

Key Points

I decided to develop relationships with two professional mentors who would be able to guide me based on their proven experience and wisdom. I wanted to receive more than one perspective, including viewpoints from inside and outside my organization and from both a male and a female.

My main focus was to find someone who had a proven track record in health care, had made it to the top of his or her field, and held positions similar to what I was aspiring to.

An external mentor can help one see the broad picture. On the other hand, an internal mentor can give insight into the inner workings, politics, culture, and connections within the organization. He or she can provide specific information on job-related questions, internal networking, and political sensitivities. The mentor needed to be a neutral party, not a supervisor, so that I could speak openly with him. My mentors have both stressed the importance of understanding my personal work habits and preferences and making sure that my career path aligns with them. Both mentors have had me complete self-reflection exercises and asked me to consider how the information disclosed through those exercises fits with my chosen career path. Both mentors have suggested that if I focus on my personal strengths within my work environment, my career will prosper. They also stressed the importance of continuing my education and building upon my skill set.

Both mentors have stressed getting my name out in the workplace and in the community. They have told me to perform my job at 100 percent, and then go find another 50 percent to devote to something else in the company or community. Deliver on what you say you will do, and then exceed expectations. Volunteer for every opportunity that opens—if the opportunity aligns with your strengths and interests.

My mentors also have stressed the importance of building relationships within my organization. What I have found to be most beneficial is having a community of like-minded peers at work with whom I am able to informally share and brainstorm ideas. I have also learned how to make the most of the time with my mentors. The relationship does not have to be formal, but it is important to have an agenda for each meeting, to follow up on the last meeting's topics, and to discuss progress. I have met with each mentor on average once every two months and we communicated by e-mails and phone calls in between. Communication has been honest and open in both directions. The relationships will start to blossom once you are able to discuss topics openly, and receive the constructive feedback or advice you may not have gotten otherwise.