

GOT A MENTOR?

Learn why having one is key to your career success by listening in on these mentees and their advisors BY PATTI JONES • PHOTOGRAPHY BY BELL SOTO

ARE YOU IN THE MARKET for a mentor? Smart move. If you're at the start of your career or even a few rungs up, a mentor can hear you out, cheer you on and steer you clear of workplace pitfalls. A mentor can help introduce you to key players, suggest you for high-profile projects, even push your promotion.

Mentors can be even more crucial to women of color, says a recent survey by the nonprofit research group Catalyst. Of 368 women of color polled, about 70 percent of those with mentors received at least one promotion over a three-year period, compared to less than 50 percent of those without mentors. "Women of color don't always get access to the informal networks that white men and women have," says Jane K. Hyun, author of *Breaking the Bamboo Ceiling*. "And they may not have relatives and friends who can advise them on how to survive in corporate America. So mentors are key."

Yet mentors remain elusive for many. In a 2004 pool at Working Mother Media's Multicultural Conference, nearly half of the 154 women surveyed (92 percent of whom were of color) said that a lack of mentors was the most serious race/gender related problem they faced at work.

What to do? Career coaches suggest keeping an open mind when seeking mentors. "A mentor doesn't have to look like you or have the same background," Hyun says. "Pairing up with people of a different ethnicity or gender can be enriching, give you fresh perspective and get you thinking in new ways." Here, meet four professionals and their mentoring partners who did just that.