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HOW TO FIND AND MANAGE YOUR MENTOR RELATIONSHIPS

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Hello there, my friends. It's so great to have you back. Mel Savage here at the Career Reset podcast. It's great to have you here.

Today is the last of five episodes on Performance Development. I love talking about performance development. Of course, it's that time of year, so I really wanted to dig into it. It's the time of year when a lot of people are getting their performance reviews, thinking about performance development, or thinking about building their strategies for their careers coming into next year. So I wanted to dedicate five episodes to that.

Go back and look at episodes 11 to 15. We have a couple of episodes on building your performance development plan, talking about your annual review, on how to get prepped on that, and lots of great tools in episodes 11 and 12. Then 13, and 14, we're all about leadership. We talked about key leadership competencies and what it means to be a great leader. We had a couple of guests along the way.

Today, I am talking about how to find and manage your mentor relationship. We're going to talk about what you use a mentor for, how you find them, and then a piece that most people don't talk about, and that is how to sustain and support your mentor relationship. I want to talk about mentors as one element of how you put together your support network. There are many elements to a support network. Once you get one up and running, it is such a valuable asset.

But a mentor is the one element of a support network that most people think about. So I wanted to talk about that one today. Because as you're going into next year, and you're thinking about your growth plans and your development plan, think about adding a mentor to the mix.

In fact, as I'm talking about support communities in general, think about how you want to set up your overall support network. Because building a strong, successful, sustainable career requires a strong support community. I call it my personal board of directors. You could Google that and you'll see lots and lots of articles on that. But I will be talking about that a lot over the course of the next year in the podcast because I'm very passionate about building a strong support network as well. You can't do it alone.

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I know that my target group, the people that I talked to in my audience are largely corporate professionals. But if you are an entrepreneur out there, like me, it can be a very lonely experience. Because you may have some staff. I am a growing organization so have a couple of part-time people that I work with. But when you're trying to make all the decisions for your company, it can be really lonely. So having a strong support network is going to help keep you motivated, keep you moving forward, and help brainstorm ideas. It's really, really important. No matter if you are a corporate professional, or you are an entrepreneur, having that support network is key.

Today, it's about mentors because they are really a critical element of your support network, and sometimes some people are a little bit intimidated to take on because how do you find one? How do you use one? How do you ask someone to be my mentor? Those are all the things we're going to be covering today.

There are all kinds of mentor relationships out there. You can primarily, I would say, two buckets really. You can look at formal mentor relationships or informal mentor relationships. When you're thinking about informal mentor relationships, you can make that as loose as you want. Anyone who offers you advice, guidance, or inspiration, you can consider an informal mentor.

In fact, I have a lot of examples of informal mentor relationships. I call them relationships. There are a lot of podcasts I listened to, and people I follow that I would consider mentors. Yes, they are only one-way relationships in this case, but they do inspire me, teach me, and help me find solutions in areas that I need.

For instance, I'm always a student of my craft, so I'm always looking to become a more effective coach. I'm always reading books on leadership, and listening to podcasts on coaching. I am looking to how to run a strong business or a marketing online business. I have a very strong marketing background, but it's an enterprise marketing. Big organizational marketing versus running an online business is a very different animal, so what's the best way to do that?

Of course, for my own personal development, I always still need a coach of my own, whether that's the person that I hired to be my coach, or, again, podcasts that I listened to for personal development reasons. There are all those things out there now that there didn't used to be. I strongly recommend thinking about that in terms of your informal relationships. There are other informal mentor relationships that I've had when I was in corporate. I had both formal and informal people.

When I think about the informal ones that I could go to when I was stuck, they could be just influencers in the organization that I built strong relationships with, and I would just ask for coffee from time to time whenever I was stuck on something. But then, I also considered some of my reports, whether they were direct reports or not, I would consider reports in some ways, mentors, because they would teach me things.

