

Presentation to the Alabama Chapter of the Special Libraries Association
“Mentoring from a Mentee’s Viewpoint”

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- I. Why Seek a Mentor
- II. What to Look for in a Mentor
- III. What to Expect from the Relationship
- IV. What Not to Expect from the Relationship
- V. Lesson Learned

[Note: the following reasons aren’t in a particular hierarchical order.]

I. Why Seek a Mentor

- a) Real-world perspective
- b) Comfort, assurance, empathy, encouragement
- c) Networking opportunities, job-hunting tips & strategies, career-development advice, resume help, internship questions, contacts, hiring news
- d) Sounding board, feedback, brainstorming, tips, guidance, advice
- e) For insight into: daily work and management decision-making, a particular firm or company, the profession
- f) Introduction into SLA

Less Obvious Reasons:

- a) Respect from peers
- b) Learn the lingo/buzzwords
- c) Brag about accomplishments
- d) Friendship

II. What to Look for in a Mentor

- a) Career paths & goals on similar track as well as work philosophy and values
- b) Experience (i.e., years as a professional; prior work history; variety of positions; forward-moving career development)
- c) Generosity with time and insight
- d) Someone who says what they’re going to do as well as someone who does what they say
- e) Someone who isn’t a competitor with me
- f) Sense of humor
- g) Curiosity (about me personally, scholastically & professionally)
- h) Empathetic
- i) Advocate [Example: my mentor tried to secure me an internship at her firm, a SLA student stipend to the annual meeting, and a job at her firm.]
- j) Communication skills (well-written e-mails; good telephone conversationalist; quick response time to my requests for information)

III. What to Expect from the Relationship

- a) Limited amount of time/attention. Mentor's workload comes first
- b) Limited pull within the mentor's organization regarding employment opportunities
- c) Frankness, honesty, even bluntness
- d) Prompt responses
- e) Encouragement, confidence-building
- f) Advice: school, internship, post-graduation career strategy, SLA conference tips
- g) War stories (i.e., work-related)
- h) Job history
- i) Work motivations & philosophy
- j) Confidence & trust

IV. What Not to Expect from the Relationship

- a) Too much time/attention on demand
- b) A job. (jobs leads, recommendations & references need to be earned, not given)
- c) Very specific knowledge about daily work processes, methodologies and competitors
- d) Decisions made for you (mentee)
- e) Face-to-face meetings (rather e-mails, phone calls, snail mail, conference rendezvous)
- f) Specifics on mentor's pay or salary

V. Lessons Learned (the good, bad & the ugly)

- a) Realize the limits of a mentor (RE: ability to move mountains for you may be hampered for reasons outside of one's (mentee's) immediate scope)
- b) Small nods of encouragement go a long way in boosting the self-confidence of fledgling professionals
- c) You never know where the relationship might lead (In my case, for example, my mentor suggested my name as a speaker before the Alabama Chapter of the SLA. Six weeks later I found myself in Tuskegee.)

If you leave today with one message, let it be this:

"Every time you help somebody, it helps you." Abby DeShane, my mentor at Ernst & Young