

Mentor networks and career success: Lessons for turbulent times

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Executive Overview

Many managers credit key professional achievements to the guidance of a mentor. Past research supports such anecdotal evidence, reporting that traditional one-on-one mentoring has been an integral component of protégé advancement, compensation, and satisfaction within traditional organizations. However, because organizational structures have changed and careers have become boundaryless, the aspiring manager today must make use of an intelligent network of multiple mentors in order to flourish in a changing workplace. This is especially true in turbulent business environments where layoffs, career plateaus, and limited promotion opportunities can derail the careers of even the most promising managers. Using support from interviews with executives, we detail the advantages of a diverse mentor network and the significant roles which multiple mentors can play in the enrichment of a protégé's professional life. We demonstrate how multiple mentors have the potential to help protégés continuously acquire knowledge (e.g., knowing why, how, and whom competencies) which they can leverage for career and personal success within and across organizational boundaries. Finally, we offer five specific strategies for creating effective developmental relationships and building intelligent career networks.

What made a difference for me was having different kinds of people who served as mentors. These were individuals whose ideas resonated with me. What they said made sense to me personally. They were not necessarily senior people in the organization. They included my employees, my peers, and senior management.

—D. McDonough, Managing Shareholder,
Retired, Lozano Smith Professional
Corporation

Simply put, mentors matter. Experts agree that individuals with mentors earn higher salaries, have higher job satisfaction, get more promotions, and have greater organizational commitment. In addition to these career-related benefits, protégés receive support that enhances their sense of personal identity, role clarity, and interpersonal competence.¹ It has been well documented that individuals, especially women and minorities, miss an important career developmental experience if they do not have a mentor.² Similarly, mentors reap

benefits from the mentoring process including: career rejuvenation; rekindling of creativity, energy and satisfaction; new knowledge and technical expertise contributed by protégés; organizational rewards, status, and recognition for talent development; social and emotional learning; and feedback and support from protégés.³ Mentors enter into these relationships for reasons ranging from the selfish (e.g., increased organizational visibility and political allies as loyal protégés mature) to the altruistic (e.g., wishing to leave a legacy and contribute to the community). Even organizations benefit from mentoring, as mentoring facilitates the socialization process and helps acculturate junior members of the organization.⁴

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While recent best-selling books such as Lois Zachary's 2000 *The Mentor's Guide* and Jack Carew's 1999 *The Mentor: 15 Keys to Success in*

Sales, Business and Life expound the values of having a senior person guide a newcomer's development, the idea of mentoring isn't new. The first documented example of mentoring dates back to the ancient Greeks when King Odysseus asked Mentor to guide the growth of his son Telemachus. What is new, however, are the recent and sweeping changes that have shaken long-held beliefs about careers and organizational life, necessitating a shift in thinking about the process of mentoring.⁵ Turbulent times, as evidenced by undervalued stock options, court cases questioning corporate ethics, and rising unemployment rates, are causing professionals to rethink their career strategies. The career, once synonymous with a well-defined ladder and advancement in one or two paternalistic organizations, has become boundaryless, with individuals continually updating and remarketing their skills and changing jobs on an average of every four and one-half years.⁶

While much recent research has focused on how individuals survive and navigate this boundaryless career landscape, most of these writings have been more descriptive than prescriptive. The purpose of this article is to provide specific recommendations on how executives can build and utilize a network of mentors to aid in the development of the competencies needed for career success and satisfaction in these turbulent times. We begin by exploring the role of mentor networks—what they are, and why they are important—and reinforce this discussion with excerpts from our interviews with 15 executives. Next, we discuss intelligent careers and the different types of knowledge that mentors can assist executives in gaining. Finally, we discuss the intelligent network and offer strategies for building a diverse network of mentors to facilitate knowledge acquisition and career success.

Multiple Mentors for Turbulent Times

One mentor is not enough. You have to rely on a number of mentors to allow you to see values in action, to develop business acumen and product knowledge. If you choose to rely on one mentor, that mentor had better know everything. Otherwise you will end up with their bad habits along with the good. From my mentors, I learned concepts that work across boundaries. These ideas apply to me in all aspects of my life. Of course, I had some mentors that taught me values that didn't work, which taught me that if you choose the wrong mentor, you might derail.

—Bill Radiger, President, Karma Media, LLC

When asked to identify mentors, we often think of one outstanding, caring individual who provided career guidance and support. People typically describe their mentors as someone older, more experienced, and higher in organizational or professional rank. Traditionally, a mentor recognizes a protégé's potential and offers to take the novice "under his/her wing" for instruction and protection. This relationship benefits the protégé with updated skills and knowledge while at the same time providing synergy and new ideas to the mentor. In many professions, such as academia, medicine, and the skilled crafts, the mentor/protégé relationship is part of the learning process. The apprentice works side by side with the master, getting hands-on instruction for an extended period of time.

