FAST TRACK YOUR SUPPLY CHAIN CAREER THROUGH MENTORSHIP

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WHAT IS MENTORING?

Mentoring is the mutually beneficial, voluntary relationship typically between a more senior individual and a less experienced individual. This relationship is built on the shared desire for development of career goals and objectives. Unlike coaching or employee-manager relationships, mentoring follows an informal process, without the need for direct reports or performance reviews. A variety of different mentor categories, benefits and ways to find a mentor are available, especially in the supply chain discipline.

The common definitions of “mentor” and “mentee”:

- A “mentor” is defined as a wise and trusted counselor or teacher: an influential senior sponsor or supporter.
- A “mentee” is a person who is guided by a mentor.

Common synonyms include advisor, coach, guide, tutor, teacher and trainer.

“Mentoring is a brain to pick, an ear to listen, and a push in the right direction.” — John Crosby

“Show me a successful individual and I’ll show you someone who had real positive influences in his or her life. I don’t care what you do for a living—if you do it well I’m sure there was someone cheering you on or showing the way. A mentor.” — Denzel Washington

“What I think the mentor gets is the great satisfaction of helping somebody along, helping somebody take advantage of an opportunity that maybe he or she did not have.” — Clint Eastwood

“If you’re lucky enough to do well, it’s your responsibility to send the elevator back down.” — Kevin Spacey
MENTOR CATEGORIES

Peer or buddy mentors
- Early stage of career
- Onboarding acceleration
- Informal and high-frequency

Career mentors
- Accelerate learning of skills (functional, technical, etc.)
- Remove common obstacles that slow or inhibit growth
- Knowledge transfer

Life mentors
- Typically the most important and high-impact
- Mentor may not be from same employer
- Major focus on growth and leadership
BENEFITS OF MENTORSHIP

From mentor to mentee to employer, all individuals involved in this relationship can reap the benefits, even if they are not the ones directly receiving the advice. It’s typically assumed that only the mentee receives career growth, when in reality all involved in the engagement can improve. Mentor–mentee relationships can provide insight, guidance, leadership development and an improved workplace beyond the span of the engagement.

Mentor Benefits
- Recognition as a subject matter expert and leader
- Exposure to fresh ideas and perspectives
- Gratitude and personal satisfaction from helping others succeed
- Opportunity to reflect on one’s goals and accomplishments
- Development and enhancement of leadership and coaching abilities
- Improvement in communication style and skills
- Help advance one’s career
- Impact the next generation of supply chain talent
- Help foster promotions within the organization

Mentee Benefits
- Access to an untapped network and increased visibility within company
- Leadership improvement
- Help prioritize and accomplish goals
- Improve self-confidence and communication
- Career mapping and planning advice
- How to utilize and benefit from constructive feedback
- Better understanding of company culture and how to navigate
- Gain invaluable insights into an organization, trends, etc.
- Reduce isolation (e.g., remote workers, independent consultants)
- Alleviate obstacles and avoid common mistakes
- Sounding board for sharing and validating ideas and opinions
- Learn how to become a good mentor
- Exposure to new ideas and improvement in critical thinking abilities
**Employer Benefits**
- Very cost-effective approach to developing talent
- Maintain high level of employee engagement
- Improve employee retention rate
- Transfer critical business knowledge and skills
- Improve succession planning throughout organization
- Develop a learning culture that promotes professional growth
- Transform culture to a desired state (share desired traits and behaviors)
- Develop and enhance leadership and coaching skills in managers
- Improve motivation, morale and overall performance
- Develop, advance and retain high-potential employees
- Promote collaboration throughout the workforce
- Improve diversity in the workforce
- Accelerate innovation throughout the enterprise
- Teach tenured employees new skills (reverse mentoring)
HOW TO IDENTIFY AND WORK WITH A MENTOR

A mentor isn’t necessarily someone you work with directly at your company or in your specific supply chain function or industry. If you’d like to work with a mentor, begin by creating a list of exactly what you’re looking for in this individual. What do you expect out of the relationship? What career goals and aspirations do you have? How can the mentor’s help get you there? This is imperative to ensure you get the most out of the relationship. Be sure to seek a mentor in your function or industry, unless you’re looking to switch into a different area of supply chain or a different industry. Finding a mentor could greatly increase your chances of both reaching your career goals and accelerating in a field in which you may not have much professional experience.

