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Emily Melton, partner at the venture capital firm DFJ, shares how to build and nurture relationships with mentors. She recommends that those early in their career really think about what they can offer to mentors, such as time and raw intellect. By offering what your strengths, you build reciprocal relationships.



Transcript

- Yeah, one of the hardest things about mentors is you can't go and say, hey, will you be my mentor? 'Cause that's like, that's not the right way of starting those conversations.. And one of the kinda key principles that I live by, that I think is particularly relevant for this, is the principle of reciprocity, right? You give and then you get.. And when you think about, what is that exchange between what you have at this moment, of usually in your career, which is time, raw capability and intellect and eagerness.. And what do the people that you want to be mentors, they don't have time, they have tons of people who are asking for lots of things, and most people are asking and not giving to them.. And so if you can find someone that you wanna learn from and you can think about, what can I give them? What are things that I can free up? What is that that someone's really interested in the space? Let me go and show them, compile all this research about what would be interesting and tell them, like for me, four or five companies that would be useful.. Then, that starts the relationship if you give someone something, "Here, I wanna be helpful to you, "can I have five, ten minutes of your time?" That starts it.. How can I be helpful, and keep going through that process.. That was something that I didn't really figure out early on enough in my career.. So that's one piece.. And the other thing is, it's really hard when you're on that steep phase of the career to ask for help..

You want to act like you know.. I remember sitting in so many rooms, so many times in my career, I have no idea what the hell's going on, but if I say something, people are gonna think I'm dumb.. So I'm just going to sit here and nod.. What I found as I've gotten older is that, now, half of the time I'm like, no, I don't understand.. I'm sorry.. You're making it too complicated.. Explain it to me.. You found that people, as they get more comfortable, are the ones that are really wanting to understand, really wanna know, versus actually pretend they know.. And that's a really empowering things where those mentors or others, where you're asking those questions, and admitting that you need help.. Give yourself the opportunity to let someone explain something? People like explaining things..

You guys get whole speaker series to come up here and explain something or talk.. People like talking about their experiences, so give them that opportunity...