This traditional mentoring model—a stable, long-term master-apprentice relationship—may no longer be viable. Forces such as rapidly changing technology, shifting organizational structures, and global marketplace dynamics have transformed mentoring into a process that by necessity extends beyond the services of a single mentor. As knowledge continuously changes and evolves, it becomes difficult if not impossible for individuals—or individual mentors—to possess all the requisite knowledge within themselves. Having multiple mentors facilitates the building of knowledge in the people who then become the primary assets and sources of competitive advantage to the firm.⁷

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One workforce change necessitating multiple mentors is the proliferation of boundaryless work practices. Ceridian Group reported that 90 per cent of firms use boundaryless work arrangements including telecommuting (i.e., completing all or most of one's work from a home office), flexible scheduling, and project work.⁸ Furthermore, the International Telework Association and Council reports that in 1999, nearly 20 million workers telecommuted,⁹ and that number is expected to increase to 137 million in 2003.¹⁰ Organizations implementing teleworking arrangements are realizing significant gains through reduced real estate expenses, increased productivity, increased access to global

markets, reduced pollution, and greater ability to attract and retain high-quality workers.¹¹

However, this technology-facilitated, boundary-less working arrangement presents a unique set of challenges to executives and managers whose experience is limited to traditional office environments. Today's managers are challenged to establish organizational and individual goals, provide performance feedback, and lead culturally and geographically diverse teams and meetings, while simultaneously maintaining a positive work climate and tracking productivity, quality, costs, and adherence to regulations with minimal if any face-to-face interaction.¹² These skills were likely not part of managers' formal education; thus, they would benefit from associating with mentors who have the technological and managerial expertise to succeed in a boundaryless venue.

Another reason for creating a multiple mentor network involves the dramatic shifts in organizational structures and the concurrent shift in job mobility over the last 25 years. Organizational downsizing, mergers and acquisitions, global competition, and the growth of small entrepreneurial startups have altered the "company man" ideal of stability and upward mobility. Today, people have careers characterized by flexibility, project work across multiple firms, and an emphasis on learning rather than promotions and salary increases.¹³ Managers change jobs, industries, and even careers, as they seek to maintain or improve their standard of living while developing new, more marketable skills. In such an environment where change is the norm and continuous knowledge acquisition is critical, the traditional single mentor-protégé model is being replaced by the guidance and assistance of a diverse cadre of mentors.¹⁴

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However, the demand for mentors is likely to outpace the supply. Because organizational downsizing and delayering have amplified workload pressures on the dwindling supply of mid- and upper-level managers, these potential mentors may lack the ability or desire to provide the time and attention needed to build a quality mentoring relationship with junior employees. These countervailing forces—need for continuously updating skills and reduced supply of mentors—require to-

day's managers to search for multiple mentors who can provide career and psychosocial support that varies in duration and intensity. What once was accomplished by a single mentor over many years is now available only to protégés who search out multiple mentors.¹⁵

In tandem with changes in organizational and job structures are major changes in the demographic makeup of the global workplace. William Johnston, author of *Global Workforce 2000*, notes that there are "massive relocations of people including immigrants, temporary workers, retirees, and visitors. The greatest relocations will involve young, well-educated workers flocking to the cities of the developed world."¹⁶ These immigrants are expected to flock to Japan, Germany, and the United States; in addition, millions of women in industrializing nations are entering the paid workforce.¹⁷ In this new, diverse global context, multiple perspectives provided by a diverse set of mentors will help bridge the variety of employee expectations, values, and work habits and allow executives to take advantage of the diversity which this new workforce offers.

These changing workforce demographics have altered the work of and created additional challenges for today's manager. For example, as the number of dual-career and single-parent employees continues to grow, organizations are increasingly adopting family-friendly policies and expecting their managers to implement these and other supportive company practices.¹⁸ The changing composition of employees and the work they do creates two challenges necessitating a new type of mentor guidance: how to deal with employees' diverse employment expectations and how to balance one's own work and family roles and responsibilities. As these phenomena are fairly recent, it is likely that minimal guidance is available through human resource or other formalized functions. A mentor who has successfully addressed these challenges can provide valuable knowledge and support for today's executive.

The expected mass global migration of workers suggests increasingly diverse work populations who face challenges emanating from minority status. However, the limited supply of minorities in high-level positions requires that protégés seek the services of multiple mentors to provide the needed advice and support. To find these multiple mentors, a protégé must search beyond organizational and geographic boundaries—non-face-to-face means of communication—for mentor support.¹⁹ In addition, each new mentor in a protégé's developmental network provides potential access to an exponentially greater number of individuals,

creating even more opportunities to build a mentor relationship with individuals who share similar or compatible values and characteristics. The more diverse the workforce becomes, the greater the need for individuals to build a diverse mentor network.

