

## Three ways relationships shape your career

Margaret Beaton 29 April 2013

How much have you thought about your career and the ways relationships can positively shape it? Do those around you give you feedback and advice? I refer to your work place peers and managers and your family and friends who are in a position to hold up mirrors for you to see yourself from different perspectives.

This post explores how relationships influence your career decisions and direction. You may well be surprised how much untapped assistance is available to you. Relationships can shape your career in many ways—it's up to you to benefit from them.

To find a framework to explain why relationships are so important to careers, I turned to [Through the Looking Glass](#), a recent white paper from the Center for Creative Leadership. "Other people can help us see more clearly how specific activities ... or experiences fit into our career path", writes Regina Eckert, one of the authors.

### Here are three ways how relationships can help your career.

**Guidance** Those with broad perspectives and knowledge of you are in positions to advise and guide. They can help you clarify your needs, challenge your assumptions and test your ideas. As guides, helping you find your way, those with whom you have a trusting relationship provide sanity checks and practical advice. The white paper also points out that guidance includes learning from others' mistakes and being advised what paths not to follow.

**Affirmation** Those around you who know you and the organisation are in a position to encourage you and build up your confidence. At times of self-doubt and stress, they can be the pillars of support and strength that keep you on course. Affirmation is particularly important when you face multiple, competing options for your career. Remaining on course and developing a track record for consistency are crucial for career success.

**Stretch** The third way others can help is by opening your mind. They stretch your imagination and challenge those self-beliefs that are limiting your progress. They push you to reframe how you see situations and encourage you to explore outside your comfort zone. Without relationships that provide stimulation and support your career may never achieve its true potential.

If you are seeking to step up in your career all three types of relationship are critical. But not necessarily in equal proportions. Depending on your career stage and challenges, you will need different proportions of guidance, affirmation and stretch. At times of uncertainty, you need mostly guidance. After a change when it's still settling down, you need affirmation that you made the right decision. And when you are coasting, you need to be pushed.

### Use the right mirrors to shape your career

I am reminded of the mirrors found in show grounds that distort your image. The ways in which relationships can positively shape your career are like different show ground mirrors. The one that makes you look very tall is the relationship that stretches your imagination and dares you to go higher. The one that makes you look round and cuddly affirms you're OK. And the mirror that puts you at the end of a tunnel reflects the path ahead and shows you where to go.

Relationships, like mirrors, enable you to make sense of your work, your organisation and your career. Relationships positively shape your career as much as they contribute to the rest of your life.

Is your career being enhanced by the right relationships?

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