

# **Eight Types of Mentors: Which Ones Do You Need?**

*by Caela Farren, Ph.D., MasteryWorks, Inc.*

Research on why people have become masterful in a niche – professions, trades, sports, science and the arts, highlights the importance of having *mentors*. Talk to any great software engineer, project manager, athlete or artist and they will tell you that their mentor(s) made the difference. We've all heard the quote that "*great scientists stand on the shoulders of those who preceded them.*" Mentor/protégé relationships were the earliest forms of learning and professional development. Today having multiple mentors is a necessity because so much is changing around us. No one person can coach others in all the domains of a complex workplace.

## **Why Multiple Mentors?**

All we need to succeed in our careers is to find that right person to mentor and coach us. Right? Yes and no. Yes, we do need mentors to coach us. But, no one mentor is any longer sufficient for 30-40 year careers. Historically, we could succeed with one or two mentors in a lifetime. But with today's increasingly rapid pace of change and accelerated learning, we need multiple mentors to stay competitive in our work life.

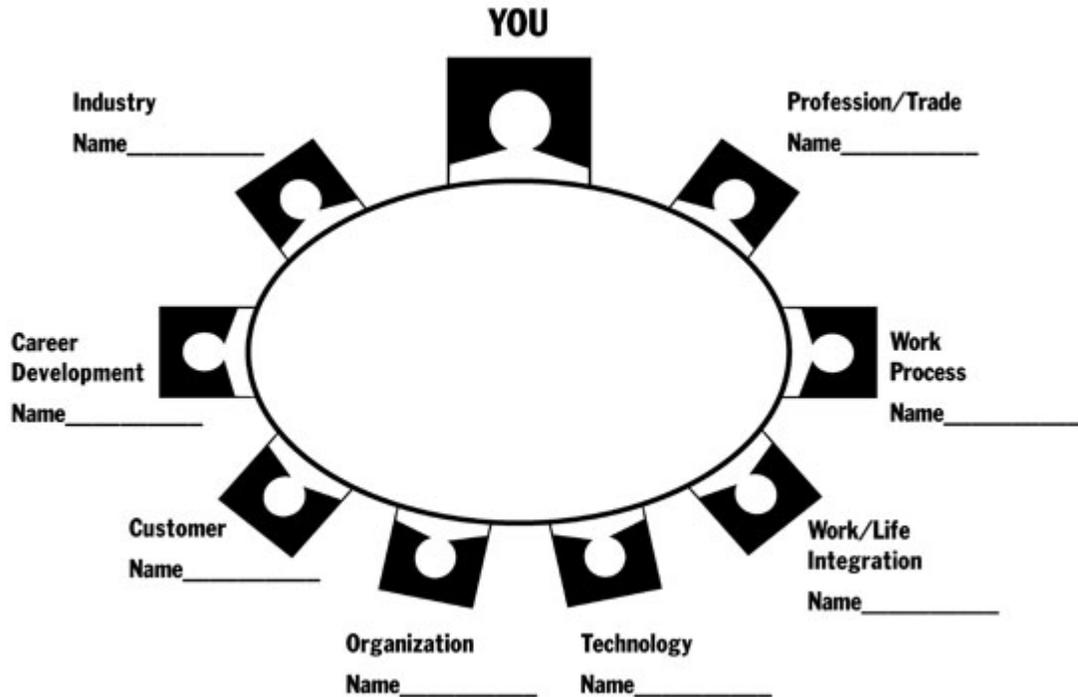
Mentors — who may be older *or* younger than you — are those who know more about a certain area of expertise than you do. Mentoring is a learning and development partnership between a professional with in-depth experience and knowledge in a specific area and a protégé seeking learning and coaching in the same area.

Finding a mentor is up to you. Look around and determine the different people in your industry, organization, and profession you might turn to for extra coaching and support. Once you find someone you think can help, look for ways you can help him/her as well. Mentor/protégé relationships work best when they are two-way streets. Listen generously to what mentors need. You will find it easier to ask them for what you need. Don't be a taker! Be a giver!

Today mentors may be our juniors, our seniors, colleagues, or even people we have never met personally. The mentor-for-life relationship is a gift. However, many other kinds of mentors — wise advisors who know much more about an area than you do — abound. So, take a look at the list below. What mentors do you already have? What mentors might you find that would give you a distinct advantage in your on-going learning and professional development?