In sum, mentoring has become an effective means for coping with organizational change. A collection of mentors is invaluable, providing different perspectives, knowledge, and skills while serving multiple mentoring functions. They can provide emotional support or protection from political enemies in a way no one individual can.²⁰ Where firms use organizational networks to facilitate increased knowledge for a competitive advantage,²¹ individuals can utilize mentor networks to facilitate access to the knowledge and experiences of others for a competitive career advantage. Moreover, individuals with multiple mentors to rely on for career assistance are less affected by a dysfunctional or unavailable mentor. Protégés with multiple mentors realize that they cannot rely on a single mentor for career development;²² instead, they must manage their own careers by developing and maintaining many relationships that will enable them to achieve career success and satisfaction.

Mentoring has become an effective means for coping with organizational change.

To better understand how mentor networks are successfully developed and applied, we conducted in-depth interviews with fifteen successful executives. These executives mirror the gender mix in upper-management ranks (twelve men, three women) and represent diverse industries (e.g., healthcare, media, food) and upper-level job positions (e.g., president, CEO, division manager). (See the Appendix for more details about the methodology.) From these fifteen interviews, convergent themes emerged which form the basis of this article. We use the intelligent-career framework and the interview themes to suggest specific strategies for employing mentor networks to enhance three career competencies, specified below.

Intelligent Careers

I had female mentors, the few women who had gone before me. These women taught me what it took to be a female in a man's world. One woman, the first female pilot in the Navy,

helped me understand that I just had to prove myself. She gave me practical, hard-hitting facts. I had men who showed me how to navigate through the political arena of Navy pilots. A master chief with 23 years of experience taught me how to gain the respect of an all-male crew. I needed his perspective and his experience to be successful in leading troops of soldiers. I had people who taught me how to act, others who taught me who to know. Each of these mentors allowed me to be successful in a world where women had not had much of an opportunity to succeed before.

—Elizabeth Williams, Lieutenant, and one of the 2 per cent of female pilots in the U.S. Navy in 1986

Respected career scholars Robert DeFillippi and Michael Arthur developed the concept of the intelligent career to complement the work of strategic management scholars studying intelligent enterprises and competency driven firms.²³ DeFillippi and Arthur suggest that personal competencies, like organizational competencies, in turbulent environments reflect different forms of knowledge that can be applied and adapted to the shifting career opportunities in today's workplace.²⁴ This approach reflects the shift from the long-term loyalty of professionals to a firm, wherein competencies were built according to organizational needs, to a model of occupational excellence, wherein professionals seek to continually upgrade the skills they offer to the marketplace. Each form of knowledge, and the accumulation of knowledge, changes in response to shifting environmental, employment, and personal factors, independent of a single firm.

The Three Career Competencies

The intelligent career comprises three career competencies that are manifested in people's beliefs and identities (knowing *why*), knowledge and skills (knowing *how*), and networks or relationships (knowing *whom*).²⁵ Specifically, the knowing-why competency reflects a professional's values and motivation—his/her career passion. Knowing why answers the question: Who am I? It relates to an individual's identity and the fit between this identity and choices made relative to tasks, projects, and organizations.

Knowing how answers the question: What can I do? It refers to the skills and knowledge needed for job performance—a person's level of expertise. Individuals may use their various employment settings and experiences on different projects as well

as the mentor network that has been developed to both apply and enlarge the skills and knowledge they possess.

Knowing whom answers the question: Who do I know? It reflects the relationships that contribute to an individual's networking. The friends, colleagues, and professional associations with whom individuals network can help build a reputation, provide needed visibility and access to opportunities, and provide new learning resources independent of the firm. Mentors serve as a knowledge bank to support professionals in the growth and enhancement of all three career competencies.

Terri Scandura and Ethlyn Williams, noted mentoring researchers, provide a detailed conceptualization of how one type of mentor, the leader, can assist in the development of his/her subordinates' intelligent careers amidst increasing interorganizational mobility. They suggest that leaders serve as mentors by providing vocational support for knowing how, psychological support for knowing whom, and role modeling for knowing why.²⁶ By providing protection, challenging assignments, and visibility, leaders help protégés enhance self-efficacy and promotability, and thus their knowing-how competency. Leaders provide counseling, encouragement, and emotional support to facilitate the building of networks and the enhancement of knowing-whom competencies. Through their example, leaders help protégés learn, understand, and internalize the organization's culture, thereby engaging the knowing-why competency.

By providing protection, challenging assignments, and visibility, leaders help protégés enhance self-efficacy and promotability.

Two authors of this article, Suzanne de Janasz and Sherry Sullivan, have applied the intelligent-career concept to examine how professors must go beyond the traditional dissertation advisor/mentor apprenticeship model and build a portfolio of mentor relationships to enhance career progression and satisfaction.²⁷ By mapping the knowing competencies across the professorial ranks (e.g., doctoral student, assistant, associate, full professor), they provide a framework for guiding professors in the construction of a network of developmental relationships. They suggest that professors who recognize the need for an intelligent career will actively seek out relationships to help them develop the three knowing competencies.

