Mentoring
The University of Chicago Graham School
Career Resources

Not everything you learn will be learned in school. Stepping into an actual workplace, or reentering one after time in school, or jumping into a new profession, requires you to understand the logic and incentive structures in your new occupational setting. You can’t always master the rules (both formal and informal) and expectations of your new profession alone. Finding a mentor can be an important step.

You might find willing mentors in your new workplace, or you might find them through professional or alumni networks.

Katherine Reynolds Lewis from Fortune magazine has mapped out some guidelines for finding and maintaining your relationship with a mentor:

1. A classic mistake in seeking a mentor is to ask a senior executive to lunch and spend the time aimlessly talking, without knowing what kind of help you need. The more specific and targeted your goal, the better.

At first, you may not know where you need to grow or develop, but that can be part of the process. Once you identify areas of weakness, pick mentors who can help you in a specific area, perhaps management, communication, or presentations.

When you do get that specific advice, follow up with your mentor to share the outcome. People like to know that their advice helped. If you end up departing from your mentor's advice, be honest about that too.

2. When you ask someone to give you advice, you owe the courtesy of respecting their time and making the most of it. That means coming to each lunch or coffee meeting with a clear agenda in mind, being efficient in your conversation and following up afterward. Play an active role in the relationship.

You should set the agenda for meetings, follow up in between, and define the relationship.
3. It's tempting to rush right out and ask your professional hero to be your mentor. That would be a mistake. Such a relationship has to develop naturally.

First of all, some people hate to be explicitly asked to be a mentor. Get to know someone before you pop the question, if indeed you need to ask outright. When looking for a mentor, ask your contacts and colleagues for someone with the kind of industry expertise, personal characteristics, or connections that you're seeking.

It may help to take the pressure off to realize that you'll have multiple mentors at different points in your career, perhaps some of them even simultaneously. One person may mentor you about your work-life balance, while another introduces you to important potential customers.

See http://management.fortune.cnn.com/2014/05/02/career-mentor-mistakes/.