How to Choose and Use an EQ Mentor

By Jean Greaves, Ph.D.

If you’re like most people, you don’t already know how to get good at what you’re not good at. Take emotional intelligence (EQ) for example. Even if you find out at an EQ workshop that you need to work on being more direct in a tough conversation, one month later you probably worry about that difficult conversation you know you need to schedule. So what can you do to get over this hurdle? Contact your EQ mentor.

Now you drop by your EQ mentor’s office and you tell her how nervous you are for this difficult conversation that has to happen. You want to learn how to be more direct. With a little discussion and figuring out the exact cause of your worry, your EQ mentor points out that you can’t completely master it in this one conversation. If you can remember to keep direct eye contact rather than looking down when you speak and practice saying what you need to say in the form of statements rather than questions, perhaps this time you won’t be perceived as not coming out and saying what you really want to say. That’s all. Eye contact and statements. That’s enough to practice this time and it feels much more doable than the stress of “go in there and handle that tough conversation better!” Phew. Thank goodness for your EQ mentor.

EQ mentors can be anyone around you who has had life experiences that shaped their own EQ. They’ve already benefited from having high EQ role models in their own lives who helped them develop things like the ability to understand their own emotional patterns, to handle themselves well during emotionally charged moments, to notice what others are going through or to have that knack for forming lasting relationships. Your EQ mentor is the person who can spot what you need to hear, not what you want to hear, and who has the skill to do it in a way that doesn’t turn you off, offend you, or go right over your head.

High EQ comes from experience, perspective, and practice. This is what EQ mentors have and what they will offer you. As most EQ development efforts are self-guided, if you want to pick your own EQ mentors and use them well, here are the four steps you will take:

1. Seek a potential EQ mentor
2. Recruit your EQ mentor
3. Work with your EQ mentor
4. End the mentoring relationship

Step 1: Seek a potential EQ Mentor

Brainstorm a list of people you know whom you admire and then ask yourself why you admire them. Based on your answers, notice whether any of these qualities have to do with emotional intelligence. Is this person known for being good at relationships, a master in social settings, handles themselves well in tricky situations or even simply knows well their own strengths and weaknesses? Pick the person who is particularly good at the EQ skill you want to work on now. You may choose to change mentors when you move on to develop a different EQ skill. If it’s hard to come up with anyone, ask your friends and colleagues if they can help you think of someone. Once you have a short list of names, compare them against the 10 Characteristics of a Good EQ Mentor listed in on the next page. Usually someone will surface who becomes your first choice and you can explore any characteristics you are unsure of (e.g. Will make time for you.) when you approach him or her with your mentoring request.
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Step 2. Recruit Your EQ Mentor

Most people feel bad asking other people for help, especially when it takes time out of their day. Don’t be afraid to ask because you think they will say no. People like to help if they can. If they can’t help, it’s likely because of time constraints and not anything about you. Schedule a meeting and find out if there’s a mutual fit. Just be honest about what you’re attempting to do, what you would like from them, and try to figure out if they really are willing and able. Then simply ask. Give them time to think about it if they want it.

If either of you like structure, you can draft an informal contract for your EQ mentorship. A mentorship contract sets expectations and establishes how you will interact. A few of the topics covered in a contract include length of the mentorship, how often you’ll talk, your needs, their needs, and anything else important to either of you. It can be written or even simply discussed informally and made as a verbal agreement.

Use the list below to help you decide what you’d like covered in your mentorship contract.

### 10 Characteristics of a Good EQ Mentor

1. A good listener
2. You trust him or her
3. Easily accessible to you
4. Will make time for you
5. Given you good guidance in the past
6. Supportive and cares about your success
7. Good at explaining how they do it or how they learned
8. Will share themselves and their expertise with you
9. Good at honest feedback or constructive criticism
10. Will hold you accountable for what you say you will

### EQ Mentor Contracts Cover the Following...

1. How long will the EQ mentoring potentially last?
2. How many times will you meet?
3. What will you want/need from your mentor?
4. What will your mentor want/need from you?
5. How will you measure your progress?
6. How will you work together (phone meetings, morning coffee chats, email questions ahead of meetings, etc.)?
7. What meeting times potentially work best?

