

# MENTORSHIP UNLOCKED

THE SCIENCE AND ART OF  
SETTING YOURSELF UP FOR **SUCCESS**



JANICE OMADEKE



“Building strong relationships with great mentors is essential to any professional’s success. But approaching a mentor can be intimidating. Omadeke will take you by the hand and walk you through a step-by-step process of how to do this in a way that will enrich your life and your mentors. Remember, you are not asking for help—you are asking a person to make a wise investment in you, one that will leave your corner of the world a better, less lonely place.”

—**Kim Scott**,  
Best-selling author of *Radical Candor*

“*Mentorship Unlocked* is the book I wish I had at the start of my career. Janice Omadeke effectively demystifies the otherwise elusive nature of mentorship. Drawn from her own experience and extensive research, this is a practical guide to finding and working with mentors that will help you grow. It helped me rethink my own role as a mentor.

—**Chris Hyams**,  
CEO of Indeed

“*Mentorship Unlocked* is a practical guide with tangible advice everyone can use to get the most value from a mentoring relationship.”

—**Shellye Archambeau**,  
Author of *Unapologetically Ambitious*

“*Mentorship Unlocked* is your go-to guide for navigating the changing world of mentor-mentee relationships in today’s work environment. Written by one of Austin’s most impressive entrepreneurs who is literally the global thought-leader in this all-important practice of mentoring, this book is packed with personal stories, practical tools, and useful examples that show you how to make meaningful connections without losing your true self. Whether you’re climbing the corporate ladder, carving out a creative niche, or starting your own thing, *Mentorship Unlocked* has got your back in helping you hit your goals and find success.”

—**Hugh Forrest**,  
Chief program officer, SXSW

“*Mentorship Unlocked* is an extremely insightful and comprehensive guide to tapping into mentorship as an invaluable resource for career building. Whether you’re a mentor, mentee, or both, Omadeke’s fascinating anecdotes and precise, thorough analysis makes *Mentorship Unlocked* an engaging and thoughtful page-turner. This book is a must-read for anyone and everyone who wants to build fruitful professional relationships.”

—**Liz Elting**,  
Best-selling author of *Dream Big and Win*  
and Founder and CEO of the Elizabeth Elting Foundation

“In *Mentorship Unlocked*, Janice Omadeke vividly brings to life the link between mentorship and growing career confidence. It’s an insightful read for professionals looking to make bold, strategic bets in their careers. The book’s blend of real-life examples and strategies is empowering and enlightening.”

—Selena Rezvani,

Best-selling author of *Quick Confidence:  
Be Authentic, Boost Connections,  
and Make Bold Bets on Yourself*

“As I reflect on my own journey, I can attest to the transformative power of mentorship. The guidance and wisdom shared by mentors played a pivotal role in shaping my business. *Mentorship Unlocked* resonates deeply with those carving their own path in the business world. Its sincere, focused content provides the tools needed for creating strong mentor relationships. An invaluable read for anyone aspiring to reach new heights in their career.”

—Kendra Scott,

Founder, Kendra Scott

“Mentorship helps make any career more satisfying and rewarding. *Mentorship Unlocked* provides the wisdom and tools to cultivate meaningful and productive relationships between mentors and mentees—and help both parties grow.”

—Scott Sonenshein,

Best-selling author of *Stretch*  
and coauthor of *Joy at Work*

“*Mentorship Unlocked* is like a coffee chat with a trusted mentor, tailored for women entrepreneurs. It’s approachable, blending personal experiences with practical strategies. No matter where someone is in their career, this well-crafted work enables leaders to engage their entrepreneurial instincts to shape mentoring strategies aligned with who they really are.”

—Jan Ryan,

Serial entrepreneur, board advisor

“*Mentorship Unlocked* offers a refreshing, mindful approach to building career relationships. It skillfully navigates the complexities of today’s work environment with a focus on personal growth and awareness. A must-read for anyone seeking a meaningful career journey.”

—Chip Conley,

Founder and CEO, Modern Elder  
Academy, and best-selling author

“*Mentorship Unlocked* reflects the truth that ‘people will be what they can see.’ It’s a modern and refreshingly honest book, offering practical and relatable mentorship insights any can follow. This book is a valuable tool, guiding real people towards real goals with strategies that work from beginning to end.”

