

Mentoring as a tool to navigate careers for young professionals

By Debleena Majumdar, ET Online • Last Updated: Jun 30, 2023, 12:44 PM IST

Synopsis

As career choices continue to expand, students often struggle to find the right path. Psychometric assessments and working with professional mentors are two popular approaches to finding a suitable career. Schools and institutions like iDream Career, Mindler, Collegify, and Leverage Edu offer career counseling services. The role of a mentor is to provide guidance and support throughout a person's career journey, and finding the right mentor may involve searching within one's organization or reaching out to senior professionals through platforms like LinkedIn.



In behavioural science, there is a concept called choice overload, which speaks of the confusion one might have when encountering a plethora of choices. When it comes to careers, students face an even more important dilemma. While choices of possible career options have increased today, making the right choice is getting harder.

And if one does not want to stick to the time-tested rules of first exploring choices such as engineering or medical careers or trying for government jobs, the question that emerges is, how does one find a career that's the best and most uniquely suited for the person to excel in?

One can take psychometric assessments. Using certain characteristics as guidelines, these tests do provide some ideas about career fit. But the best answer might emerge from working with professional mentors.

Gerry Arathoon, Chief Executive & Secretary of CISCE, says, "A decade or two ago, 'career professionals' was not a common phrase, given the limited scope in the professional arena. Today, it is a buzzword, due to the vast and humongous number of opportunities available to the modern generation. Therefore, there is a need for proper mentoring, especially of our early career professionals."

The mentoring journey can start right from high school. Some leading schools are opting to work with career counsellors in a structured way for their students. Parents and students can also reach out to them directly. Some of the institutions offering career counselling are iDream Career, Mindler, Collegify and Leverage Edu. The areas of support might be different from broader career counselling to study abroad.

As students make the transition from school to college and then to their first jobs, the need for professional mentoring only increases. So how does one find the right mentor? What skills should one look for in a mentor?

Arathoon adds, "The role of mentoring is one of perseverance and commitment. A mentor is first a mentee before one climbs the ladder to be that person who effects the requisite change. Unless there is an investment of time, patience and direction-oriented dialogue, a good team cannot be established. Every work culture has its own set of work dynamics. It is hard to ascertain a fixed blueprint of success in mentoring."

This means that the answers the mentor can provide often may not be deterministic.

Arathoon explains that every situation, group or individual needs a "tailor-made mentoring blueprint" to reach out to the person or group.

Thus, the role of the mentor emerges as two-fold:

1. Ensure that the young career professionals are in the right line of work and of their own choice. The right mentoring in the formative years is vital
2. To sustain, motivate and enable the person to grow and thereby to become an active contributing member in society

Given the rapid changes in the world of work across sectors amid the new technological advances that are still emerging, it will definitely help early career professionals if they get trusted advice to navigate the shifts.

But where can one find a mentor?

One possible choice is to find a mentor in their own organisation. Some are lucky to get great first bosses, and that first boss can become a career mentor for life. Some might meet a senior professional with whom they can really connect well. They can also use industry events or portals such as LinkedIn to reach out to senior professionals. These are some of the ways to look for mentors. The benefits accrue over time.

According to Arathoon, mentoring can help early career professionals set the right tone for the best possible outcome. However, it is an ongoing process. A good mentor acts as a rudder to young career professionals.