

Mentoring – *From the Inside Out*

If you've had a mentor, you're lucky. In today's "flattened" organizations, mentors may not be available to help your "newer" colleagues learn to be resourceful and effective members of their organization. And even if they are, evolving workplace trends, such as telecommuting, may make it difficult if not impossible to put a bonafide mentoring program in place.

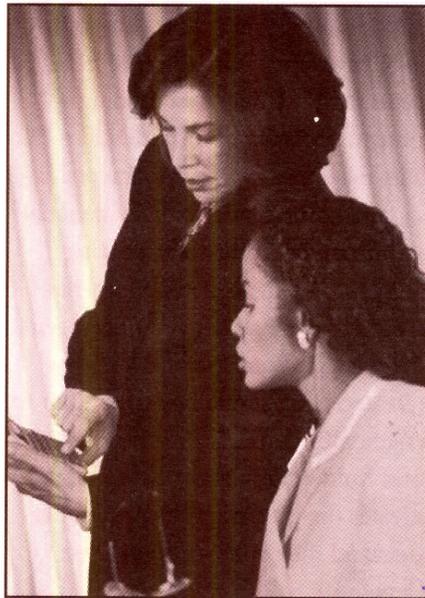
But what if we could mentor ourselves? What if we could take one part wisdom and one part wit, balanced that with a dollop of compassion and three helpings of the kind of curiosity that leads us to seek out how we can be our own best advocates in the workplace?

The good news is, we can. But first a story, and then the action plan.

The Guide Inside. Books and articles on mentoring frequently point out that the word "mentor" comes from Greek mythology. Remember The Odyssey? Mentor was the name of the trusted man who protected and educated Odysseus' son Telemachus when Odysseus left to fight the Trojan Wars. Mentor, though, was actually the goddess of wisdom – Athena – in disguise.

Odysseus had asked Athena to guide and protect his son while he was away. Athena, disguised as Mentor, became Telemachus' teacher, advisor, counselor, and even networker as she guided him in his adult quest to find the father who'd been missing for ten years.

Here's what's interesting: Mentor was both male and female. Mentor personified the innate wisdom energy of both genders: the "feminine" energy of intuition combined with the "masculine"



energy of acting on that inner knowing. Think about that – using Mentor as a model, we, too, can call on our own individual mix of male and female energies to be the mentor we always wanted (or wanted to be).

A 10-Step Action Plan. When change is as common as it is in today's business world, it's helpful to continuously reconnect with your own inner mentor. How to get started? Try the 10 steps listed below.

1. Align your mission and goals with your organization's mission, goals, and strategic plan—and let this be the basis for making work- and career-related decisions. Choices either support your mission and goals, or they don't.

2. Find ways to network "across the white space" in your company's organizational chart. Remember: you must show up AND interact.

3. Be a great communicator in all areas: speech, writing, meetings, and

presentations. Remember to understand different communication styles and sharpen your listening skills.

4. Ask coworkers to include projects that support your goals. Find ways to drop or delegate low-medium-priority items on your "to-do" list so you can launch into the project worry-free.

5. Make it easy to convert your "to-do" and "done" lists into quantifiable achievements for your performance review – and for your résumé.

6. Consider the value of a professional mentor, a person who serves as a sounding board for navigating office politics.

7. Accept the challenge of "tooting your own horn" – and finding ways to make your boss look good as well.

8. Map a unique career path by paying attention to the kind of work that brings you joy, and by dealing with transitions in ways that play to your strengths.

9. Fight obsolescence – take stock of your skills regularly, and create a personal learning plan. Could a "mentor of the moment" be helpful? Make the connection.

10. Celebrate your success – and draw your next road map.

This article is adapted from Mentor: The Guide to Being Your Own Best Advocate in the Workplace by Joanne Lozar (Reston, VA: National Business Education Association, 2003).

To our readers: Have career wisdom to share? Contact communicator@naab.org with your idea for a column.