—Joseph Kopser,

Serial entrepreneur, investor, start-up advisor

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UNLOCKED**



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SETTING YOURSELF UP FOR SUCCESS

JANICE OMADEKE

WILEY

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*To the three wisest women I'll ever know:*

*My sister for paving the way for generational growth.*

*My aunt, Martha, for embodying a loving and gracious heart.*

*My mother, Lorena, for being the shoulders we had the privilege to  
stand on to reach new heights.*



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# About the Author

JANICE OMADEKE is a pioneering serial entrepreneur who made a life-altering decision when she transitioned from her role as a corporate graphic designer to embark on a journey into tech entrepreneurship. As a remarkable achievement, Omadeke stands as Austin's first Black woman to secure a venture-backed tech exit in 2022, and she ranks among the first 100 Black women to raise over \$1 million in seed funding for her first tech company.

Omadeke is the exited CEO and founder of The Mentor Method, an enterprise software designed to drive transformative change within company cultures through the power of mentorship. Guided by her belief in data-driven decision-making as a cornerstone for strategy, innovation, and cultural transformation, she has honed this model through over a decade of leadership experience within Fortune 500 companies. Her roster of influential clients includes Amazon and the US Department of Education.

Omadeke earned recognition as one of *Entrepreneur* magazine's 100 Women of Influence in 2022. Her voice and commitment to mentorship and entrepreneurship can be found in publications such as *Forbes*, the *Harvard Business Review*, *Fast Company*, *The Austin Business Journal*, *Black Enterprise*, and *Inc.* Omadeke was part of a select group of diversity and inclusion leaders chosen to participate in the 2016

White House Summit on Building the Tech Workforce of Tomorrow. Alongside her entrepreneurial expertise, she holds a PMP (Project Management Professional) certification and has received a certification in Entrepreneurship from MIT.

With a unique blend of directness and compassion, Omadeke is dedicated to making a positive impact. Her approach is both strategic and heartfelt, always driven by a deep sense of intention. Beyond her professional pursuits, you can find Janice cooking, reading, taking on a self-development project, or a combination of the three.

# Introduction

RAISE YOUR HAND if this sounds familiar:

- You work hard and are successful by most societal measures, but something feels missing.
- You don't feel that your professional life and larger purpose are connected to each other.
- You regularly think about switching careers or starting a business but don't know how to pinpoint your niche and needs.
- You often feel as though you don't have anyone to turn to when you need advice, honest feedback, or a new perspective.
- You have received a lot of advice about work and career, but none of it really resonates with you and your circumstances.

The above resonated with me in my career, too. I came to a realization. Despite a successful career, I felt something was lacking in my professional life. I had progressed through the ranks at a Big Four management consulting firm and several leading defense contracting companies, successfully managing projects for billion-dollar clients, including government agencies. My career took off through strong creative leadership and implementing tactical solutions that attracted and retained customers. I significantly contributed to profitability, from winning multimillion-dollar accounts to overhauling internal

systems to cut costs. My educational journey led me to MIT for entrepreneurship and Harvard for strategic management, studying alongside some of the brightest minds globally. At the heart of my journey was a missing element: my own identity. My early career was driven by the pursuit of financial success and climbing the corporate ladder, often neglecting deeper introspection. This mindset was shaped by the times and my background. Launching my career amid the rise of tech giants and evolving work cultures, I was swept up in a narrative of relentless ambition, often sidelining self-reflection. As a Black woman and a first-generation American, the weight of expectations left little room for anything but achievement.

It took nearing burnout to compel a profound reassessment of my career and life goals. This introspection revealed how important the role of my community served in both my success and my pursuit of what lay ahead. Finding mentors who truly resonated with my experience was challenging, but once found, they were instrumental in my growth as a professional and individual. Mentorship provided me with emotional and mental wellness in the workplace, fostering resilience and sustainability.

Mentorship, I've learned, is more than guidance; it's a nurturing process that enhances our mental and emotional well-being by sharing professional wisdom and encouragement. It's this holistic approach that makes mentorship a key factor in workplace success.