If I was open-minded about it, I would learn a lot from the people who reported to me. Again, whether that was a direct report or an indirect report, because I don't know everything. When I listened to the people who reported to me, I would learn a lot, I would learn a lot about how to move a project forward and how to grow people effectively. I will learn about how to build relationships in the organization just by listening to my own people so I encourage you to do that.

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You can have mental relationships, laterally, on the up, on the down, whatever you want to look at, however, you want to, whatever you want to call it, they're all around you. Always think about being open to learning from everyone. I consider all of that informal mentoring to a degree.

But today, we're going to be talking more about the formal mentor relationship, because that's the one that you really need to know how to manage effectively. We're talking about how you use them, what you use them for, how you find one and ask them to be your mentor, and how you sustain and support the relationship. Because it doesn't stop by just saying, *I've asked you to be my mentor so let's have a coffee and keep it loose.* You certainly can.

But you really want to make the most of that relationship, not just for yourself. Make it effective for the person who's agreed to be your mentor, respect their time, and help get them focused on the kind of information they want to give you and share with you. Having some structure and some approach to that relationship is always going to be a valuable tool for you. So we're going to talk about that as well.

And I do have a great freebie for you today and that is how to become a marvelous mentee. I know that is a cheesy title but that's what I'm calling it. I'm a big fan of alliteration and cheesy titles so that title is perfect. So pick that up and you can get it at thecareerreset.com/15 which is the number of this podcast and it's going to go a little more in-depth into how to be a great mentee and manage that mentor relationship that I'm going to go into in this podcast. I really recommend that you get that. So let's get into it.

As I said, mentors are people who are offering you sage advice. Sage, meaning they have a lot of experience, they are sages to a degree so they are offering you sage advice. They are offering you guidance. They're offering you inspiration. They help you identify your potential. They teach you skills by sharing that experience with you. And they really help you think through your approach so that you're not learning everything by mistake, by stepping in it the hard way.

You can really accelerate your learning process by having a mentor help you through it. The best thing is, these people want to see you succeed because your success is their success as a mentor so they're really invested in you and really behind you. Having a mentor is a real gift of an opportunity. If you treat it that way, if you get the opportunity to have this gift of a mentor, you definitely want to take the time to make the most of it.

When you're first considering a mentor, and not just because when you think about a mentor, it's not just *Oh, I want a mentor to help me*. You have to have some purpose behind it. Ideally, you want to set a goal for your mentor relationship or the reason that you're choosing a mentor. The more generic you keep it like, *Oh, I just want a mentor to help me with my career*, the less you're going to get out of it, the less effective it's going to be.

One caveat to that. I know some people, and I even have one myself, someone that has just been with me my entire career, someone I can just call, and ask for help. I consider mine an informal mentor. But I know people who have had someone that they actually consistently meet with once a month and someone they've had in their careers all their lives. They're like a good friend, but also someone who's agreed to be a mentor for them in their careers. That does happen. But I would say that relationship is something that you build over time.

If you're looking to get a mentor, that's not the kind of mentor that you just go out and try to seek out and get and say, *Hey, will you be my mentor forever and just help me with my career in general,* that's not always the effective

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way forward. So you really want to have a purpose. Usually, that can come from your development plan or your career plan. It's not always just about growth, it might be something specific that you want to achieve in your development plan. Maybe you want a mentor to help you set up your support network, maybe you want a mentor to help you with a specific behavioral challenge or mindset challenge, or maybe you've got a big project coming up.

I find that there are three things that I think mentors can really help you with. For instance, maybe you want a new skill. In this case, you would partner with a mentor who has the skill or the experience in developing the skill and the area that you need. This can be a behavioral skill like you want to learn to communicate more effectively or manage the organizational politics better, or maybe you want to understand how to manage risk in the organization. There could be lots of skills.

It could just be *I need to learn to be a better listener.* It could be that. But you want to basically build a new skill. Again, this can be someone inside your organization or someone outside your organization. You may want to choose a mentor to help you enhance an existing skill. The first one was about building a new skill, but maybe you want to enhance an existing skill.

