

URL: <https://ecorner.stanford.edu/in-brief/get-many-mentors/>

Early in her career, author and board director Shellye Archambeau realized the wisdom of having many mentors, not just one. Often, she says, it's helpful to not seek formal "mentorship," but to gradually adopt mentors by asking for advice and always following up. Furthermore, she has found, mentors often turn into sponsors—the people who actively advocate for you and advance your career.



Transcript

- I learned a great lesson relatively early in my career.. 00:00:07,849 Probably, I don't know, six years into my career, something like that.. I was at IBM and IBM decided that high potential employees, they wanted to make sure had mentors.. And so they decided that they were gonna get ask the employees who would you like to be your mentor, because a lot of other ways don't work.. So fine, I get the request who do you want to be your mentor? Well I picked a gentleman by the name of Roland Harris.. Roland was somebody a couple levels above me, I knew him, I thought he liked me.. Said great.. Well a couple days later, I get a call.. (click sound) It's Roland, Shellye.. Hi Roland! Shellye..

You put my name down to be you're mentor.. And I'm thinking well, yeah, Roland.. I thought you liked me.. And he says "Shellye, you've got me, go get somebody else." And I went, oh.. So that taught me a couple things.. One, I had mentors I didn't even know, right? Cause they weren't formal, we never had a conversation about it.. And number two, if I can have one, I can have two, I can have three, I can have as many mentors as possible.. And so that's what I started doing.. I said all right, fine.. I'm gonna go get a bunch of mentors..

And I also learned, don't ask people.. Cause they're gonna typically say no, cause they don't have time.. And they don't think you're going to be a good mentee.. Which you're probably not.. And we'll talk - we can talk about that too if you want, Tina.. But, what I did was I adopted mentors.. I just started treating them like mentors.. When I realized that Roland was actually a mentor and I didn't know it, I said oh, okay.. So I would just start asking people simple, easy questions, you know, or advice.. And then I always followed up..

And that's the key, you have to follow up.. The mentors need something too.. This is not a one way thing.. This is a relationship.. So you need to get value, and give value.. And the biggest value you can give a mentor frankly, is appreciation.. Is knowledge that intrinsically they helped.. Cause most people want to help deep within them.. So go adopt mentors.. Have as many as you can possibly support..

And then what happens a lot of times, is as you work hard, and do well, and rise, many mentors can become sponsors.. Because now they want to claim you.. It's like, oh yeah, Shellye? Oh yeah, I've been giving her advice on the side.. Right? (laughs) This is all me.. You know, but they do.. And they'll open doors for you.. So I've had many a mentor turn into a sponsor...