

# Mentoring Is More about Questions than Answers

If you think you'd like to help someone along in his or her career, or if you want some help, it's time to turn to the IMA® Leadership Academy. Opportunities to be a mentor or mentee await you.

**D**o you remember a time when you were excited but uncertain how to get started with a project, new task, or career change and wondered what pitfalls might await your decision? Volunteered or were picked for an assignment and then thought, "Am I going to be able to do this?" Worked with a boss, peer, or employee who was a challenge to manage? Were thrust into change or having to lead others through it?

Today's business environment is incredibly fluid and ever changing. Management accountants and financial professionals are expected to be equal partners with their manager peers but, because of our full company vision, often take the lead. How do you do that when you've never been in such a situation before?

Tom Bodett of Motel 6 fame is quoted as saying: "The difference between school and life? In school, you're taught a lesson and then given a test. In life, you're given a test that teaches you a lesson." I believe there's a lot of truth in

Tom's words, but it doesn't have to be painful. Lots of help is available if you just reach out for it.

## Learn Before the Test

I've worked for a lot of great leaders but only one mentor. My mentor, Mike, hired me as an accounting manager when he was the CFO. He's a masterful leader, but he always had time to listen and ask deep, thoughtful questions. I don't recall him ever telling me the solution, only asking if I had thought of this alternative or noticed this detail. Or did I look at this resource, training opportunity, or methodology? Mike mentored me on what to expect in big organizational change, thoughts on handling difficult owners and managers, career change, a job change after 18 years with one firm, and the value of obtaining my MBA. We met in 1987 and still occasionally touch base with each other. My situation is unique, and I feel honored to have met such a great human being and business leader.

How much more confident would you be with your actions and decisions if you had an opportunity to discuss options and possible outcomes with a trusted leader mentor? What if

you could reach out to someone, describe your situation, and get critical guidance without critical judgment? Have someone question you on process, motivation, and alternatives but then step back to let you make the decision you will own?

## IMA Leadership Academy: A Place to Find a Mentor

IMA can help you find this person. To further support the leadership development of members, we founded the IMA Leadership Academy. It has a robust and growing menu of educational webinars and a formal mentoring program.

There's no question that finding a mentor early in my career made a positive difference. I was lucky to have found such a well-rounded and gifted person to work with over the years. The IMA mentoring program can be your path to finding experienced professionals who'll help you find the answers to your questions. Unlike my experience, most mentors provide mentees support for a defined period of time on a specific milestone in the mentee's career. That isn't to say you can't find a lifelong mentor like I did. But either way, you'll get the best thinking and



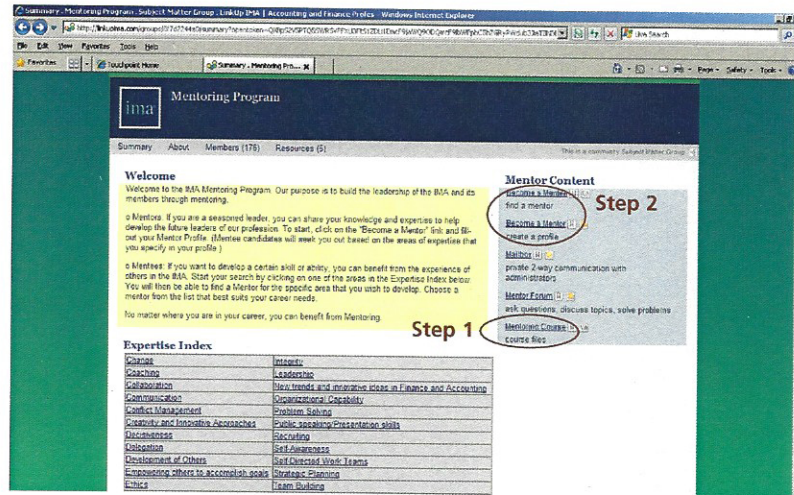


questions on specific subject matter. IMA members have access to a wealth of experience and knowledge in the mentor pool. And mentees can review mentor bios for industry-specific support.

