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## WHEN IT COMES TO FINDING A MENTOR, DON'T SETTLE FOR JUST ONE

by **Stephanie Bouchard**



**Margarita Diaz and Jaclyn Woolnough**

Two years ago, Margarita Diaz, RN, had just moved into a new leadership role in the surgical services unit at Cleveland's MetroHealth System. She was also exploring the idea of taking her career in a different direction by pursuing a dual master's program in nursing and business administration.

She wanted someone to help her navigate her new role and provide her with career advice about two aspects of healthcare that she had little experience with: business and finance. "As a nurse, I wanted to be well-rounded and I wanted to look at the profession from a business aspect versus clinical," she says. What she needed to help her find her way was a mentor.

Decades of research have revealed that having a mentor can be invaluable to enhancing your career. Those who have mentors have greater career success, this research shows, including higher rates of promotion, larger salaries, and more job satisfaction.

Clearly, those who want career success need to find mentors! How do we do that, though? And, in this business climate where people don't stay at one job or one company for long, is one traditional mentor enough?

Photo courtesy of MetroHealth System

Let's tackle the second question first. The short answer is no, one mentor is not enough. What people need are what career experts call developmental networks: A personal board of advisers from inside and outside your work environment. The traditional mentoring model of a highly placed, older person guiding a younger person just starting out is one component of a career strategy.

## Seek Support

"You need sponsors, you need role models, you need people who are supporting you," says Wendy Murphy, co-author of *Strategic Relationships at Work* ([http://www.amazon.com/Strategic-Relationships-Work-Creating-Sponsors/dp/0071823476/ref=sr\\_1\\_1?ie=UTF8&qid=1391782853&sr=8-1&keywords=circle+of+mentors](http://www.amazon.com/Strategic-Relationships-Work-Creating-Sponsors/dp/0071823476/ref=sr_1_1?ie=UTF8&qid=1391782853&sr=8-1&keywords=circle+of+mentors)), which she wrote with mentoring research pioneer Kathy Kram. "The reason we say developmental networks are so critical is because you probably need all of these different types of support, but they don't all have to come from the same person," Murphy says.

### The New Rules of Mentoring: Wendy Murphy



Other mentors you should seek include step-ahead, peer, reverse, and inspirational mentors, Murphy, Kram, and other career experts say. Rely on a peer mentor to strategize things like your next annual review conversation with your boss, for example. Use the time you have with your harder-to-meet-with senior-level mentor for things like finding out how to get that challenging assignment that will result in more visibility for you within the organization, Murphy says.



Wendy Murphy

You may be saying to yourself, "That's just great. It was daunting enough having to find one mentor, but now I have to find a whole slew of them?" Don't worry; it's not as intimidating as it may seem.

There are many ways to create a network of mentors. Start with a self-assessment, Kram says. "Be proactive by knowing who you are and what you're seeking in terms of your own growth and development," she adds. Look at your personal and professional goals, your personal values, your experiences, and your strengths and weaknesses—those areas you want to develop further. Identify what it is you bring to the profession that would be valuable to other people.

With this awareness, be strategic about who within your organization and outside your organization might be a valuable resource to you, Kram says. "Being proactive and being strategic about reaching out to people is going to result in better and higher-quality developmental relationships," she adds.

It might be tempting to focus on people who are at senior levels, but don't forget about your peers, she says. "If you're only looking for senior members, you're probably discounting some very useful resources that are easier to connect with because they're at your level and they're more plentiful than seniors."

## Be Well-Resourced

OK. You've identified some folks you'd like to get to connect with. Now what to you do? Start by discovering your resources, career experts say. Maybe the organization you work for has a formal employee mentoring program, such as the one at Ohio's MetroHealth System. It was through this program that Margarita Diaz found herself a traditional mentor in Jaclyn Woolnough, MetroHealth's director of revenue integrity.



Diaz, a nurse who was looking for a mentor with finance and business experience as she contemplated a business administration career track, would not have organically met Woolnough, the two said in a joint interview, because they moved in different areas—finance and clinical—that didn't intersect.

"I was looking for someone who had the knowledge in the business world and the finance world that would complete me, so to speak," Diaz says. "Oh my gosh, I complete you!" Woolnough laughed, in a reference to an oft-quoted line spoken by actor Tom Cruise in the 1996 movie "Jerry Maguire."

Like the best of mentoring relationships, both Diaz and Woolnough get something valuable out of their relationship, which has been thriving for two years, they said. Diaz gets advice and support from a senior level manager in a field she is interested in but has little experience with. Woolnough gets to know the inner workings of an area of the health system she is unfamiliar with. This knowledge helps her in her revenue integrity role. She also gets to form a relationship with someone in the up-and-coming leadership group of the organization, she said.

Kathy Kram

If your organization doesn't have a formal employee mentoring program, don't fret. Many organizations don't have such programs in place so you'll have to do what most people do: Make connections any way you can.

One of the most effective ways to make a connection with someone is through someone else you both know, called "warm" connecting, says Ellen Ensher, author of *Power Mentoring* (<http://ellenensher.com/>). Making a "cold" connection—reaching out directly to someone you don't know—can be done, too, and with people used to connecting with strangers through social media, it is easier to do now than in the past. LinkedIn (<https://www.linkedin.com/>), for example, is great for making "warm" and "cold" connections, she said.

## How to Get a Mentor - Tedx Talk from Ellen Ensher



Professional organizations, like HFMA (<http://www.hfma.org/>), are also a great way to network, she notes. Many of these types of groups offer mentoring programs.

Once you've made your connection and agreed to a mentoring relationship, make sure you set expectations for the relationship, Ensher says. Decide how and when you will communicate. If you can, she suggests working on a project together or integrating mentoring into something you're already doing. Everyone is busy. If you both like jogging, for example, you could jog together.

Don't get discouraged if you get turned down, Ensher says. Senior-level people, particularly women because there are so few of them in upper management, get besieged with mentoring requests. "Maybe you can't reach the highest-ranking woman in your organization, but she has a lineage: people she's mentored, people who have mentored her," she says. "Maybe you can do an informational interview with her and see if she'd connect you with someone in her lineage."

Given the limited number of women in upper management, it's also a good idea to cultivate male mentors, Ensher and Kram say. You'll derive different benefits from having both men and women mentors, Kram notes. For example, women can identify with gender challenges, whereas men may also have the clout and status to help get you promoted.

## Network, Network, Network

Developing a mentoring network may seem like a lot of work, but the benefits are worth it, career experts say. And it's also important to remember that the skills you gain in learning to develop a network of mentors can be used in your personal life, too, Ensher says.

Women have many roles in life, she adds, and those roles are constantly changing—now a new mother, now a new manager, now running a school fund-raiser for the first time, now a cancer patient, now running a department, etc. “As we go through life, we're going to keep having new challenges. We have to keep learning, growing, and developing, personally and professionally,” she says. “Any time we have to take on a new role, personally as well as professionally, use those professional skills and get yourself a team of mentors to get through that new role.”

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**Stephanie Bouchard is a freelance writer based in Maine. Visit her website** (<http://www.stephaniebouchard.net/>).

The logo for the HERE initiative, featuring the word "here." in a lowercase, rounded, red font. The letter "e" is stylized with a thin red outline and a small circle at the end of its tail.

The Conversation Starts **HERE**.

The HERE initiative is an effort that aims to inspire not only women but men invested in the professional development of women leaders in the health care field with the tools and resources they need to succeed. We hope to **inspire** one another, **learn** together, and **connect** with colleagues across the industry.

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