



... because the future has curves

The Importance of Mentors

by **Deborah Reber**



Ask any successful woman how she got to where she is, and chances are she'll mention the positive role a mentor played in her life. Even Oprah might not be the international phenomenon that she is were it not for her mentor—a fourth-grade teacher.

The impact of a mentor can be so powerful that according to Big Brothers/Big Sisters, students who have a mentor are 46% less likely to start taking illegal drugs, 27% less likely to try drinking and 52% less likely to skip out on school.

And those aren't the only benefits. How cool would it be to have someone to turn to who could support you in the following ways?

- give you advice about how to handle difficult situations
- provide a reference for a college or job application
- offer job advice and career guidance
- play the role of a big brother or sister
- offer a different perspective

The word "mentor" literally means teacher or counselor, but mentors can actually come in all shapes, sizes, ages and walks of life—from an older sibling to a boss to a camp counselor. And while the relationship with your mentor might be a formal one, it doesn't have to be ... sometimes someone is a mentor to someone else and doesn't even know it. The only real criteria for a mentor is that they should be someone who can support you through their actions, and most of all, be someone that you can trust.

If you want to have a formal relationship with a mentor, keep in mind that they don't have to live in the same town as you. In fact, many people communicate with mentors over the phone or via email or IM. The most important thing is finding a mentor who understands your goals and wants to be a support in helping you reach them. You don't have to be limited to one mentor, either. You could have one mentor for your academic and career goals, and another one to support you on your quest to be the best soccer player around.

So, how do you go about finding your perfect mentor? A great place to start is by spreading the word that you're on the lookout for someone who can give you insight into your area of interest. Tell everyone—friends, relatives, teachers, coaches—and see if any of your immediate contacts knows of the perfect person to refer you to.

Guidance counselors at your school can also be a great resource—check with them to find out if any alumni from your school works in your desired field. Lastly, find out if there are any organizations in your community that offer formal mentor relationships to teen girls, such as Girls Inc. or the Girl Scouts.

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