**Training Is Included**

How would you feel if you asked someone, “How do I help this subordinate stop being so caustic in meetings?” and you received the reply, “That’s easy. Before each meeting, ask them to be nice.” You probably wouldn’t ask that person a question again for two reasons. One, the advice wasn’t insightful, and, two, they actually told you the answer. How many times as a professional have you liked being told what to do? I believe the vast majority of us would rather have an informed discussion of the many ways to get a staff member excited about work and participate positively in meetings. Mentors are good at asking questions, listening, and asking the mentee clarifying questions. You’ll probably hear a lot of “Have you looked at this, thought of that, why do you think that?” Then they’ll share their experience and ideas. Most important, they’ll make you think in new and different ways about your issue. In the end, you’ll come to a resolution that fits you and your environment and is one you can live with. In the end, you’ll have to live with your decision.

Mentors may open new doors and opportunities as well. Much like networking and social media websites work, mentors often will advocate for their mentees. They may become references for new opportunities or show you new ones because they’ll see you use



the experience, learn from it, and form decisions. Who is better able to articulate your thinking process than your mentor?

With almost 200 seasoned accounting and financial professional mentors to chose from, IMA members have a priceless benefit. IMA mentors receive training on how to mentor and then use their experience to guide discussions. They have volunteered, in part, because they know the value of giving back to their profession and of helping others succeed. It’s another way of saying they are leaders in their profession.

**Asking Questions Is Critical**

A wise person once said: “The only bad question is the question that goes unasked.” If you have a professional question and need someone to help you set a direction, find a solution, get experienced advice, and generally get support, go to the IMA Leadership Academy’s pool of mentors. We can help you ask the right questions, find resources, give perspective, and help you analyze the pros and cons. It’s really about asking the right questions to help members get to the thoughtful answers. Let the IMA mentors help you

learn some lessons before you get the test. You’ll be glad you did.

**Accessing the IMA Mentor Program**

Geoff Norby, associate dean of the IMALA Mentoring Program, adds his thoughts:

The vision of the IMA Leadership Academy is to “build leadership throughout IMA.” One way that we intend to do this is through the IMALA Mentoring Program, which is designed to provide one-on-one mentoring opportunities that will help develop leaders within IMA. The process is similar to the scouting Merit Badge program where counselors in the community let the scouts know what areas they are able to teach—first aid, wilderness survival, etc.—and scouts choose their instructors based on what subject they want to learn. Similar to the scouts, mentors in the IMALA program will self-identify their areas of expertise. From there, mentees can search for potential mentors in the areas of expertise they want to develop.

You can access the Mentoring Program group via the *LinkUp IMA* section of the IMA website

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([www.imanet.org](http://www.imanet.org)) at <http://linkup.ima.com/groups/8f7d2244a0/> summary. You have to log in with your membership information first. (See the sample of the Mentoring Program page on p. 20.)

**Step 1:** The price of admission into this program is to review the Mentoring Course on the site. This will enable mentors and mentees to start with a common understanding of the program framework. Once you've reviewed the training course, you have two options:

**Step 2:** Join the program as a mentor, mentee, or both:

**Mentors:** Click "Become a Mentor" to create your profile. Mentee candidates will be able to search profiles to find a match for the skill set they need.

**Mentees:** Click "Become a Mentee." This will show you how to search for your mentor by area of expertise. Once you've found a mentor that you'd like to work with, use his or her contact information to request a relationship. From there, the two of you can set the parameters for future meetings and establish goals for the relationship.

Don't feel limited to do only one or the other. You can be both a mentor and a mentee at the same time.

### A Call for Leaders

The IMA Leadership Academy is off to a good start with the mentoring program and its educational programs, but we continue to need additional mentors. With close to 60,000 diverse IMA members, we need mentor leaders in a variety of subjects and/or experi-

ences. If you would like to help lead the accounting and financial profession forward, volunteer as a mentor. **SF**

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