Let's say you're already a really strong leader but in order to achieve a specific goal, like say, maybe getting promoted to a higher level. You want to accelerate your growth and experience of a specific strength that you already have and you want a leader to help you get there so that you can start already acting in the role that you want to get promoted to. And that's a big part of being promoted.

You want to show that you can demonstrate and behave and have the skills for the role that you want to be promoted to and a mentor, especially one within the organization can help you do that. It doesn't have to be inside the organization but it can be inside. I think it's easier sometimes when it's in the organization because they can help also be an influencer with some of the players, especially if you're really managing that mentor relationship well.

Having a mentor for something like enhancing some skills to help you get promoted is a really great way forward. And they can help you fast-track because they can share their own experiences, whether it's how they grew that specific skill, or how they work with specific people within the organization. That can help you manage your own scenarios, way, way better, way quicker, way more effectively.

The third thing is maybe you want a mentor to help support you in addressing a specific project. Sometimes you have a specific project that you're trying to achieve. It could be a mentor to help you build your career plan. That's something that's a big specific project. That's something that I help people with all the time. Of course, that's a big part of my business.

But it could be something else. It could be you have a big task force that you are leading and you want a mentor who's done that kind of a task force before or manages the kind of people that you're managing before or maybe you're setting up a conference or restructuring your department, or opening a new location of your business or some something where the stakes are high for your success, I would say is a great time to bring a mentor in. The stakes being higher, of course, always relative to your situation.

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For instance, if you're managing a task force, it doesn't sound like the stakes are as high as say, restructuring a department. But depending on how the results are going to affect the organization, or how the results are going to affect your standing within the organization, helping with your promotion, or reestablishing your influence in an organization, *the stakes are high* is a relative term to you, your career and your situation. Whatever it is, that's a great time to bring a mentor into your career and into your life.

A mentor is great for all three of those situations, building a new skill, enhancing an existing skill, or addressing a specific project. Sometimes, depending on how experienced you are with mentors and how much time you have on your hands, you can have a couple of mentors at the same time for different things that you're trying to achieve. That's fine. It's really about the time commitment that you have because it's not just about meeting with the mentor.

You really need to give yourself time to prep for the mentor relationship, have the mentor meetings, and have follow-up after the mentor meetings. That's just not about sending an email, sometimes it's way more than that, like speaking to your mentor after the mentor meeting. You need to give yourself the time to really nurture and make the most of that relationship. If you've never had a mentor before, definitely just start with the one mentor, and see how that goes. Learn from that experience, and then you can add on if you have the time.

I think you can really see the benefits of having a mentor relationship. The bottom line, a mentor helps you achieve your goals quickly and more effectively. They provide feedback that's objective because often it's slightly removed from your direct situation, slightly removed from your boss, especially if it's an external relationship. Actually, that's a really good time to get a mentor if you have a *'bad boss relationship'* that you want to work to your advantage, then a mentor can really help you do that. I love that one. That's my specialty.

If you've got a bad boss out there, rather than running away from a great job, there are definitely ways that you can turn that situation to your advantage. Let me tell you, I've had a lot of bad bosses, and I have blown it a lot. But there are definitely ways you can make it work for you.

A mentor can also increase your motivation and increase your confidence. When you work with a mentor, you feel more prepared to take on or tackle what's in front of you, because you have this confidant. You have this person who's on your side, who's invested in your success, who's behind you that you can ask questions to or maybe share things that you would not feel comfortable with. Maybe ask your boss or ask other people depending on the question, depending on the relationships you have in those situations.

It's always great to have a mentor or a coach supporting you on this journey. It's definitely a huge benefit to have a mentor. The question is, *how do you find a mentor?* There are lots of ways to do this and no one way is perfect every time. It really depends on who you are, who you know, the experience you're looking to achieve, and the reason you have this mental relationship. All those criteria not only help you narrow your choices but also help you understand how wide of a list of choices you have in front of you.