Developing these different career competencies makes relying on different types of mentoring re-

lationships essential. Drawing on the ideas of the intelligent career, we examine how the career competencies of knowing why, how, and whom interact with learning demands to produce the need for different types of mentoring.

Knowing Why: Who Am I?

I really don't have an authority figure who serves as my mentor, but I do have people to get advice from. These are people whose opinions I value, so I turn to them to get their thoughts. It seems to me that almost everyone who makes it to the executive level at Frito Lay has someone who helps them figure out their career path and how to match who they are to the organization.

—John Swenson, Division Warehouse Performance Manager, Starfleet Captain Warehousing, Frito Lay Incorporated

Knowing why relates to our identity, which relates to our career-related choices. This identity begins to form at a young age, evolves through educational and work experiences, and translates into early career choices. New entrants into the workforce might ask themselves: Do I enjoy working for a large, prestigious corporation or a smaller, more close-knit firm? Am I better suited to this industry or another? Am I on the right path? They might also seek the counsel of mentors in their personal or professional networks for information and support in making difficult career decisions.

During this time, the knowing-why competency continues to be tested and developed. Was the right profession chosen? Is the work satisfying? Junior professionals may seek the advice of their peers or supervisors for help with these questions. They may seek out new mentors within their firms for more organization-specific knowledge about performance standards, how to get promoted, and learning the ropes.²⁸ They also begin to build reputations about who they are and for what they will be known.

As time passes, trigger events such as a blocked promotion, job layoff, divorce, or illness may cause professionals to reevaluate their career paths.²⁹ Many of the executives we interviewed recounted how they sought the advice of one or more mentors when they reached a career or life transition. Based on their mentor's advice and their own reassessment, some professionals veered off the fast track or took a lower-level position with less prestige. Some may strategize their eventual move up

through the company's ranks, while others may leave the corporation and start their own firms.

Upon achieving career success, the need for mentoring continues. Formal networking, as well as informal conversations with other seasoned professionals, may assist in making decisions about work/family balance, midlife renewal, career changes, updating skills, and retirement options. For example, Dan Caulfield, CEO of HQ Group in Oceanside, California sought advice from another CEO on how to manage work/nonwork balance. From this interaction, he gained a new perspective and adopted a new work style. He states: "Now I work a three-and-a-half-day week . . . I never work on the weekends anymore . . . I'm so in love with the business, I could end up talking about it all the time . . . What's amazing is that I get a lot more work done this way."³⁰

In sum, answering the "Who am I?" question relates to individuals' search and development of their identity and the fit between this identity and choices made relative to tasks, projects, and organizations. As individuals change career directions and need to develop new skills and abilities to support changes in their self-concept, they will need to seek out new mentors to help guide them.

Knowing How: What Can I Do?

Initially, NCR Corporation provided a senior salesman to show me the ropes. As I moved up into management, I found that I needed additional mentors as I was developing new skills. As managing partner for AT&T's Metis Business Unit, I turned to a subordinate in a collaborative role. Still today I have mentors who help me with the demands of my new job—negotiating company acquisitions and selling business units. As my skill demands changed, my mentors necessarily changed as well. I don't suppose I will ever outgrow my need for strong mentors.

—Jeff Whiting, President, Entervault Incorporated

Throughout and beyond formal schooling, individuals continue to build new skills and identify those skills that require polishing through feedback from self and others. This learning process enhances individuals' self-esteem and their beliefs that they can perform a task.³¹ Regardless of education, experience, or career stage, people need to learn continuously—that is, develop their knowing-how competency—particularly in turbulent times.³² For example, many firms lament that despite their advanced degrees, MBA graduates lack the soft skills

(i.e., communications, interpersonal relations) and hands-on experience needed to succeed in business.³³ Even as individual proficiencies are developed, demands shift, requiring a need for additional mentor help with new technologies or markets. Such mentors not only provide career guidance but also psychosocial or emotional support—an important and helpful function of mentoring.³⁴ In addition to work demands, professionals must cope with simultaneous and often-conflicting personal demands and obligations.³⁵ Mentors may listen and advise protégés, helping them cope with personal stress as well as work stress, such as heavy workloads, unfair treatment, inadequate feedback, problem coworkers, and unreasonable bosses.³⁶

Given the rapid changes in today's business environment, professionals need a diverse portfolio of mentors possessing sufficient breadth and depth of expertise to help them learn the ropes of their specific firm, gain knowledge of new technologies, and assist in the development of interpersonal skills (e.g., communication and conflict resolution techniques) as well as numerous other skills that may arise unexpectedly from the changing environment. Some of these mentors may be internal to the firm while others may be members of professional organizations, volunteer groups, or even paid executive career coaches.

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In sum, knowing how relates to the skills and knowledge needed for people to do their current jobs as well as any future jobs. Employees, especially temporary or project workers who often move between boundaries, need several mentors to assist in their continuous learning and development of new expertise. These mentors may be coworkers, friends, or formal mentors established through professional organizations.

Knowing Whom: Who Do I Know?

