

URL: <https://ecorner.stanford.edu/in-brief/cold-call-a-mentor-or-even-create-one/>

Airbnb strategic advisor and Modern Elder Academy founder Chip Conley explains that his two most important mentors were people he never met in person. He offers an even more radical idea: Do some digital sleuthing to learn more about someone you admire, and use them as a DIY model to think through your own decisions.



Transcript

- The two most profound mentors I've ever had in my life, I never met.. Interesting.. The first one was a guy named Herb Kelleher.. So Herb Kelleher was the founding CEO of Southwest Airlines.. And after a couple of years of starting my company and I was growing the company.. We're going to have a second and a third hotel, I wrote to the CEO of Southwest Airlines, based in Dallas, and I wrote a letter because that's what we used to do.. So I wrote a letter and said will you help me.. I'm a, at that point, a 28 year old CEO.. I'm growing my company.. I like your culture..

The culture of your company is incredible.. And I said can you teach me a few things.. Three weeks later I received a letter back from Herb Helleher saying yes, I will help you.. I guess the letter I wrote was pretty, I guess was pointed or something, and he just he said I'll help you.. So for the next 10 years about once a year I'd write him a letter.. We never had a phone call, never had a phone call! We just wrote letters to each other.. Now similarly I wrote one letter to a guy named Peter Drucker.. And I think Peter Drucker was the first modern elder before we actually had a phrase modern elder.. Peter Drucker lived 'till the age of 95.. He wrote, of his 40 books he wrote, 2/3 of them he wrote after age 65..

He's the one who popularized the idea of the knowledge worker in 1959.. I think today it's we don't need knowledge workers anymore.. We need wisdom workers because knowledge is all in our smartphone.. But both of these guys, I wrote Peter Drucker, he wrote me back.. So just know that sometimes we think that there's not a mentor in our midst, but there may be somebody out there you could write or you could reach out to.. Or in the world we live in today, you can learn so much about someone else who you may never meet and just learn everything you can about them and then use that as your form of DIY, do it yourself, mentorship from somebody you might never even meet...