

# 10 Questions to Ask Potential Mentors

By [Walter C. Wright, Jr.](#) On May 9, 2011

Recently I was asked what makes someone a good [mentor](#). I immediately thought of ten questions I would like to ask persons I might want to [recruit as mentors](#) on the leadership journey.

## 1. Who have been his mentors?

The best mentors have worked with mentors themselves and understand the value and the process. [Max De Pree](#), a [significant mentor in my life](#), worked with [Carl Frost](#) around the organization of people, with [Peter Drucker](#) on themes of management and with David Hubbard on the ethical, moral and spiritual dimensions of leadership.

## 2. How accurately and articulately can she reflect on her own journey?

The value of a mentor is directly related to her ability to reflect accurately on the successes, failures, struggles and joys of life and work. To be able to learn from the [mentor's experience](#), we need to be able to feel the vulnerability and ambiguity of the process she went through, the disappointments and the satisfaction.

## 3. What has he learned lately?

The first question I always ask Max when we meet is: what have you learned since we were last together? There is always a new book, a new story, a revealing experience, or a provocative idea that has been capturing his attention. Wise mentors are still learning and growing and interesting.

## 4. What do openness, transparency, and honest speaking mean to her?

Open, vulnerable, honest communication is essential for a healthy mentoring experience. This means that the mentor allows the mentoree into the difficulties of the journey as well as the accomplishments, and that the mentor can ask the hard questions or give the contrary feedback that we might not want to hear.

## 5. When does he listen and when does he talk?

Listening is the number one skill needed by a mentor. If the mentor talks more than he listens, you might have found a great teacher, but not a good mentor. Mentors may share from their lives, but their primary work is to help us mine our own journey and learn from our experiences.

#### **6. How is her strength of character revealed in her values and integrity?**

As Max would ask, do [voice and touch align](#)? Do behaviors and actions match the values articulated? Knowledge and values that have not been applied, fall short of wisdom.

#### **7. How does he handle conflict and diversity?**

Mentoring is not about cloning; it is about helping someone realize their full potential, even when they differ from the mentor.

#### **8. What does she encourage and affirm?**

What is it that the mentor sees and values? Is she encouraging your agenda or her own? That brings up the next question.

#### **9. How well does he understand your agenda for development?**

Mentoring is a working relationship. It has an agenda, a purpose. We recruit mentors to assist us in growing toward our potential in a particular area of focus.

#### **10. What does being accessible mean to her?**

To be valuable, mentors have to be available. Mentors too busy to be available may let us down when we need them the most.

<http://depre.org/10-questions-for-potential-mentors/>