I have had several mentors throughout my career at GE. I relied most on mentors at transition points, though individuals helped me navigate the corporate landscape throughout my tenure. One mentor in particular helped me make the transition from a GE subsidiary to a big corporate job with GE. This particular mentor taught me how to pitch ideas to Jack

[Welch], gave me inside tips on the players, and, most importantly, opened doors for me. He knew folks all over the world and would ask them to give me five minutes. Without his introduction I wouldn't have been able to get an appointment.

—Jeff Dye, CEO, GE Corporate Payment Services

According to Execunet, a career management and recruiting resource center for executives and recruiters, the old rule of thumb that it takes one month per \$10,000 of salary expected to find a new job has changed, with recent findings suggesting that one's age and ease of finding a new job are inversely correlated.³⁷ Executive search firms capitalize on the growing difficulties in finding appropriate positions for executives and utilize their networks (in addition to workshops and coaching) to hasten executives' search. In especially tight labor markets, job hunters realize that it's not always what you know but who you know that facilitates job acquisition.

Having an extensive network of contacts also makes the individual more valuable to organizations.

Individuals who have knowing-whom competency may increase their mobility both within and outside the firm based on the reputation they have built through their mentor networks. Of the 3,652 executives surveyed by Drake Beam Morin, 61 per cent said they had found new positions in the previous year through networking.³⁸ Having an extensive network of contacts also makes the individual more valuable to organizations. Management scholar Rosalie Tung writes about the organization's need "to attract and retain people who are well connected or who excel in collaborative teamwork in order to become or remain world class."³⁹ For example, without *guanxi*, international firms in China would have great difficulty gaining access and approval for just about everything.⁴⁰ *Guanxi* includes having connections, leveraging power and trust, and knowing the right people who can grant special favors. It is also the granting of favors to others to pave the way for future business. This type of connection that implies a reciprocal obligation to provide assistance when needed exists to varying degrees in every culture.⁴¹

Knowing whom refers to the depth and breadth of relationships within the networks that people build to facilitate their career development. These

friends, coworkers, and colleagues in professional associations may come from different organizations, occupations, or parts of the globe, but together they provide people with networks of information and emotional support to increase their mobility and improve their job skills. Building and continuously developing such networks allows individuals to stay connected and opens doors to new opportunities.

In order to develop the knowing who, how, and why competencies in an increasingly complex and changing environment, individuals must develop relationships with multiple mentors who can assist in different aspects of their careers. In the next section, using information gleaned from our interviews with top executives as well as recent mentoring research, we provide five specific strategies for building and maintaining an intelligent career network. Such a network should provide a portfolio of "mentors of the moment" who can help protégés develop across a variety of learning experiences and over the phases of their careers.⁴²

Building an Intelligent Mentoring Network

Recent research and current realities support the idea of constructing an intelligent mentor network. But how do professionals actually build such networks, and how can executives help professionals in their firms develop these networks? We suggest the following five steps:

1. Become the Perfect Protégé.

Linda Hill, in her well-known Harvard Business School article "Beyond the Myth of the Perfect Mentor," suggests that instead of searching for the mythical perfect mentor, an individual should become the "perfect protégé" by investing the time and energy needed to develop and maintain a network of developmental relationships.⁴³ Because of the give-and-take aspects of the mentoring process, protégés must be careful to invest enough time to permit the mentoring relationship to grow and mature, so that trust and respect can develop. Andy Winston, a sponsoring editor at Irwin McGraw Hill, commented on developing such relationships:

In my experience, mentoring often occurs as an ad hoc process of relationship building that lacks direction and definition. While these networks (if you can call them that) are helpful, I have found that when I have taken the time to cultivate a mentor relationship,

the benefits are much more tangible: wisdom, support, and most of all strategic suggestions.

Protégés should be aware that mentors often risk their own credibility and reputation to aid in protégé development. When a protégé stumbles, the failure often reflect poorly on the mentor. Protégés should be careful not to underestimate the risks that their mentors assume on their behalf and should publicly acknowledge the mentor's assistance. Moreover, protégés should seek out opportunities to provide their mentors with technical information, new knowledge, or emotional support, as "the goal of building networks is to contribute to others."⁴⁴ Mentoring is a reciprocal relationship; mentors assist protégés, and in turn protégés should assist their mentors. Helping others increases the likelihood of receiving assistance in the future as well as increasing the trust and credibility of the relationship.⁴⁵ Protégés should provide positive feedback and thanks when their mentors help them. If mentors don't know that they have been helpful, they may be less willing to share valuable insights or opportunities in the future.⁴⁶

Because mentors are identified based upon their wisdom and reputations for developing others, expect quality mentors to be in high demand. Realize that mentors have work demands and personal lives as well as other protégés in their networks. Protégés must discuss their needs and ascertain the mentor's willingness to provide corresponding time and effort; they also need to be proactive in maintaining contact with their mentors. For example, mentoring researchers Lillian Eby and Tammy Allen found that 55 per cent of 242 protégés studied reported that their mentors had occasionally neglected them.⁴⁷ Executives we interviewed suggest that they relied not just on one mentor but had several trusted mentors to whom they could turn.