Mentorship nurtures our mental and emotional well-being, enriching our professional lives through shared experiences, expertise, and encouragement. That's why mentorship helps us become more successful at work.

This impact is mirrored in the experiences of leading companies and business figures. Employees engaged in mentoring programs are promoted five times more often than those without a mentor. Serving as a mentor also correlates with career advancement—those who serve as a mentor are six times more likely to be promoted to a higher position.<sup>1</sup>

That's just one example of the power of mentorship. Mentorship is important for the future of work and leadership, too. According to a survey by CNBC, millennial and Gen Z professionals with a mentor are 21%–23% more likely to report being satisfied with their current job compared to those without a mentor. *Harvard Business Review* finds



that people of all ages who served as mentors experienced lower levels of anxiety and described their job as more meaningful than those who did not mentor. They also found that 89% of those who have been mentored say they'll go on to mentor others.<sup>2</sup> The feeling of belonging, lower stress, and deep relationships tie directly to employee retention.

However, there's a noticeable disconnect between the recognized value of mentorship and how few people access it. A significant percentage of professionals acknowledge mentorship's importance, yet a much smaller number actively participate in such relationships. Even fewer establish clear objectives within these mentorships. Olivet Nazarene University surveyed 3,000 professionals on mentorship. They found that 76% of people think mentors are important, but only 37% had one. Of those who had mentoring relationships, only 41% had formal goals for the mentorship.<sup>3</sup>

In 2017, I started my first company, The Mentor Method, a platform dedicated to creating genuine mentor-mentee connections based on shared passions and interests, moving beyond traditional job roles or network-based matches. I was inspired by my strong belief in the power of mentorship, reinforced by my personal experiences. My focus was on forming powerful professional relationships that significantly alter work and life perspectives.

My journey with The Mentor Method marked significant milestones, including becoming the first Black woman in Austin to achieve a venture-backed tech exit and one of the first 100 Black women to raise over \$1 million in venture funding in the US. In 2022, I was honored by *Entrepreneur* magazine as one of 100 Women of Influence. These achievements showcase the profound importance of mentorship across various stages of life, career, and entrepreneurship. Mentorship is instrumental in providing support, building skills, expanding networks, and helping achieve goals.

The success I've achieved in my career is largely due to the time, effort, and guidance invested in me by my mentors. My approach to seeking mentors was proactive, data-driven, and systematic, driven by a deep curiosity about the dynamics of successful mentorship. I observed a common trend: many navigate their path to success in isolation.

One reason for this is the lack of mentorship investment in many corporate environments. Additionally, conventional business wisdom

often doesn't align with modern realities. Common archetypes such as the lone wolf or verbally abusive tech genius dominate the narrative, focusing on individual triumphs rather than the power of community. An entire industry of content has been developed to help you change yourself to become a singular success—not on building the community you need to thrive.

It's harder to stand out in a crowd when the majority of your team is working from home, there are fewer networking events, and people slowly step away from a culture of fear-based over-functioning in favor of a more self-advocating approach to a career lifestyle. We are inundated with career and mentorship advice from every medium and platform, telling us we earn mentors and advance in our careers by changing who we are, not by following our inner voice.

Add to that how the way we work has changed in recent years—hybrid and virtual work has been accelerated thanks to the pandemic. Before the pandemic, 61% of mentor relationships occurred naturally.<sup>4</sup> Although how we work has changed for so many, the need for mentors remains as important as ever, but the changes in the way we work means how we bring mentors into our lives has changed as well. Organic mentorship, what is oftentimes viewed as the “ideal” mentorship structure, can be more challenging to establish if you spend most of your days working within the four walls of your home and through your computer screen. There are fewer opportunities to interact with potential mentors in person—chance meetings on the elevator or standing in line for a sandwich in the cafeteria, for example.

In writing this book, my goal is to offer distinct career guidance to learn, apply, and advance swiftly through specialized career advice that accelerates learning and advancement. It's about becoming complete individuals without fearing judgment or adhering to outdated professional standards. You're encouraged to adopt an entrepreneurial mindset in your career, relevant whether you're in a corporate, creative, or entrepreneurial role. Remember, mentorship is a key tool for you to achieve your goals.