Like I just said, the first thing you want to do is identify what you want the mentor for. Is it for a project? Is it for a skill set, building a skill set for a specific purpose, or developing a new skill set? What's it for? Then based on that, what kind of experience does your mentor need in order to support you? Keep in mind that no one mentor is perfect. No one's going to have all the skills and all the experience that you're looking for. What are the one or two

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really non-negotiable skills that you need to have in a great mentor? You just want to go forward and list all the people that have this skill.

The easiest way forward, obviously, is once you know what you're going for. It's really easy if you work in an organization to find your first mentor in the organization that you work in, or it could be someone who's related to the organization that you work in.

When I worked at McDonald's, for instance, we had tons of supplier partners in all different aspects of the business. It was just a matter of building relationships with those people. If you build relationships, there could be great mentor relationships there. There don't always have to be people in your organization to help you solve a problem or manage a situation. Think about that as well.

Whether you're looking for someone inside your organization, or outside your organization, you want to pick someone that you know. That's going to save you some time, because approaching strangers who don't know anything about you, that situation rarely works out. The reason for that is, really, it's not personal, it's that people are busy. Being a mentor also takes time, not just being a mentee.

People mentor people and dedicate their free time to mentoring people who they know, and who they feel very confident that by investing their time those people are going to get the return. It's going to be time well invested in great people. It's very rare that I have to give my free time away to someone that I don't know. When I was working my corporate job, it was already a grind. You're already working 50, 60, 70 hours a week, depending on the week. Dedicating more time away from your family to someone that you don't know doesn't happen very often.

So start with a list of people that you know. That is the easiest way. People who have a positive opinion about you are the easier people to get on your side to be your mentor. I'm not saying that people who don't have a positive opinion of you, or people who have a negative opinion of you can't be your mentors. Those can also be great mentor relationships but that's a different strategy. I'm not going to get into that today.

There are ways to benefit from a mentor relationship, not only by learning from someone who sees things differently than you, but it's also a great way to get a critic in your organization on your side, by having them become a mentor partner. It's harder to get them to agree, I'll be honest, but if you can make it work, it's an interesting relationship to have. So get your list of people that you think fit your criteria, and then you can reach out to them.

If you don't have anyone on your list, if you're finding it really hard to find people who fit your criteria, you don't know anyone who fits that criteria, I know it's tough, but you're going to have to start from a different way forward. You're going to have to find ways to build relationships. Make a list of people that you think could be great mentors for you and where you think you have a chance of building a relationship with those people. You can start to do that.

You can go to network events, meet some of the speakers, spend some time with them, and follow up for a coffee. Again, getting some of those speakers to be your mentors, depending on the kind of speaking things that you go to, might be easy, might be hard, depending on how popular the speaker is. If you're going to go to a Brené Brown event, and then ask her to be your leadership mentor, I'm not sure that's going to happen. But if you're just

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at a local event, or a local TED talk, and you see someone talking, maybe they would become a mentor for you. Who knows? It really depends on the person. It's a bit more of a long shot.

Sometimes it's working your network to find the people who, second and third-tier relationships, who do they know who could help you and set you up with someone. That could be a way forward.

The other thing is building new relationships by joining targeted Facebook groups. I would say LinkedIn groups, but LinkedIn groups aren't really great, yet, I'll be honest. I'm hoping LinkedIn can make that work. I'm not saying they're terrible, you might find them. But Facebook groups tend to work a bit better. Maybe you can join a Facebook group based on the kind of thing that you're trying to achieve. You might see the same people popping up in different kinds of Facebook groups.

So offer lots of advice in Facebook groups to help people, reach out, and ask people to have a video conference with you. You'll see people will do that because they want to help. They're in the Facebook group to help. They're in the Facebook group to learn and they will have a video call with you. You might find a great mentor that way. Of course, you can always listen to podcasts. Sometimes, there are some great Facebook groups that are dedicated to a specific podcast. You can find people there who know a lot about it.