Be sure to poll your colleagues and supply chain network to identify potential mentor candidates, since referrals typically yield the best results. You should also find out if your company offers a mentor program. If your company doesn’t offer a program, consider discussing the idea and the benefits of establishing a mentorship program with your superiors.

Another place to look for mentors in the supply chain discipline is through supply chain associations, such as APICS, which recently launched the APICS Mentor Center. Joining your local chapter and attending networking events in your area can help expand your supply chain network as well as introduce you to potential mentor candidates.

Once you identify someone who has achieved goals similar to your own and might qualify as a good mentor, initiate contact via email or phone with the goal of starting a dialogue and ultimately landing a meeting—perhaps over coffee or lunch. Let your potential mentor know you’re seeking professional guidance and are highly interested in learning subject matter that aligns with his or her area of expertise. Be sure to refrain from blatantly asking, “Want to be my mentor?” When the timing is right and you feel the individual would make a great mentor, then ask the person to be your mentor.

When you’ve secured the mentorship, start scheduling meetings with your mentor. Develop communication templates to aid with facilitating the mentorship relationship, such as agendas and progress update templates. You can find a document template to help with starting the conversation and goal setting on the APICS Mentor Center Resources page. These templates will help keep your relationship on track for success. Always be on time and prepared for each meeting with your mentor—remember that he or she is taking time out of a busy schedule to work with you.
HOW TO USE LINKEDIN TO FIND AND ENGAGE A MENTOR

LinkedIn is a great place to find mentors who you may not know on a personal level. This business-oriented social networking service provides you with the opportunity to network with professionals in the supply chain discipline and connect with potential future mentors.

Before you get started, make sure you’ve created a complete and fully optimized profile on LinkedIn. Next, research different profiles in the supply chain discipline that have the strong leadership traits and subject matter expertise within your domain that spark your interest and align with your career goals. Be sure to seek individuals who contribute the type of content that resonates with you. One great way to identify leaders and influencers within your domain is through LinkedIn Pulse, the content publishing platform.

When you find a few individuals you would be interested in learning more from, be sure to check out their recommendations and analyze for their strengths. Taking detailed notes on each LinkedIn profile is imperative, because you’ll leverage this information to engage and “break the ice” with each contact. You should also “follow” these individuals on LinkedIn in order to keep tabs on future curated and shared content. Don’t be afraid to engage with their postings and activity. You can “like” their posts and comment when you have something worthwhile to contribute.

When you’re ready to connect, send a customized connection request to your potential contacts referencing something unique in their profile or an article they wrote or shared. State your reasoning for establishing a connection. Once you become first-level connections, send an email or InMail to initiate a dialogue, explaining that you wish to gain more wisdom within their area of expertise. Ask for a coffee meeting, or at least a phone call, stating that you’d like to learn about “X” or “Y” during the meeting. Provide a glimpse into your background, as well as your target goals or career aspirations you have for the near future. Chances are the mentor was once in your exact shoes, and can often provide quality advice from personal experiences that you can leverage to advance your own career.

If you do not receive a response or feedback from the potential mentor, give him or her a few days before providing a short follow-up reiterating that you wish to connect. Many subject matter experts and senior-level supply chain professionals are extremely busy with their jobs, so if you don’t receive a response after two or three attempts, move on to the next mentor candidate on your list.
DO'S AND DON’TS OF MENTORING

In order to ensure that your mentor relationship is successful and utilized to its fullest potential, be sure to follow these do’s and don’ts throughout the process and the relationship that follows.

