

How to Find a Mentor After 50

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For years, I worked as a production account manager at an independent video store while pretending to pursue an acting career. I didn't go to auditions, send my resume and headshots out or try to find roles in student films.

I was an actress in name only.

When I was laid off from my job in my fifties, I had a choice: pursue an acting career or try to make my living as a writer. I knew I didn't have the skills to be an actress, and decided it was time for me to pursue a freelance writing career. I was older than most people starting out, but age gave me the ability to focus on my goals and make them happen rather than talk about them.

I knew having a mentor would help me with a writing career. However, much of the mentor information that I found seemed geared toward young people embarking for the first time on their professional journeys. Older people were seen as mentors, not mentees.

There was an assumption that older people didn't need guidance since they were the ones with all the answers. While it's true that wisdom comes with age, within that wisdom is the knowledge there's much we don't know.

People aged 50 and up need career guidance as much as anyone else. Mentors do so much more than give you job advice — a good one will support, guide and inspire you.

As I embarked on my new career, the first thing I did was call myself a writer — not an aspiring writer or a want-to-be but a freelance writer. I took classes, talked to working writers and wrote a lot. It was exciting when I began getting published and paid.

Things were going well, but I still needed help to go to the next level. I was writing on [Medium](https://medium.com/) (<https://medium.com/>) and meeting many different kinds of writers.

One woman, Debra, had published a memoir and was writing consistently well-received pieces on the platform. When she created her own Medium publications, she asked me to join her editorial team. After working closely with her, we've become mentors to each other, and I have thrived under her guidance.

Based on my experience, here are some ways older adults can find a mentor.

- **Determine why you want a mentor.** What do you hope to achieve with a mentor? Are your goals clear and do you know the steps you need to take? How will a mentor assist you with this?
- **Be flexible when considering a mentor.** Don't disregard someone as a potential mentor because they're younger than you or because their field of expertise doesn't exactly match yours. If you're too rigid about whom you'll consider as a mentor, you may miss out.
- **Find someone you admire and who's doing what you want to do.** If you feel awkward contacting a stranger, remember few people are so successful they find honest admiration annoying. If they respond, be grateful for any information they're willing to share. Trust your instincts and if it feels right, ask them if they'd consider mentoring you. If they can't help you now, they may be able to in the future. Don't take their refusal personally. Remember, not everyone is comfortable with mentoring.
- **Go to alumni get-togethers.** Alumni functions are the original networking opportunities and people may feel more inclined to help a fellow alum than someone else.
- **Use social media.** Social media isn't only about humble-bragging and self-promotion. You can use social media to find the help you need.



You never know who knows someone who can connect you to your next mentor. On Facebook, there are many different kinds of groups; find one that aligns with what you want to do and join. Talk to people and find out what they did to get started in their second career. They also may be able to advise you on the best online mentorship platforms.

- **Be a mentor to a mentor.** Sometimes a mentor/mentee relationship can seem out-of-balance with the mentee getting the most from the relationship. Mentoring your mentor is a way to guarantee that you both get something valuable from the relationship. The skills you learn from mentoring can help you on your path to achieving success in your new career.
- **Attend networking events.** It may not seem like a hiking meetup or a mixer at the Chamber of Commerce would be a great place to find a mentor, but they're a low-stakes way to practice your social skills and fine-tune your ability to make connections quickly. You might find a mentor, or you might find someone who can help you find one.
- **Take a class.** Your instructor may currently be working in the field you're interested in, or they may be retired from a [long career](#) (<https://www.nextavenue.org/retirement-is-an-opportunity/>) in it. Whatever their status, they are experienced in your field and can give you tips on how to navigate the landscape. Your potential mentor isn't limited to the instructor, another student may have strengths in areas that you don't and might be interested in the experience of mentoring.
- **Take advantage of your age.** As someone over 50, you may not have quite as many resources as someone just starting out, but since there are so many people over 50 starting second careers, "[unretiring](https://www.nextavenue.org/goodbye-early-retirement-hello-early-unretirement/)" (<https://www.nextavenue.org/goodbye-early-retirement-hello-early-unretirement/>) " and returning to the workforce, there are programs for the 50+ mentor seeker. [The Gerontological Society of America](#) (<https://www.geron.org/programs-services/mentor-program>) , for example, has a user-driven, online career networking tool, called Mentor Match. Also, check out your local senior center, many offer career assistance and mentorship programs.

Since most mentors don't charge for their time, you, as a mentee, should be respectful and thoughtful. Don't get angry if he or she gives you a piece of advice you don't like, or if they need to reschedule at the last minute.

There isn't an exact science to finding the right mentor, but persevere, be patient and think creatively. If the first mentor you find isn't a good fit, it's OK to thank him or her for meeting with you and continue the search.

When you're 50 years old or older, you're smart enough to realize when you need help, be open to receiving it and have enough experience to take full advantage of it, especially if it's in the form of a mentor.