You can hire a coach, obviously, you can invest in a mastermind, sometimes, again, depending on what you're trying to do. A mastermind of people who don't always have the same skills, but might have the skills that you're looking for, and will help keep you accountable and give you advice to move forward. There's lots of good stuff and opportunities. Just because you don't know someone, don't stop there. Once you've identified the person, it's usually pretty easy at that point, depending on your situation. But you've got your objective.

Ideally, these people know you, they already like you, so reach out face-to-face if you can. If you're in the same geographic vicinity, ask for a coffee. Tell them what you're trying to do, and what your goal is, and ask them if they're going to be your mentor, and usually, it works out okay. Wait to see what they say once you ask them to be your mentor. Don't babble on and on and try to qualify things and coach things like *It won't take too long*, *I promise this or I promise that*. You've already set up what you're trying to do and why you're trying to do it.

Ask them to be your mentor, and then stop talking. Wait to see what they say. They will ask you the questions that they need to ask. So be prepared and make sure you've given some thought to how the relationship could work. You don't have to bombard them with that information when you're first sitting down. But make sure you've given them some thought like, what do you think you need? Once or twice a month? Is it an hour? You can come to them. It can be a video conference.

Think about ways to make it easy for that person. Tell them you'll send them a list of discussion points ahead of time if that works. As I said, you don't have to line list all this stuff that you're thinking through right off the bat or have it in your back pocket. If they say, *Oh, that's interesting. How would you see that working?* Be able to answer that question. If you're afraid to ask, don't be. You're not going to get what you want unless you ask for it.

A thought that's been popping up in my life over the course of the last couple of weeks is the Napoleon Hill quote, which is, *"The obstacle is the way."* Whatever you fear, whatever is holding you back from doing something, that's what you have to do to get ahead. That's what you need to do to find your success. So make sure that you do it.

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There's nothing wrong with asking. Nothing wrong with asking. What's the worst that can happen? Someone's going to say, no, and that's fine. Even if they say, no, then just say, *Okay, no problem. I totally understand. Would you mind if we chat from time to time? Can I ask you a question from time to time? Can I send you an email from time to time?* Find ways to stay connected. Quite often because someone has said, no, they're going to say yes to the time-to-time scenario. Whatever that is, they will say yes to that.

You never know what it's going to turn into. It could actually end up turning into a mentor relationship more organically than formally. You might have to take no for an answer, if they really mean it but don't let the relationship go just because they've said no. So make sure you have a few people on your list who can help you so that you can go to work your list and stay connected with whoever says no, and don't be afraid to ask.

Now that you know what you want your mentor for, and how to find one, the question becomes, how do you support that mentor relationship? The number one thing you can do is prioritize that relationship. Like I said, it's a gift. Make sure that you are allocating the time like it's the most important thing that you've got going on. I know it's a free relationship so it's easy to say it's not costing you anything. But don't treat it like that.

A mentor is a really valuable asset. Someone is giving you their time and to them, their time is a valuable asset. And the benefit to you is so huge. Like I said, make sure you treat it like it's the most important thing you have on the go. For each mentor that you have, take the number of hours you plan to meet with them on a monthly basis and multiply that by three. That's how many hours a month that you want to allocate to that relationship.

Let's say, you meet with someone once a month. You would have one hour for the actual meeting, one hour to prep for the meeting, and one hour for the personal debrief and any follow-ups from the meeting. If you have two mentors, that's six hours a month, in that case, unless you're meeting with him on an every two-week basis, then double it.

So make sure that you make the time to have that mental relationship with at least one of them because everybody's busy. The idea of finding three extra hours a month sounds daunting. But if you want it, you can find it. Having a mentor is so valuable, I really recommend that you figure out a way to do that.