Mentoring is all about learning—for both the protégé and the mentor.⁴⁸ Protégés should develop the knowing why, how, and whom competencies and learn from different types of mentors; in return, those mentors will learn and grow. In addition, protégés should seek development from formal mentors as well as through coaches, sponsors, friends, and peers.⁴⁹ By honestly sharing successes as well as mistakes, protégés enable learning—both theirs and their mentors.⁵⁰ Todd Smart, marketing vice president of Tabin Corporation, advises sharing with mentors "what happened as opposed to the story we all made up about what happened . . . you don't get the benefits unless you take the risks."⁵¹

Several of the executives whom we interviewed acknowledged that they saw their advisor or friend as a mentor only in hindsight, as illustrated by Ed Hartman, director of technical services with Avaya Corporation:

Working with Jim, Scott, and Ann on the management team was the best time I had at work. We had fun; we made things happen. Jim retired, Scott took a new job, and Ann moved. With them gone, suddenly I realized that I had counted on these people for more than support and fun . . . I had lost a trusted group of advisors.

Development may also come through co-mentors—a pair of close, collegial friends committed to facilitating each other's development—who take turns mentoring each other at particular stages of their careers/lives.⁵² The real key to successful mentoring relationships is to participate in a power-free facilitation of learning.

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2. Engage in 360-Degree Networking.

In a study of fifteen high ranking women executives in the male-dominated entertainment industry, Ellen Ensher, Susan Murphy, and Sherry Sullivan found that while only a few of the women had traditional mentors, many had developed a 360-degree approach to networking.⁵³ The women shared information and strove to maintain good relationships with those above, below, and at the same status level as themselves. Their social lives were built around, and integrated with, work contacts and friendships. Hiking outings or monthly women-only industry parties provided social satisfaction as well as a means to connect and share resources with many different types of developers.

Aspiring managers can adapt the 360-degree technique of these successful women by seeking out developers and mentors who are at different career stages and levels. Some junior executives turn to senior executives, such as Cameron Burr who sought out the advice of his father and People Express Airlines founder Don Burr, explaining, "You want someone who's been around the block a few times, who has a more seasoned perspective on life issues."⁵⁴ Others, like Ellen Aschendorf, CEO of Egg Electric Inc., approach peers who are facing similar challenges. She sought advice from

a CEO who shared several similarities: both are women, in the same industry, have children, and are about the same age.⁵⁵ In addition to competency matching with mentors, aiming for similarity in values, personality, or other attributes can further enhance the value of the mentor relationship.⁵⁶ Cindy Hovanec, a retired human resource consultant with Medical Mutual, described her 360-degree networking approach and how she became a link in other people's networks:

You really need a strong mentor. While working as the manager of electronic transfers for a major bank, I began to develop relationships with peers, my boss, and people in other departments. I used this network to find my next job. Then as a senior consultant I still had my network from my previous job, and I found people coming to me with questions. I guess I became a mentor to them, especially the women. So it really came full circle.

3. Commit to Assessing, Building, and Adjusting the Mentor Network.

The executives quoted throughout this article attest to the fact that they have relied on various mentors and developers for different types of support at different points in their careers. Further, a survey of 649 professional women found that approximately 50 per cent of them had three or more mentors.⁵⁷ However, it is not enough just to increase the size of the mentoring network; it is important to conduct a careful analysis of what competencies you wish to build (knowing why, how, whom) and find the best resources for development. While multiple mentors might be willing to participate in a mentoring network, there can be a point of diminishing returns.⁵⁸ A healthy mentoring relationship is based on mutual trust and mutual obligations. Too many individuals in a network can impede the building of trust and hinder support, information, and assistance.

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The analysis process begins by assessing the current mentor network and identifying which mentors currently provide support for which com-

petences. Individuals should be available to help identify a career path and determine how to succeed to the next level within the organization. If not available, other trusted individuals who know the protégés can develop their knowing-why competency. Individuals who can help develop critical job skills and corporate knowledge provide a lifeline for developing knowing-how competence. Mentors can open their networks and assist in the development of knowing-who competencies. With network assessment, gaps and needed mentor competencies can be identified.

As experiences and knowledge are gained and professional goals shift, a mentor network must also change. With passing time and changing needs, the frequency and intensity of interactions may alter, and members may enter and leave the network based on shifting goals and demands. Whether the employee is starting out in a new position or considering a shift in current career status, the network must be reviewed to determine if additional assistance is needed. Even after you have mastered the job, think ahead to your next career move in determining whether your current network is adequate. As networks evolve, they should be continuously monitored and updated—advice that is reinforced by Bob Donaldson, managing partner of Wasatch Mountain Adventure Consultants.

