'Hi. I'm Chris Jones and I want you to be my mentor!'"

**Do** ask. If you want a formal mentor relationship ask him or her if they are open to being a mentor and explain your goals and expectations.



**Do** get started. Schedule a kickoff meeting and talk in more detail about goals, expectations, communication, frequency of contact and any other parameters that are important to you. Work on one goal at a time and create action steps. Be sure to come to your mentor with what you think are potential solutions and get their guidance.

**Do** keep it going. Give your mentor progress updates items you've discussed to show them that you are committed to your goals. Take time to respond to their e-mails, text messages and phone calls – your mentor may have feedback or questions for you.

**Do** know when to stop. Some mentorship relationships last for months and others last for years. Respect your mentor's time and call it quits when the time is right.

It's up to you to drive this process. Take the first step. You've got everything to gain. Just like Kim Knight, a pharmaceutical sales rep, CNS specialty care rep from AstraZeneca, explains: "When I was promoted to the CNS position, my counterpart left the company six months after I started working in my new territory. To say the least, I had many challenges as a fairly new specialty rep in a highly demanding territory working by myself for 10 months. My mentor, Tony Walker, provided me with the support I needed. We had built up a level of trust so I could ask him any questions I had. He made himself available and helped me through the tough times."

### The big picture

"My company advocates mentoring," Krisi Beherns of Sanofi-Aventis told me. "They recognize that people stay focused on business objectives when they feel that network of support. It also helps retain top talent." A good mentor relationship not only helps you and your mentor – it helps your company, too.

Judi Glova – founder of Pinnacle Coaching & Consulting – is a Certified Empowerment Coach (CEC) and adjunct trainer for the Center for Creative Leadership. Pinnacle's coaches and trainers enhance leadership skills and provide a strategic approach for on-boarding and retaining top talent through a customized behavior modification program that combines emotional and social intelligence development, coaching and workshops to improve interpersonal effectiveness, develop leader behaviors, build high-performance teams and accelerate business growth. She can be reached at [judiglova@pinnacle-coach.com](mailto:judiglova@pinnacle-coach.com).

