

# Finding Mentorship

## Chapter 7: Education

If you're reading this and you don't have a mentor today, I urge you to begin looking for one who can help you reach the next stage of your professional journey. Someone who's thoughtful, experienced, wise. Someone's who's just a little further along the path than you are (but not so far along the path that they can no longer relate to the challenges and opportunities before you today).

The next step? How to approach them.

To help you figure out how to do this, I asked my friend Nate Green, a master connector who's been mentored by a who's-who list of interesting and successful people. Here's how he thinks about approaching possible mentors, plus some of the strategies he'd recommend for you.

### Send the email.

Nate emailed Lou Schuler, the fitness industry's most well-known journalist, when Nate was just nineteen years old. He proceeded to tell Lou that he wanted his job, asking how he got it.

"It wasn't my best email," Nate told me. But Lou surprised him by writing back and offering career advice. "That meant a lot to me. I would have never met him (or many other people who've helped shape my career) if I didn't first reach out."

Here's an updated script he recommends if you plan to reach out to a potential mentor via email.

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*Hey NAME,*

*My name is Nate, and I'm a big fan of your work.*

*Specifically, your (article/book/podcast) about (A, B, C) really helped me to (X, Y, Z).*

*I know you're busy, but I'm hoping you have a minute to answer a very short and specific question for me.*

*INSERT VERY SHORT AND SPECIFIC QUESTION HERE.*

*If you don't have time, I completely understand.*

*Thanks again for your work.*

### Approach an equal and not as a “fanboy”.

Whether you start with an email, or you get the chance to meet a potential mentor in person, make roughly 5 percent of the next interaction about how much you love their work. The remaining 95 percent or so is all about talking to them like a friend would. (This works better in person, of course, but applies equally to email.)

Nate recommends never fawning over people, hanging around them for too long, or coming across as needy. “It’s like dating that way,” says Nate. “No one wants to hang out with someone who’s constantly like, ‘OH MY GOD I LOVE YOU’ and clings on in a needy way.”

Also, when meeting people in person, never ask to take photos with them. (“It’s too fanboy-ish,” according to Nate.) Yet feel free to bring people small gifts, such as a book you really enjoy and think they’d like too.

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#### Ask if you can follow up.

If you end up meeting someone at a professional event or social function and have a good initial conversation, Nate recommends asking if you can follow up. Here's how you can approach the subject.

*It was really nice chatting with you, NAME.*

*I know you're busy, and so I want to respect your time.*

*That said, if I have a VERY specific question about (X, Y, Z), are you open to me sending you a short email?*

*If you don't have time to answer, that's fine.*

*But I really respect your opinion and think it could really help my career.*

*You have my word that whatever you tell me to try, I'll give it a shot.*

If they say yes,

*Thanks so much. What's the best way to get a hold of you?*

If they say no,

*Thanks so much. Keep doing good work. You're helping a lot of people.*

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#### If they share some advice, take it.

More than gifts or financial rewards, a mentor's greatest payoff is knowing that a mentee respects their time, takes their help seriously, and isn't afraid of hard work.

“Let's say I'm at a conference and meet someone I respect and want to learn from. Maybe we have a five-minute conversation and they give me a small piece of advice. I write that advice down (later, when I'm back in my hotel room). Then I follow their advice. If they tell me to read a certain book, I read it. If they tell me to should consider starting a blog, I start one.”

Whatever it is, Nate does what they recommended. Later, he tells them about it. “I'll email to follow up. Then I'll ask for a next step, something else they'd recommend I put into action.”

#### Always consider: “What can I offer them?”

You may have no idea what that is. But it helps to think this way—to constantly be on the lookout for how you can do something, anything, to express your gratitude for their help, guidance, and support.

If you're wondering why mentors would even spend their time helping you like this, the answer is easy. The right mentors want mentees, badly. They want to share what they've learned. And they want to share it with young, smart, curious people who are likely to do something valuable with their advice (and honestly report back on what they did and how it worked out).

And, keep this in mind, they're not looking to be “impressed.” Frankly, if you're mentoring with someone worth learning from, you can't impress them at your level of development. So you're not there to be the expert, or to show them how smart you are, or to impose your own limited insights. You're there to show up with a great attitude and a growth mindset. To listen carefully, ask great questions, and put what you're learning into action.

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Yet, while you're there to learn, you do get points for being curious, thoughtful, and adding value to the relationship in other ways, for expressing gratitude for the advice and the opportunity. To this end, I often send my mentors handwritten notes, short reports of how I used their advice to my advantage (as Nate does), and small tokens of my gratitude. I love it when my mentees do the same.

These activities and worksheets are taken from the book **Change Maker**: Turn your passion for health and fitness into a powerful purpose and a wildly successful career by John Berardi, PhD.

Check it out at: [www.changemakeracademy.com/book](http://www.changemakeracademy.com/book)