I advise my executive clients to stay connected. As these executives develop more focused careers, higher income expectations, and fewer attractive job opportunities, it is critical to have a growing network of professional connections. It is these connections that will provide future job opportunities.

4. Develop Diverse, Synergistic Connections.

In the same way that work teams realize benefits such as increased creativity, innovation, and effectiveness from the synergistic combination of multiple, diverse perspectives,⁵⁹ individuals should be able to reach their greatest potential through interaction with multiple, diverse mentors. The unique combination of the guidance, information, and support of this diverse team of developers can exceed the sum of its parts, enabling protégés to expand their competencies.

Organizational or geographic boundaries should not preclude developing a diverse set of mentors. Improved technology (e.g., Internet, inexpensive air fares) and the growth and globalization of professional organizations have made it easier for professionals to develop effective working relationships

with individuals from different backgrounds and in different firms and countries.⁶⁰ For example, a manager might select an internal mentor to learn about the ins and outs of an organization's culture, policies, and practices; s/he may also seek advice from those outside the firm, industry, or country to glean specific information about external job opportunities, international market trends, best practices, and obtaining new skills.

Moreover, formal and informal mentoring opportunities offer unique benefits; protégés might consider drawing from both. Many organizations have formal mentoring programs that assist in matching individuals based on their career plans and goals in addition to other firm-sponsored opportunities (e.g., conferences, women and minority network groups) that can expand the mentor network. Recognizing that gains can arise from the mutual-selection aspect of informal mentoring,⁶¹ some organizational mentoring programs allow individuals to take a role in choosing their mentors. For example, GE selects the top 20 per cent of their performers and permits these protégés to personally choose their own mentors from a list of top executives. Jan Johnson, former vice president of marketing of Zions Bank, commented on the value of such programs:

I realize now that my career could be a lot different if I had mentors to introduce me to the right people and to provide visibility within organizations. I chose to work in start-up companies while some of my friends went to work in large corporations with formal mentor programs. I saw how their mentors could open doors for them. There is a lot to be said for having a mentor to stand up for you, introduce you, and shine their successes back on you.

In addition to seeking both internal and external, informal and formal mentors, the synergy of diversity—facilitated by seeking out mentors and developers of different races, educational backgrounds, industries, and of the opposite gender—should be considered. A diverse set of mentors provides different worldviews that will open new and refreshing ways to view old problems while also providing potentially exciting and novel career opportunities.

In sum, by consciously targeting a diverse team of mentors, professionals building an intelligent network can capitalize on the strengths of distinct mentor characteristics as well as the synergy that often comes from a diversity of opinions, information, and knowledge.

5. Realize That Change Is Inevitable and That All Good Things Must Come to an End.

We know that mentoring relationships vary in intensity and change over time. Some relationships never mature beyond the minimum mentoring based upon on-the-job training. Other relationships are characterized by marginal mentoring; these mentors provide limited developmental assistance and are just "good enough."⁶² Still others develop into powerful co-learning relationships where the parties begin to view themselves as family.⁶³ Mentor relationships that are characterized by different processes and outcomes, vary in how long they last, and change over time are illustrated by Kirk Wessel, corporate consultant with Organizational Consultants to Management, Inc.:

A mentor network is dynamic. It has to be. As a manager at Pepsi Corporation and Associated Food Stores. I would turn to a mentor in my functional area for job-related support. When I moved on from a job, I normally left my mentor relationship along with the job. In the Navy, however, as an ensign, I had a "Sea Daddy" [the Navy term for mentors]. "Sea Daddies" stick with you; it is a permanent relationship. In fact, I'm still in contact with my Navy mentor.

Ideally, mentor relationships provide rich learning experiences. Over the course of a healthy mentoring relationship, shared experiences, insights, and sacred knowledge are exchanged. At some point, however, relationships change. According to Burt Chase, a member of Gore Industries' board of directors, there came a time in his mentoring relationship with the company's founder, Bill Gore, when distance, growth, and experience deemed it time to adopt a new sponsor. His relationship with Bill stayed strong, yet the relationship changed from a mentor-type relationship to a friendship. Burt Chase commented:

Gore Industries has a mentor-type program which we call "sponsorship." Your sponsor is a supportive individual from whom you seek out advice. I was very fortunate as a new employee at Gore Industries to have Bill Gore as my first sponsor. Bill was a visionary leader who revolutionized the concept of corporate culture. I learned a great deal from Bill. Over time, I moved on to other sponsors. It is interesting how I identified my sponsors. I really looked for ordinary people doing extraordinary things.

All mentor relationships will change over time, and at some point they will end. Although some mentoring relationships grow across decades, research indicates that most mentoring relationships last an average of five years.⁶⁴ Some relationships, like that of Burt Chase and Bill Gore, will grow in mutual respect indicating an end of a mentor-protégé relationship and the start of a friendship; Other mentor relationships may become distant or dysfunctional. When the relationship ceases to be beneficial, ties with those mentors need to be cut.⁶⁵

"It is interesting how I identified my sponsors. I really looked for ordinary people doing extraordinary things."