Work is a significant driver in our lives, and considering the time we spend working or thinking about work, our careers greatly influence

our quality of life. The various “isms” that affect us at work, particularly women of color, make our professional journeys crucial indicators of our overall well-being.

Mentorship is an empowering form of self-advocacy, helping you break through barriers to achieve the life you’ve envisioned.

## **Bringing Entrepreneurial Thinking to Your Career**

As CEO and founder of The Mentor Method, I advised numerous executives to adopt an entrepreneurial mindset for employee retention. I emphasized the importance of treating staff retention with the same urgency as revenue and customer loss. I advocate for professionals to actively shape their careers, seeking roles that offer personal satisfaction, not just societal approval. Mentorship is needed in this journey, acting as a compass for career advancement.

My own shift from corporate roles to entrepreneurship taught me the value of entrepreneurial thinking in all professional contexts. I viewed my corporate career as my first business. I focused all of my energy on reaching a six-figure salary and paying off my student debt within the first five years of my career. This mindset parallels starting a business: I was the product, corporations were my customers, and my salary was the revenue.

Embracing entrepreneurship in your career means fighting for what you want. If you’ve ever stretched resources, fought for a raise, or handled unpaid emotional labor, you possess an entrepreneurial spirit.

So how do we leverage our entrepreneurial instincts to find the right mentor and mentor others? I believe the whole process starts from within.

*Who am I?*

*What do I want to get out of mentorship?*

*What strengths can I share with someone else to help them advance?*

*What type of lifestyle do I want in the future?*

*What does a fulfilling career look like for me and the overall life I want to achieve?*

I advise everyone to start by answering these key questions before strategically pursuing one of the most important relationships in a career.

This approach goes against traditional career advice. Successful

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*Contrary to old advice, your innermost feelings about work and career aspirations are important. Our souls, our true selves, do matter.*

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mentorship isn't about getting others to like you; it's not about conforming or fitting into a predefined mold. Contrary to old advice, your innermost feelings about work and career aspirations are important. Our souls, our true selves, do matter. In my earlier career, when I

followed the prescribed mold, mentor relationships felt forced, shallow, and uncomfortable. I didn't learn as much as I could have because I didn't feel comfortable with that person. And if I didn't have a clear idea of who I was and what I wanted out of that relationship, how could they even help me?

Ignoring our own instincts can lead us to unfulfilling careers. This book guides you in using intuition to find mentorship that honors your true self. While mentors can help refine our approach, it's important to distinguish this from losing one's identity. I once strived to fit the "professional boss babe" image, but it took a toll on my well-being. This book will help you break this cycle, advocating for authenticity over conformity.

## **Before You Begin - What to Know Before You Get Started**

In the chapters that follow, I outline a strategy that anyone can use to create, build, and deepen mentorship relationships to achieve your goals. I want you to walk away from this book with a focused strategy and the exact steps to find the right mentors, feel confident and empowered as a mentor, guiding mentees and deliver excellent mentorship, and use both as tools to help you achieve the professional goals of your dreams.

There are a few things I want you to know before you start reading the rest of the book:

First, let's correct a widespread misconception: mentorship isn't reserved for the newcomers in the professional world. Whether you're just beginning or you're an experienced professional seeking fresh

avenues for growth, mentorship is a recurring need as we navigate through changes and gain clarity on our career paths. Despite common narratives focusing on the youth, mentorship transcends age. Leaders at the top of their industries also seek counsel and new learning opportunities. Your mentorship needs may shift with your career progression, but the value it adds remains. This book will assist anyone in unlocking their potential and stepping into their leadership role, complete with engaging exercises and reflective prompts.

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*This book will assist anyone in unlocking their potential and stepping into their leadership role, complete with engaging exercises and reflective prompts.*

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Second, we will focus on helping you build your action plan, with the intention that you will come back to it many times over the course of your career. I'll provide insights and tools to empower you to develop a well-defined mentorship strategy that will lead to tangible results in your career and in your overall well-being. By implementing the insights and tools offered in these pages, you'll gain the confidence to navigate the science and art of mentorship with ease and efficiency.

