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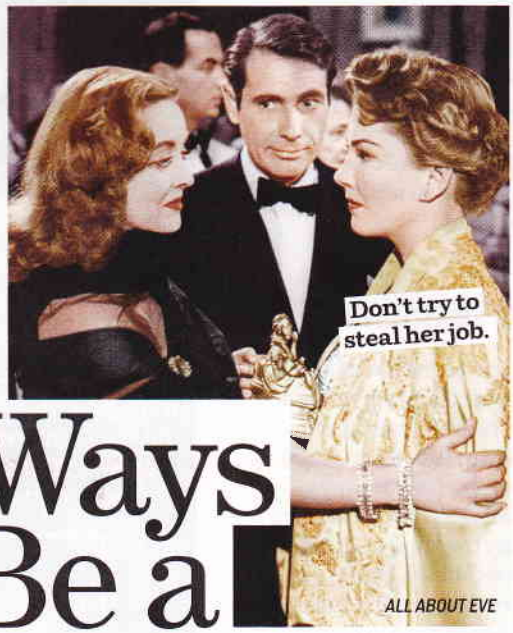

5 Ways to Be a Good Mentee

A MENTOR CAN BE AN INVALUABLE RESOURCE IN YOUR CAREER. FOLLOW THESE RULES TO MAKE SURE YOU MAKE THE MOST OF YOUR RELATIONSHIP.

By Anna Davies

1. Be Respectful of Her Time

Like any successful woman, your mentor is busy. A quick coffee with you becomes just one more item on her already packed to-do list. So give her options, says Kat Griffin, founder of the career-advice blog Corporette.com. Shoot her an e-mail when you have a question, and let her know you are open to coming to her, chatting on the phone, or just talking via e-mail. Give her plenty of time to get back to you—e-mailing with questions that need ASAP advice is annoying.

2. Seek Advice, Not Answers

She's not your best friend, mom, therapist, or Ouija board. And she probably doesn't feel comfortable telling you what you should or shouldn't do. The work-around? "Instead of asking 'what should I do' about a situation, ask what *she* would have done," says Nina Ries, principal of Ries Law Group, in Santa Monica, California, who mentors other lawyers. That way, she's sharing her experiences rather than feeling pressure to make your decision for you. She'll also respect that you're simply looking for insight to help you make an informed decision rather than just deferring to her.

3. Keep Her in the Loop

"If you only contact her when you need a favor or advice, she'll feel like she's being used," warns Zoe Weisberg Coady, cofounder of the PR firm BrandStyle Communications. Did she help you navigate a tricky work situation? Send her an e-mail, and let her know how it turned out. And if you opted not to take her advice? "Tell her that even though you decided to do X, talking about Y was illuminating," suggests Jenni Luke, CEO of Step Up Women's Network. You'll avoid hurting her feelings, and she'll get to know your decision-making process better."

4. Don't Push It

Your mentor might introduce you to people who could lead to a full-time position somewhere, but don't *expect* her to. And definitely never straight up ask her to hire you. Her role is to guide you and offer advice, not to find you a job. "Your mentor isn't your personal headhunter," says Ries. "You don't want her to feel like she was being used for her connections rather than for her knowledge." Don't worry; if she hears of a position you'd be a good fit for, she'll let you know.

5. Know When to Move On

"If you don't recognize when your mentor-mentee relationship has run its course, you become a nuisance," says Nicole Lindsay, a career consultant in Connecticut. Periodically take stock of your professional status. Ask yourself: Have you completed the project you sought her help with (like getting into grad school)? Are you interacting more like colleagues lately? Do you find that other people are asking you to be *their* mentor? If so, let her know how much you've appreciated having her in your life, stay in touch, but set her free. ■

(Clockwise, from left) 20th Century Fox/Everett Collection; Moviestore Collection/Rex/Rex USA; 20th Century Fox/Everett Collection.