## Build Your Board of Directors

Use the diagram below to assess where you have mentors and where you might need mentors. Read the descriptions below and take charge of building your own Board of Directors.



### Profession or Trade Mentor

Your profession, trade or business field is continuing to change and evolve. Finding someone from whom you can continue to learn is important. This person will help you stay current on the important changes in your profession as well as react to your ideas about the new practices and competencies you need to master. Since your profession or trade endures, this is the most important area for your development.

Do you have a mentor with whom you can –

- Discuss the trends in your profession?
- Outline the basic practices that must be mastered to reach an expert level in your professions?
- Discuss key players in the field you must get to know?
- Brainstorm new technology that will impact you in the future?
- Prioritize the experiences and competencies that will best equip you for the future?

Only a mentor in your profession or trade can play this coaching role. You may be fortunate to have your manager as an expert in your profession or trade. But often today, managers are not. Talk with your manager to discover people inside and outside the organization who are experts in your profession or trade.

### **Industry Mentor**

Most industries are changing rapidly. Don't get so busy doing your *job* that you forget to pay attention to changes and trends in your *industry*. New players come into the playing field – large companies and young “up starts.” Global competitors appear. New products or services are required to meet the needs of customers. Understanding the trends, competitors, challenges and needed breakthroughs in an industry positions you to be a major contributor. To do this, find an expert in the industry. Study associations. Research key presenters and articles. If you can't work personally with them, follow their thinking and development. This is easier than ever with our web-based research capacity.

Do you have someone to turn to for building your industry savvy? Such a mentor can give you:

- Insight into trends in the industry;
- Major competitors to research and study;
- Companies to watch that are "best in class;"
- Breakthroughs that need to be made;
- Breakdowns that are limiting the industry;
- Journals and/or books to read;
- Leaders to follow; and
- Associations to join.

Professional development requirements, new areas for learning and new competencies are shaped by the industry needs. Find a mentor that you can trust about the Industry.

### **Organization Mentor**

Whether you're new or have long tenure in your organization, it continues to change. Mergers, new leaders, scandals, increased competition and technology continue to reshape many organizations. The organization you joined may no longer be the same – changes in mission, values, strategies and even products and services shift the organization culture. If your organization is “doing more with less” and rewards a “24/7” mentality, you need to be more knowledgeable than ever about the politics in your organization. Too often, people are busy doing a good job. They're too stressed to see what's happening around them. An organization mentor can help see changes and trends before it's too late.

Do you have an organization mentor who can:

- Clarify the mission and strategies of the organization;
- Show you how your job contributes to the mission and strategy of your organization?
- Discuss what counts for success in your organization? What are the norms – the "dos" and "don'ts" of the organization?
- Help you see the pressing business needs?
- Describe the values and style of the leaders and implications for performance?
- Discuss how changes in the organization, such as mergers and acquisitions, competitors, or new leaders will impact your business unit and job?

Find a mentor to talk with about these issues. Don't be caught off guard as the organization changes while you're *doing a great job*. Find a mentor who can clue you in on the subtle nuances of organization politics.

### **Customer Mentor**

The more powerfully you serve your customers, the stronger your organization. Unfortunately, in many large organizations, thousands of workers have little or no contact with customers. We've asked hundreds of employees *how their work impacts their customers*. Many didn't know. *They were just doing their jobs*. If you work directly with customers – sales, management, advertising, customer service, finance, etc., you have a better idea of customer needs. However, they change. Demographics change. And work you thought essential to the customer disappears because of new strategies or technology. Remember, you serve both external and internal customers.

Do you have a customer mentor who can:

- Get you up to speed on the various customers you serve?
- Give the history of various customers and subtle ways they differ?
- Inform you about the key players and their expectations?
- Discuss the greatest successes or failures with the customer?
- Review the basic interests each customer wants met?; and
- Coach you in the best ways to get regular feedback?

Find someone with this customer history and you'll be surprised at your increased comfort and competence.

## **Work Process Mentor**

In every organization, there are people who know *how to get things done quickly*. They cut through the red tape and bureaucracy. They know who to call. They can “run around” any process. They know how to save time and money by knowing exactly how the system really works. You can find them in many places. They may be the best project managers, administrative assistants, or seasoned people in finance, purchasing, or the mailroom, etc.

