

## **BORROW A BRAIN: Finding a peer mentor**

*"I not only use all the brains that I have, but all that I can borrow." Woodrow Wilson*

Having a peer mentor (or several) will be beneficial to you in your learning journey and these potential "Success Buddies" are all around you.

**Family and friends:** Do you have an older brother or sister – or special friend a few years older than you who has been in the workforce for a couple of years? Are they good at listening to your problems and offering great advice? These family members or friends can help you to focus on your goals and support you in your learning.

**At your new workplace:** There may be people around you who have been in the workplace for a couple of years who can give you some good advice as you learn your new role. You might want to invite them to go for a coffee (or hot drink) and you can let them know about the learning programme that you are completing and discuss whether they might be interested in supporting you with this.

### **What to look for in a peer mentor:**

- A positive role model – someone who leads by example
- Honesty
- Good communication skills – the ability to listen, understand, question, clarify and will give constructive feedback
- Approachable, patient, and open-minded
- Shows respect for others and is willing to put themselves in another's shoes

### **Asking someone to be your peer mentor:**

This can be daunting. Even though it can be scary to ask someone to take on this role, remember that people are usually flattered if they are asked to help you guide their learning/career. Here are some ways that may help:

**Communicate why you want them to be your mentor:** It shows that you know why you would like them to be your mentor. Try to find a good reason that demonstrates that you've really thought about it, such as "I really admire how you have progressed in your career and how you are willing to share information with others".

**Communicating your situation and how their mentorship will help:** People become mentors because they are inspired by the passion and potential of those they mentor. Share what you are learning about and why their experience/advice can help.

**Actually ask the question:** “Would you consider being my mentor?” – some people shy away from the question and can leave the other person confused. If the person is a stranger, perhaps start with coffee to get to know each other first, before asking the question outright.

**Communicate how they can help you:** This includes the type of advice/feedback you are hoping to receive. Many people are happy to be mentors but are also very busy people so clearly describing how they can support you will be helpful.

**Communicate how you can help them:**

Use the “three mentors approach”: have a mentor that is already experienced in the workplace, have another mentor that is at the same experience level as yourself and a third mentor who is less experienced than you. There will be support you can give to them, whether it’s offering a different perspective on their work or introducing them to someone you know. As you grow and develop, you will also be able to help others more.

**Follow up:** It’s up to you to make it easy for others to help you. If this person agrees to being your mentor, he or she would still expect you to take the lead so figure out how best to communicate and build the relationship over time.

Lastly remember that that mentorship is ultimately about collaboration, sharing ideas, asking for feedback and not being afraid to ask for help or advice. Whether you are mentored by a friend, family member or colleague, don’t forget to be open, honest and giving in return.