Regardless of how the relationship ends, individuals should write a note expressing appreciation for the sponsor's influence on their careers. This communication is not only thoughtful but also may keep the door open for future conversations. An intelligent network is one that is fed and pruned as necessary.

Lessons Learned

Throughout my career, the mentors that I have had are very different. What was the same across all of them is that in each relationship there was mutual respect. I've had numerous mentors, and I've been a mentor. It seems that there are people out there with sharp, strategic minds who can take what they learn and apply it. It's intangible, but these people have a knowledge base, they carry themselves with self-confidence, and they know lots of people. These are the people who can make sure that mentees will continue to evolve and grow.

—Mike Dougherty, Vice President of Sales and Marketing, Cookiecree Bakery

Just as the leaders of democratic nations rely on a group of advisors to make decisions about governmental issues, individuals also need a portfolio of trustworthy mentors to provide insights and help them make decisions about complex and changing issues. This article has emphasized the desirability of professionals developing a cadre of multiple mentors to support their career development. These mentors can assist professionals in knowing the why, how, and whom in developing intelligent networks for future opportunities. Dick Graham, CEO of Au-

gusta Medical Center, explained why building a network of multiple mentors is so important:

The higher you rise in an organization [by whatever means], the more the skill set changes. At some point you climb beyond some imaginary clouds that keep you from recalling and exercising the skills that got you to that level in the first place. Many of these skills are no less necessary at the top than during the climb. So high perch dwellers need to find young mentors still making the climb and learn or relearn from them. You can always find bright young executives who are far better than you were on your best day and be humbled in knowing that about half of your perch came to you by sheer luck . . . and humility is also a mentorable attribute.

As can be seen from the comments of high-level executives, we are never too old or too experienced to have mentors in our lives. We all have something to learn. In the same way that organizations seek partnerships in an effort to capitalize on collaborative strengths, so can individuals at any level of an organization or any stage in their careers form facilitative mentor relationships. Arie deGeus, former coordinator of group planning of Royal Dutch/Shell, notes that "the ability to learn may be the only sustainable competitive advantage."⁶⁶ For an individual, this learning comes most directly from mentor relationships. To that end, we have outlined five specific strategies for identifying, managing, and nurturing these mentor relationships. We think that these strategies should aid in developing effective relationships and intelligent networks that will promote success and satisfaction in these complex and changing times.

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Appendix

Following from Alvesson, we used a reflexive approach to gathering interview data.⁶⁷ Specifically, we developed a framework which identified potential lines of thinking, beginning with the initial question asked of the executives: "Can you tell me a bit about a person who made a difference to you in terms of your career with [company name]?"

Based on the response to the initial question, the interview followed the logic flow of the interviewee's statements in an effort to understand the aspects of career networks which contributed to the interviewee's success. The reflexive interview technique allowed the interviewer to consider the interviewee's responses from a variety of angles, thereby allowing greater exploration of the topic. Moreover, the nature of the reflexive interview allowed the interviewees to clarify and explain their statements in an effort to ensure that the researcher understood the point they were making.⁶⁸

Next, we integrated the reflexive approach with a narrative-analysis strategy to synthesize the interview data. Following this method's protocols, we considered the stories told by the interviewee in light of the topic being studied as well as the individual's life experiences. Content analysis of these narratives yielded several mentoring-related themes.

A recent study of developmental relationships among women demonstrates that individuals often did not recognize the significant contribution of these friendships to their professional and personal lives until they narrated their experiences for the researcher.⁶⁹ Although the initial interview question did not use the term "mentoring" or suggest that there would be more than one individual who served in the mentor capacity, each interviewee identified several individuals who served in a developmental role.

We used a target-sample approach to select our executives, focusing on individuals with rich career experiences in diverse industries. We stopped adding to our sample when the stories told became redundant. All fifteen individuals granted permission to quote them in this article, and we are indebted to them for their time and assistance. The professionals we interviewed are as follows: Burt Chase, Member, Board of Directors, Gore Industries; Bob Donaldson, Managing Partner, Wasatch Mountain Adventure Consultants; Mike Dougherty, Vice President of Sales and Marketing, Cookiecree Bakery; Jeff Dye, CEO, GE Corporate Payment Services; Dick Graham, CEO, Augusta Medical Center; Cindy Hovanec, retired HR Consultant, Medical Mutual; Ed Hartman, Director, Technical Services, Avaya Corporation; Jan Johnson, former Vice President of Marketing, Zions Bank; D. McDonough, Managing Shareholder, retired, Lozano Smith Professional Corporation; Bill Radiger, President, Karma Media, LLC; John Swenson, Division Warehouse Performance Manager, Starfleet Captain Warehousing, Frito Lay Incorporated; Kirk Wessel, Corporate Consultant, Organization Consultants to Management Inc.; Jeff Whiting, Presi-

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