

Mastering Mentoring 10 How Many

by **Bob Whipple, MBA, CPTD**



The question of how many mentor relationships to have at any point in time will depend on a number of factors. I will examine the question from the perspective of the protégé first, then I will discuss it from the point of view of the mentor. Finally, I will discuss the special case of mentoring leaders.

How Many Mentors Should a Protégé Have?

I recommend that every professional should have at least one mentor. I have outlined the benefits of having a mentor in several articles in this series, and I will add more benefits in future articles. A professional mentor can guide you on your journey in your chosen career.

Naturally, having a mentor in your professional arena is of paramount importance, but there are other areas of your life where a mentor could be a significant advantage.

Having a mentor for your volunteer and civic life really helps provide networking and skill-building advice. Seek out a respected community leader to help you. Your progress toward reaching your goals will be greatly enhanced. In fact, the act of identifying your goals can be significantly enriched by having a good mentor.

You may want to have a mentor who is like a life coach for your physical wellbeing. This person would have the requisite background to advise you on things like diet, exercise, disease prevention, recuperation, medications, sleep patterns, and other aspects of your health.

The only caveat here is to select a person who is reliable and not into things like fad diets or questionable medications or treatments. Many people rely on their personal physician as this mentor, but you may want to have a personal coach in addition to your doctor.

A coach for your spiritual life can be a good idea in many cases. This would be a friend who can focus on how you are integrating the various influences on your soul and the future of it.

Keep in mind that your mentor in any of these areas does not need to be a physical presence. Your mentor might be an author that you respect. Many of my mentors have never met me, but they have had a significant influence on the quality of my life as a result of my study of their ideas.

You could have several mentors in one area that see the world from different perspectives. They do not always have to agree on everything. You have the opportunity to select which things you are going to espouse.

How Many Proteges should a Mentor Have?

I advise that every professional should have at least one protégé. This is a way to give back and build up another person, so it is an act of kindness that pays big dividends. There is no reason to stop at only one protégé. You can have as many as you wish as long as you have the time and inclination.

I usually can count on more than 10 people at a time that I am mentoring. These relationships take on different levels of intervention and coaching. I might have an interface with a protégé on rare occasions. Others I might see weekly or sometimes even daily.

Keep close tabs on how much time you are spending with these people and scale things back if the situation gets out of balance. When you do not have enough time to service all of the people you are mentoring and they are getting frustrated, you have gone too far.

Likewise, if your professional or personal life is suffering due to the time you are putting in coaching others, you need to rebalance your own life.

Mentoring Leaders

I believe the highest calling for any leader is to grow other leaders. That is how you can leverage your leadership and get a multiplier effect. I have seen many leaders who do not recognize this mandate and spend all of their energy maximizing their own performance while forgetting the responsibility of bringing along the next generation of leaders.

This selfish attitude is one of the reasons there is a shortage of great leaders in our time. If every leader would focus some energy on helping other leaders advance their skills, we would have fewer problems in this world. If you are a leader, consider if you are giving back enough to grow other leaders for the future.

Bob Whipple, MBA, CPTD, is a consultant, trainer, speaker, and author in the areas of leadership and trust. He is the author of: The Trust Factor: Advanced Leadership for Professionals, Understanding E-Body Language: Building Trust Online, Leading with Trust is Like Sailing Downwind, and Trust in Transition: Navigating Organizational Change. Bob has many years as a senior executive with a Fortune 500 Company and with non-profit organizations.