It's Not Lonely at the Top if You Help Someone Else Get There: Developing a Successful Peer Mentoring Relationship
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Having a mentor as a new professional helps you settle into a professional position. A mentoring relationship creates an environment for sharing best practices, provides different perspectives on ideas or situations, increases your network of colleagues, and gives you real life feedback on the “I wish I had” or the “I wish I had not” moments during your professional career.

Peers as Mentors
Some of the greatest mentoring relationships are those we share with other colleagues who are in the same place professionally. This is a relationship that we, the authors, share with one another. Throughout this article, we will be sharing a few of our tips and lessons learned through our experience as peer mentors.

Although these mentors may not have the knowledge or experience that more seasoned mentors possess, what they do have is empathetic compassion and support to help talk through situations, offer solutions, brainstorm ideas, listen when things get tough, or celebrate moments of success. These relationships are some of the most important that a new professional can have; there is a sense of vulnerability, truth, and understanding at this peer level that is hard to match. Here is one example of our peer mentoring relationship:

One September weekend, I was preparing for my best friend’s wedding, when I received a frantic phone call. On the other end was my fellow graduate school partner in crime and good friend. From the first hello, I could hear the stress and confusion in her voice. It was her first formal recruitment on her own. For the past two years, she normally shared recruitment week responsibilities with another graduate student and a supervisor. At that moment it wasn’t about anything other than me being there to support, listen, and give her the reassuring words she needed to confidently finish out a successful recruitment.

Finding a Peer Mentor
Finding a peer mentor can be challenging. Here are some steps you can take to begin your search.

Know yourself. Think about where you are in your career and where you would like to be. Honestly assess your personality type and which personality types complement your style. Consider your strengths and weaknesses and how a mentor might guide you through your growth. You want to build a relationship with a mentor that will both challenge and support you.

Identify a mentor and be proactive. In some cases, mentoring relationships form naturally or by circumstance, but this is not always the case. Take time to observe individuals whom you may consider asking to serve as a mentor. Watch how they interact with others or how they present themselves, and identify those who have served as their mentors. A mentor should be a person that you both respect and admire. Once you have identified this person, take the time to seek them out and let them know how much you value them as a professional and person. Then simply ask them if they are willing to commit to being a mentor for you as you grow professionally and continue to seek knowledge in the field.

Set clear, mutual expectations. From our experience, a clear understanding of your purpose and desired results will ensure that you find a suitable mentor and that you and your mentor find value in the relationship. Be honest and open with them about what you seek; setting boundaries in the beginning will only improve the relationship. Do you want them only available for times of conflict and confusion, or are you looking for someone to check in with you periodically to see how things are going? Is this only a professional mentorship or is discussing personal situations acceptable? Are they comfortable with you calling them, stopping by anytime, or would they rather a set appointment or conference call? Clarity eliminates any future confusion regarding roles and expectations. Being open and honest will create a relationship that will flourish over time.

It is important in peer-to-peer mentoring to utilize shared resources and have a common mindset. With peer mentoring and support, it is vital to carry others along with you as you succeed and gain knowledge and direction, creating better professionals to help support the fraternal movement and provide the best opportunities for students with whom we work.