Some people wonder whether you have to ask an EQ Mentor to be your mentor or whether you can simply observe privately and come to them with specific questions when you need help. You can learn from other people without telling them what you’re doing, but you miss out on one important element, the “why’s” behind their actions. You can have these conversations informally with anyone, but if they become regular with any one person, you may want to formalize it so that you feel free to take their time without becoming a burden.
Choosing an EQ mentor is an integral part of the “My EQ ACTION PLAN” in the book *Emotional Intelligence 2.0*. It’s part of the self-guided development process offered along with the opportunity to narrow in on one EQ skill, practice 3 strategies for that skill for a period of months, access an EQ mentor along the way and once you’re ready to see how well you’ve made progress, you are able to hop online and take the Emotional Intelligence Appraisal a second time to see your change scores and how far you’ve come.

Once you’ve chosen the person who is willing to provide you with EQ mentoring advice throughout your EQ development journey, grab your book, *Emotional Intelligence 2.0* and turn to page 57 and jot down the name of your EQ Mentor. You’re ready to begin working with your mentor.

**Step 3: Work with your EQ Mentor**

Mentorship typically lasts for months or even a period of years. You may want it to span the time you committed to working on developing your EQ or you may want it to be a brief period of three or four months while you work on a specific EQ skill. But mentoring relationships don’t always have hard and fast endpoints. Typically the need to meet becomes infrequent and the conversations evolve into ones that colleagues or friends have rather than mentoring advice. You may never exhaust what you can learn from a mentor because practicing EQ skills is a lifelong journey. As you face new situations, their perspectives may continue to be useful. If you’re approaching situations exactly how your mentor would, it’s likely your conversations will become unnecessary.

It’s up to you whether you work with multiple mentors or only one mentor at a time. Pick your preference based on how you like to learn. Keep in mind that simplicity helps when you are learning. It will be up to you to manage how you sort out varying advice if you choose multiple mentors. If this doesn’t sway you, go ahead and access multiple mentors. The one thing to avoid would be asking one mentor to critique the mentoring advice you get from another mentor. That will prove more and more problematic as time goes on. It will be up to you to weigh the input you receive.

There are a few specific things you ought to be attentive to when working with your mentor. Don’t miss appointment meetings or be late, and try not to bombard your mentor with constant meetings. Next, be prepared to guide the discussion if your mentor doesn’t by asking questions like ‘What would you do if…?’; ‘Yesterday I ... what would you have done?’; or ‘Yesterday I...what could I have done differently?’ Be prepared to try what your mentor suggests and go back and debrief together afterward about what worked, what didn’t, why, and what you would do differently next time. When you ask for feedback, consider it seriously. The best reward for an EQ mentor is to hear about what goes well for you. The small successes are the best thank you a mentor can get.

On the next page are the eight tasks you are responsible for to do your part in the EQ mentorship.
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The 8 Tasks of a Good Mentee

1. Be respectful of your mentor’s time.
2. Ask your mentor questions and ask for examples.
3. Be specific about what you don’t understand.
4. Practice your mentor’s recommendations.
5. Go back and discuss your efforts.
6. Ask for feedback and be open to it when you get it.
7. Share your progress and successes.
8. Say thank you.

A good EQ mentor will suggest specific things to say or do the next time you face a situation where you can practice your EQ. When that next tough situation happens, ask yourself two questions. Question 1: How did it turn out? If the answer is “great”, your mentor is helpful. If the answer is not so great, then you have to ask yourself Question 2: Did you do what your mentor suggested and do it well? If the answer is no, then you have more practicing to do. If the answer is yes, then you need a debrief discussion with your mentor to gain more perspective. This “debrief” discussion will tell you whether you missed something important or whether you won’t get what you need from your mentor.

Step 4: End the Mentoring Relationship

If your mentorship isn’t giving you what you need, you have two options. First, you can meet with your EQ mentor and say you appreciate how far you’ve come, what they’ve contributed and that you’re going to free you both from this formal phase of guidance. Your second option is to allow a more gradual end to the mentoring relationship through fewer and fewer scheduled conversations. Mentors rarely feel the need to stop the mentoring status they have and they also don’t typically feel slighted if discussions become more infrequent. They are just happy to be helpful if and when you need it. If you don’t need it, fine.

If your mentorship has proved fruitful, ending a mentoring relationship doesn’t mean ending the relationship altogether, just the formal mentorship. Write a thank you card or give a small gift as a token of your appreciation. What mentors like most is to hear how you’ve benefited and what you’ve learned. Keeping in touch is also appreciated.

There you have it; a simple and informal approach to getting the most from those high EQ people around you. They are emotionally intelligent, so they will already have the kinds of skills that a mentor typically uses. Treat them as special because they are special. And who knows, maybe once your EQ development journey is well underway, maybe you will agree to mentor someone else who is just starting his or her EQ development journey.

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