

You Don't Have To Go It Alone: How to Find a Mentor as a Freelancer



As a freelancer, having enough time to not only grow your business, but also grow your career can be challenging. Who can you turn to for guidance when you're the boss? For those who strike out on their own, putting time and effort into finding a mentor (or several) can make a huge difference in establishing a successful freelance business. Among small business owners who have professional mentors, the five-year survival rate for their businesses is 70 percent, according to a survey by BCSG; among those who don't have mentors, the five-year survival rate is half of that.

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Now that you're settled into the new year, it's the perfect

time to reach out to your network (or establish a new one) and find a group of mentors. Here are some tips for identifying those who can help you achieve your personal and professional goals.

Evaluate your strengths and weaknesses.

As a freelancer, it can be challenging to find the time to step back and examine your professional strengths and weaknesses. While it can be tempting to rely on a mentor to give you guidance on where you need to improve, you'll get much more out of any mentorship relationship if you've done some self-reflection first.

As a first step, consider taking a few minutes to complete a skills evaluation test, such as Myers Briggs or 16Personalities. Both will provide you with a detailed explanation of your personality, including analysis about workplace habits, relationships and ideal career paths. The results will help you understand how you interact with clients and colleagues, as well as what types of careers and working styles are likely to be a good fit for you.

If you need more help determining your working style or how to achieve the next step in your career, a career coach could be a great investment. Finding the right coach can help you develop a strong understanding of your own personality and work style. Once you know more about yourself, you'll be able to better identify mentors who can help you play to your strengths and improve upon your weaknesses.

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Form relationships through networking groups.

Once you've had time to reflect on your professional needs, it's time to find a mentor. As a good first step, look into virtual and in-person networking groups where you can meet people in your industry. Networking groups and programs, like Entrepreneurs' Organization, allow you to connect with other freelancers and business owners so you can learn from what they've experienced over the course of their careers. This can help you find a mentor who's also gone through the challenges of becoming a freelancer.

The location of your potential mentor can be a determining aspect as well. Having a mentor that lives close by gives you access to knowledge of the local trends and makes it easier to scheduling a quick chat. Meetup.com offers access to thousands of organizations around the world in sectors ranging from outdoors and adventure to fashion and tech to writing. If one event looks interesting, take the time to attend and talk to the other participants. One (or more) may have helpful insights for your career.

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Keep in touch with former colleagues and associates.

Just because you've decided to strike out on your own doesn't mean you can't still rely on former coworkers, bosses or other working relationships that you developed before becoming a freelancer. Those you've worked with in the past are already familiar with your working style and approach to business, which is helpful context for any mentor/mentee relationship.

Make sure to keep in regular contact with former colleagues, especially those you admired when you worked together, so that you can use each other as a resource for professional questions or opportunities. Haven't been in touch for a while? Reaching out can be as simple as sending your congratulations about a new job or reminiscing about an old work memory, but it can go a long way toward helping secure a valuable mentor.

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Seek out people who inspire you outside your professional realm.

Inspiring mentors can come from unexpected places, not just your professional bubble or your fellow freelancers. Take a few minutes to research interesting organizations in your local area, perhaps through volunteering, and get involved where you can. Other volunteers might come from unique backgrounds and work in different fields or industries, so their points of view can provide you with unexpected perspective that may help you think about a challenge or client differently. A mentor from a different field has a unique opportunity to see your business from the outside and won't be bogged down by conventional solutions.

Finding a mentor is one of the most valuable investments you can make for your future as a freelancer and for your personal work enjoyment. Mentorship makes a difference all the way to the top – 71 percent of CEOs said having a mentor directly improved their company's performance according to a study in a book by Suzanne de Janasz and Maury Peiperl. Beyond the financial returns you can see from mentorship, having advisors you trust can make freelancing feel less overwhelming and more rewarding. So, make sure to put yourself out there and start building your mentor relationships.

Related: How to Attract the Best Mentors, According to Tim

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