Third, we'll focus on the cornerstone of all your relationships: yourself. We'll begin by acknowledging the unique talents and capabilities you contribute. Recognizing your true self beyond societal constructs is a profound act of self-love. We'll discuss how genuine engagement with your career can lead to both success and satisfaction. We'll examine aspects of your personality that influence your work and future, harnessing your strengths to redefine leadership. A key resource in this process is a mentor, helping you refine your discoveries and build a fulfilling career.

This book isn't about escaping your current situation through overwork, nor does it suggest mentorship as a substitute for personal effort. It's about tapping into and optimizing the potential within you. We'll address everything from mentorship basics to the spectrum

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of mentors beneficial at various career stages, including transitional periods. For entrepreneurs, we'll address specific mentorship strategies for company growth. I'll encourage a wide-ranging panel of mentors to

provide a comprehensive perspective on your career, moving beyond a narrow, prescriptive approach.

My hope is that you'll find an opportunity for self-reflection in these pages. I hope you distance yourself from limiting ideas about who you can be at work. I hope you use the tools to build a plan that you can implement immediately. I hope you learn that the very specific practice of mentorship in professional spaces is valuable no matter what you do for a living.

# 1

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## Laying the Foundation: The Parallels between Mentorship and Entrepreneurship

EVA\* WORKED IN the corporate world for over five years and was now making a comfortable salary. She had worked hard to get where she was, but something was missing. Her career felt more in the hands of her circumstances than something she felt she was driving. She felt stuck, frustrated, and unfulfilled. Eva knew she had the potential to do more, but she wasn't sure how to get there.

Eva's story is not uncommon. Many professionals who have reached a certain level in their careers find themselves in a similar situation. They are successful by most measures, but they feel like something is missing. They want more out of their careers, but they aren't sure how to get there.

Eva could binge-read articles on mentorship and career advancement written by people who have not struggled to find mentors, go to countless networking events, get burnt out, and let a scarcity mindset or feeling overwhelmed convince her to stay on her path of solo career navigation. Or she could make five times her salary over her career by learning how to be efficient and effective at finding a series of

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\*Working with my clients and hearing your stories is deeply rewarding. Out of respect, some names have been changed in the examples throughout this book to protect privacy, but these are real examples.

strategically timed mentors using the same guiding principles found in entrepreneurship.

For Eva, her frustration stemmed from a lack of direction. She had worked hard to climb the corporate ladder, but she wasn't sure where she wanted to go from there. She felt as if she was just going through the motions and that her career had plateaued. She wanted to do something more meaningful, but she wasn't sure what that was.

As I've spoken with professionals like Eva, companies that want to keep their talent, my entrepreneurial peers, and entrepreneurs I've mentored or invested in, I noticed a common thread in the mentorship world and entrepreneurship world: finding a mentor is a lot like the early stages of building your company.

If you skipped the introduction to dig into the heart of the book (I do the same thing), I encourage you to read it, as I explain the parallels of being the CEO of your career in greater detail in the introduction. This chapter is a brief overview of the key leadership skills top CEOs embody for success that will help you as you take on a leadership role in your career and journey to meet powerful mentors, before starting to reflect on your internal identity in the following chapters.

## **How an Entrepreneurial Mindset Pays Off in the Long Run**

Let's compare the journeys of two aspiring entrepreneurs on their quest for success. Person 1, eager and self-reliant, embarks on this journey solo. In contrast, person two recognizes the value of mentorship and seeks guidance from an experienced mentor.

Both individuals start their careers with similar roles and salaries. However, person 2, guided by their mentor, consistently hones their skills, tackles challenges more effectively, and capitalizes on growth opportunities. This mentorship-supported path leads them to excel in their current role and positions them strategically for future success.

On the other hand, person 1, navigating their career independently, faces a more challenging learning curve. The absence of a mentor's wisdom means they might struggle to showcase their full potential and compete for promotions. Over time, the gap between the two becomes evident.

The moral of the story? Mentorship can be a game changer, providing valuable insights and guidance that pave the way for personal and