Find a mentor who can:

- Explain the “ins and outs” of project management as well as day-to-day expediting;
- Teach you how to use the budgeting process, purchasing process and filing expense claims;
- Point out the critical factors in making a presentation – software, engagement, length, etc.;
- File medical forms; or
- Speed up the proposal making process.

Look for such a mentor. He or she will make a big difference in your life and work. You’ll be able to speed up core processes and use your time more efficiently.

## **Technology Mentor**

None of us work or live without being surrounded by changing technology. And, no matter how good our systems are, there are breakdowns. New technologies continue to evolve. We are expected to master these tools quickly and use them effectively. Staying current with changing technology is becoming an employment requirement – whether spoken or not.

Do you have a mentor who is available to:

- Coach you and answer questions about new technology tools?
- Advise you on new systems to learn or explore?
- Help you with technical breakdowns?
- Work with you to develop a plan for using leading technologies – whether required or not by your current job?

This person can be inside your organization or outside, younger or older. This mentor might be an internal IT support person, a college student, or colleague. What’s important is that they are dedicated to your continual learning and easy to reach when you need them.

## **Work/Life Integration Mentor**

Personal happiness and a sense of harmony thrive when your work and life support each other. Much of today's stress is caused by the pressure of work – need for speed, shift work, demanding clients or colleagues or intense travel schedules. If you are a Millennial, GenXer, or Boomer, you want a life. You're not waiting to retire to have time for family, hobbies, special interests or relaxation.

Find a mentor who can:

- Help you negotiate life needs with work priorities;
- Choose work situations that “fit” with your interests and social relationships;
- Legitimize your desire to have a full and happy life, outside of work;
- Determine ways to speak with your manager that create new opportunities rather than conflicts of interest; and
- Help you detect and honor the results of stress and see steps you can take to improve your life as well as your work.

Learn from the people who have done this successfully. You will feel more peaceful and energized.

## **Career Development Mentor**

This is the role we most frequently think of when we think of a mentor. This person spots you, takes you under his/her wing, gives you coaching and advice, both personally and professionally. This is a relationship "made in heaven" – a gift. This relationship can last for years or a lifetime. As it develops, you will be able to talk through just about anything that comes up with this person. Any of the above relationships "could" develop into this long-term relationship. If you're fortunate to have this kind of relationship, express your gratitude frequently. And, look for other people along the way for whom you can play the same role.

## **Mentors Anytime! Anywhere!**

Thanks to our telecommunication links, we can talk with anyone in the world inexpensively and frequently. This makes it possible for virtual mentors. It is possible to introduce yourself to anyone on the web – asking them to be your just-in-time mentor. Obviously, this is about "how" you create a relationship rather than the nature of the expertise they may bring to you. Any of the roles described above can occur on-line. The unusual aspect of this kind of mentor-

protégé relationship is that you may never actually meet your mentor face-to-face. Nevertheless, with their permission, you can avail yourself of their wisdom and coaching when you most need it. Obviously, you need to build the relationship and be on the lookout for ways to support your mentors – alerting them to articles, books, projects, and other areas that address their needs.

As the business world becomes increasingly fast-paced and complex, the need for multiple mentors intensifies. The more you can learn from the experts around you, the better you will do in your career. Be on the lookout for people who can play a variety of mentoring roles. Ask for help. Ask people to coach you in specific ways. Build your own Board of Directors. Be sure you never take their help and support for granted. Mentoring is a two-way street with mentors and protégés each having responsibilities. Go out of your way for them and express your gratitude. Some of these relationships will be short-lived while others may last for years.

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**About the Author** — Caela Farren, Ph.D., is President of MasteryWorks, Inc. in McLean, VA. She has been a consultant, entrepreneur, and educator for over 30 years, Caela has worked with hundreds of thousands of people worldwide to get them on their mastery path. Caela's practice and company builds strong links between changing trends in industries, changing strategies of organizations and the talents and aspirations of individuals. People who work with her company discover their passion, their mastery path, and bring renewed contribution and high performance to their organizations.

Caela is known internationally for her expertise in developing talent management products and services. Her solutions are user-friendly systems that serve the needs of both organizations and individuals. She is frequently quoted in the media regarding her thoughts and advice on changing careers and work patterns in the nation. Hundreds of organizations have implemented talent management solutions from MasteryWorks, Inc. — consulting, workshops, assessment instruments and web-based talent management portals.

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