This might be a good time as well to cover a critical part of the mentoring relationship, which is how to be a great mentee, and I cannot underline this enough. This is one that I personally screwed up a lot in my career. I wish I'd really sat down and thought this through much earlier in my career because I would have gotten a lot more out of mentor relationships. And I probably would have pursued a lot more mentor relationships, because I would have gotten a lot more out of them had I managed those relationships more effectively. That's really the big thing.

There are two main reasons to figure out how you want a mentor relationship and get really proactive about that, because one, you're going to get so much more out of it. And two, the mentor is going to appreciate you so much for making it really easy for them to be an effective mentor.

They're going to like the mentor experience. They might mentor you for longer than your specific project. They're also going to have such a great experience with you that they're going to talk about this relationship in a positive way. They may even put you onto another mentor for a different thing because they so much enjoyed how you managed the mentor experience. It's really critical to think through how you manage it and be a great mentee.

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As I said, being a mentee takes effort and preparation. You cannot just show up and wing it. Make sure that you do these five things. I have five things that I tell people, and I'm just going to list them off here.

First thing, align on the goals and parameters of the relationship. That means, what is the objective? What does success look like in this relationship? How long is this relationship going to last? How often are you going to meet? How will you communicate? All those things. You got to figure out all those things ahead of time.

Again, understand that I'm not suggesting that you put a really tight box around it, but you want to lay out the playing field so that you can be flexible around it. It doesn't have to be hard and fast rules. But at least you can purposefully and consciously be flexible with the rules that you have. It's always better when everyone knows what to expect and then you can stretch things when you need to.

The second thing is always to be respectful of your mentor's time. Your mentor is a volunteer, so make sure that you're treating them like that. Don't make it hard for them to be your mentor, in general.

The third thing is to make sure that you are leading the relationship. You are driving the topics for discussion, you are helping them get their minds prepared, and you are making sure that there's an agenda that they know what to expect. All of those things. Make sure that you're leading the relationship. Prepare yourself with thoughtful questions for the discussion.

Again, don't get super connected to those questions like you must have them all ticked off. But at least you know the kind of things that you want to take out of this conversation. It might go on a totally different tangent. You don't know what to expect. Your mentor knows things that you don't know and is going to ask you questions and make you think about things that you didn't even know you needed to know. But at least you can come prepared with some thoughtful questions that you need to get your head wrapped around and they can help you get there.

The last one is to be *mentorable*. Mentors want to influence people's success. If your mentor is giving you advice, and you are not open-minded, you don't follow through with any of their advice, you're not prepared to listen to them, then, you don't really need a mentor. If you're going to go out and get a mentor, then be *mentorable*. There's a great quote, I know it's from somebody but I can't remember who it is. *"A comfort zone is a beautiful place, but nothing ever grows there."* The whole point of having a mentor is to have someone that you trust to push you out of your comfort zone.

Definitely, think about those five things and how to be a great mentee and pick up the download which is going to give you a lot more texture on each of those five things in terms of how to really effectively manage your mentor relationship on an ongoing basis.

That's what we covered today. Identifying the purpose for your mentor before you go out and get one, identify the people you know who fit the criteria of the kind of mentor that you need, start reaching out, start building relationships, thinking about future mentors, all of that stuff, prioritize the time to the relationship. Make sure that is the number one thing that's going on on your calendar because you're going to get so much out of it. It's not just about the actual meetings, it's about the cascading benefits of this amazing mentor relationship.

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Thank you so much, my friends. That's it for this week. And that's it for this five-part series on Performance Development, specifically as it pertains to building your goals for next year. I hope you took a lot away from it. Let me know if there are other things that you would like me to talk about.

I recommend getting a combo of formal and informal mentor relationships going on in your career. It's going to help a lot. The bottom line is don't do it alone. It takes so much longer and you may not actually get to where you want to go because you don't know what you don't know, in terms of what it takes to get there.

Thank you again, I will chat with you next week. Have a great one. Bye for now.

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