

SEARCHING FOR GUIDANCE

A person stands on a large rock in the middle of a dark sea at night. They are holding a flashlight that illuminates a path in the dark sky. The scene is dark and atmospheric, with a few stars visible in the night sky.

20 Things to Look for When
Hunting Down the Perfect Mentor

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20 Things to Look for When Hunting Down the Perfect
Mentor

You have big dreams. Now it's time to turn those dreams into reality. How are you going to get there?

If you said something about hard work and a lot of luck, you're partly right. There is definitely going to be hard work ahead. But what if you didn't need luck to gain the unseen advantage? What if what you needed instead was a mentor?

At first glance, mentors might not seem very important. Sure, it's nice to have someone to dispense with the occasional sage advice, but are they really necessary? The answer is a resounding, "YES!" Mentors do a whole lot more than tell you what to do. In fact, the best mentors don't tell you to do anything at all. They guide you toward the answers by providing you with their own experiences, some solid intel about what to expect, a whole lot of guidance toward the skills you need and a solid dose of networking on top just to make sure you know all the right people.

Perhaps that sounds a little more interesting?

If so, you might be interested in hunting down a mentor of your own. Only, how do you go about finding this perfect paragon?

First you need to realize not just anyone will do. Sure, there are lots of people further along on their life journey than you, but not all of them make for good mentors. What you want is someone who has these particular qualities:

They Have a Sincere Desire to Share Their Knowledge

The best mentors are committed to giving back to the world. They're not mentoring because they're fulfilling some kind of obligation or because they think they 'should' be there. They're interested in mentoring because they want to.

They Walk the Walk

Before you even consider someone for a mentor, you need to take a look at who they are as a person. Do they follow their own advice? Are they genuine in who

they are or are they merely playing some kind of role just to get ahead? Never settle for insincere!

They're Ready to Teach

Even if someone is further along than you are on their journey, you need to remember they might still be striving to get ahead in some way in their own lives. If your prospective mentor is too caught up in taking care of their goals, they're never going to have time for helping you out. This can be solved with an open and honest conversation about how much time you're looking for from your mentor and asking outright if they have the ability right now to make this sort of commitment without overextending themselves.

They Have the Right Attitude

What is the general feeling you get from your prospective mentor? Do they have a tendency to see the glass as half empty or half full? You might not think a positive attitude is overly important so long as you can check off all the other boxes, but when faced with challenges you want someone who can help you to see the possibilities without focusing on the disaster.

They're Excited about Mentoring

If your possible mentor isn't thrilled to be helping others, you're going to be fighting for their attention and seeing them less and less over time. You need a mentor who thinks what you're doing is awesome and seems pumped up at the idea of working with you.

They're Open to Learning

Mentors aren't going to know everything. Sometimes they're going to be learning things from you. With this in mind, the last thing you need is a know-it-all who's going to insist they're always right, even when they're clearly not. You're better with someone who is willing to admit they don't have all the answers and are interested in learning what they don't know. How to tell if your mentor is a lifelong learner? Check out what they're learning right now. The right kinds of

people are always bettering themselves, taking classes, reading books, and otherwise trying to gain new knowledge.

They Know the Difference Between Feedback and Criticism

It's absolutely crucial your mentor knows how to communicate well. If they're going to jump on your flaws and make a point to hound you about everything you're doing wrong, they're not teaching, nor are they being helpful. The right candidate knows how to be constructive in their criticism, as well as how to deliver bad news in a way which doesn't humiliate or demean their student.

They Reach Their Own Goals

How can you expect someone to help you to reach your goals when they never reach goals of their own? Do your research when checking out any prospective mentor and look at their accomplishments. What have they done in their lives? What successes have they had?

Other People See Them as Experts

Anyone can be a self-proclaimed expert at anything. The question is whether or not the rest of the world sees your possible mentor as an expert. How are they regarded by their peers? Are they talked about in positive ways? Are there articles about them or mentions on social media? How does the world see them?

They Have Awesome Listening Skills

Mentors need to be excellent listeners as this is where they're going to get all the information they need to be supportive of you. Here's where a conversation with any person you're thinking about as a mentor is absolutely crucial. Do they dominate the conversation? Do they ask questions and wait for the answers, or do they tell you the answers themselves? Do they want to lecture or guide? Do they listen to what you have to say or are they ignoring what you have to say?

They Withhold Judgement

There's going to come a time when you and your mentor might not agree. Or where you're going to do something which might lead to a mistake which could

have been avoided if you'd only talked to them first. Is your mentor the sort of person who's going to call you twelve kinds of idiot or make harsh judgments about your decisions? Or are they the sort of person who'll be compassionate, even when you're trying their patience? If you're not sure of the answer to this, look at how they talk about other people. Are they malicious in their gossip or put people down? Or do they practice empathy?

They Have Time for You

Some people keep a pretty busy schedule, which is understandable. But are you going to be able to reach your mentor when you need them? If you have to go through a secretary, have only one way to reach them, or have to wait on them to talk to them, then you're likely not going to be a good fit. A good mentor doesn't have to clear the decks for you at every opportunity, but they certainly will give you options on how to reach them and will get back to you in a timely manner if they're busy when you call.

They Know People

How big is your potential mentor on networking? Hopefully, they're going to recommend some people who you might benefit from knowing. This isn't going to happen if they don't have a decent network of their own to draw from. This doesn't mean your mentor needs to know every person who's anybody. What you want is *quality* of contact over quantity. It's better to have a solid introduction to the person you need right now over a nebulous connection to a dozen people who might get you to the same place.

They Know When to Set Brakes on Things

There's nothing like the sight of an impending disaster to show what a person's made of. A great mentor will warn you when you're going wrong, even if it means disappointing you. A bad mentor will avoid the confrontation, making it more like you'll crash and burn. Look for someone who's not afraid to tell it like it is for this trait.

They're Honest About Who They Are

Speaking of honesty, there's nothing worse than a mentor who's playing a role. Take for example the guy who will brag about being an expert, only to be proven as a fraud later on. This can be disaster when it comes to mentoring. You need to trust your mentor to know what they're doing and to not steer you wrong. Role-players aren't going to be any help to you here.

They're Easy to Talk To

Is your potential mentor intimidating? If you're too much in awe of them, or they seem too unapproachable, you'll never benefit from the interaction the way you would someone you're comfortable talking to.

They Know How to Adapt

Not every approach is going to work when you face a problem. The good mentor knows when to abandon ship and take a new direction, even if it means going against what they might have tried previously. Being flexible enough to know when to try something else is crucial to mentoring.

They Expect to Learn from You

A good mentor will expect to learn new things. A great one will expect to learn from *you*. When you find a potential mentor who's stuck in the mindset where they think they can only teach you, they're already closed-minded. But a wise mentor recognizes they'll be gaining something out of mentoring you.

They'll Treat Others with Respect

How does your mentor treat those around them? If they talk behind people's backs, criticize, or make cruel, racist, or otherwise unpleasant remarks, don't expect them to treat you with any respect. This is a red flag which can't be ignored. Don't give someone like this the time of day.

They Believe in You

Finally, the only mentor worth your time is one who sincerely believes in you and what you're wanting to do. If they're not all in, on your side, they'll never fight for you or go the extra mile to make sure you succeed.

Of course, not every mentor is going to have every one of these qualities. What you're going to want to do is to go through this list and make note of those traits you absolutely cannot live without. Those are the ones you'll be focusing on most as you seek out your mentor.