**DO’S**

- ✓ Seek out mentors who have deep expertise in the areas that you’re most passionate about learning and improving on.
- ✓ Engage with mentors who have strong leadership abilities.
- ✓ Always be prepared for every call with your mentor.
- ✓ Look for a mentor who can relate to you and your objectives.
- ✓ Seek out a well-connected and respected mentor to aid with facilitating introductions to key leaders and influencers.
- ✓ Always remember that a mentor may not be able to solve all problems or help with all goals.
- ✓ Understand that mentoring is a two-way street and you need to put as much into it as the mentor to maximize results.
- ✓ Always exude trustworthiness with your mentor and maintain confidentiality when asked.
- ✓ Always be yourself—your mentor needs to understand your true self, thoughts, and motivations.
- ✓ Remember to practice “pay it back” by staying in touch with your mentor and providing advice when you’re able to.
- ✓ Understand that you’re fully responsible for driving the relationship, making contact with your mentor, creating agendas for each session, and providing status updates on progress.
- ✓ Be aware that mentoring is a developmental relationship where feelings, thoughts, and emotions should come into play.
DON’TS

Never ask your direct manager to be your mentor.

Don’t even think of asking your mentor to help find you a job.

Never drop the ball on any commitments you’ve made to your mentor.

Never assume that because you’re successful or experienced in your field, you don’t need a mentor.

Don’t rely on one mentor to help guide you. You’ll need multiple mentors off and on throughout your career.

Don’t expect to receive mentoring without providing anything in return—mentorships should be mutually beneficial.

Don’t make the mistake of dropping mentorship just because you achieve a new goal. Everyone has room to grow.

Don’t give up if you have a bad experience with your first mentor; instead, seek out a new mentor.

Don’t forget that your ideal mentor could be someone close to you such as a relative, friend, colleague, supplier or customer.

Don’t expect the mentorship to last forever. You may achieve the results you desire and outgrow the mentor.

Don’t end a perfectly good friendship you’ve made with a mentor after the mentorship has ended.

Don’t assume that mentorships are time- and labor-intensive. You can learn a lot just by committing an hour or two per month.
APICS MENTOR CENTER

The APICS Mentor Center is an online program that facilitates connections between supply chain professionals to help establish mentor or mentee relationships. Mentors and mentees can set up profiles and complete searches in order to find a good match based on their professional needs.

Mentorship relationships can help mentees explore future career paths, expand their professional networks, and gain knowledge and perspective on the supply chain industry. It’s equally fulfilling for mentors to contribute to someone’s growth and development.

The APICS Mentor Center also offers great resources to help get your relationship off on the right foot, including an FAQ about the program and a goal development/mentor conversation starter worksheet.

Get Started!
Visit apics.org/mentor today to learn more about the program and start your search today!
ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Rodney Apple is the founder and president of SCM Talent Group, LLC—a national supply chain recruiting and executive search firm that recruits across the end-to-end supply chain discipline. For nearly 10 years, Rodney worked at the corporate headquarters for The Coca-Cola Company and The Home Depot, where he led professional and executive recruiting for their global supply chain organizations. To date, Rodney has successfully filled over 1,000 professional- to executive-level supply chain positions for clients ranging from Fortune 15 to startup. Rodney also authors “The Supply Chain Talent Blog,” where he shares advice on job search strategy, résumé optimization, interviewing tips, career development, hiring and more. For more information, please visit scmtalent.com.

Visit apics.org/careercoach to read the library of white papers authored by Rodney Apple.
ABOUT APICS

APICS is the premier professional association for supply chain management and the leading provider of research, education and certification programs that elevate supply chain excellence, innovation and resilience. The APICS Certified in Production and Inventory Management (CPIM), APICS Certified Supply Chain Professional (CSCP) and APICS Supply Chain Operations Reference Professional (SCOR-P) designations set the industry standard. With over 45,000 members and approximately 300 channel partners, APICS is transforming the way people do business, drive growth and reach global customers. For more information, visit apics.org.