

As a sophomore majoring in psychology at Harvard University, James Tobin was having a hard time deciding on a career path. He was equally interested in psychology, psychiatry and neurosurgery, but he didn't know enough about the working lives of professionals in those fields to make an intelligent choice.

To help him evaluate which discipline best suited his personality and career goals, Tobin went in search of a mentor. His first stop was his school's alumni relations office, where he compiled a list of former graduates working in the three professions. By contacting them, he hoped to gain firsthand exposure in each field.

After making a few telephone calls, Tobin identified alumni in all three professions who might help, including the chief resident of neurosurgery at a major Baltimore hospital. The resident described a one-week internship in which students could spend spring break shadowing him, learning all they could about the specialty.

With the resident's help, Tobin applied for and received the internship. When the week was over, Tobin was so impressed by his experience that he changed his major, graduated pre-med and is now enrolled in the neurology program at a Philadelphia medical school. The icing on the cake for Tobin was the personal relationship he had established with an accomplished professional, someone who would maintain a watchful eye over his career for years to come.

Attracting the support and encouragement of older professionals in your career field is the basis of mentoring. "It's a great way to learn about a company's unspoken rules, while helping your career progress at a steady

pace," says Michael Zey, Ph.D., author of "The Mentor Connection" (Dow Jones-Irwin). "A good mentor offers excellent insights and introductions to people higher up," he says, citing Geraldine Ferraro's reliance on Tip O'Neill as a classic mentoring relationship, which culminated in O'Neill's recommendation of Ferraro for vice president.

corporate Jedi warriors. In reality, bosses, older co-workers and family friends all face ample problems of their own. Few have the time or inclination to volunteer their support.

They have to be enlisted. James Tobin understood this principle. He didn't wait for his parents to suggest a friend in neurosurgery. He didn't rely on the career

placement office to match him up with former grads. He took the offensive, searching out potential mentors long before graduation, and developing skills on his own that would help him gain the respect of mentors throughout his career.

There's no guarantee that you'll be able to attract a mentor. Most people don't. But there is a way to set up a self-mentoring program that greatly increases your odds. The idea is to create a process where you develop business skills independently while you seek to attract one or more senior managers who can provide specific career advice and encouragement.

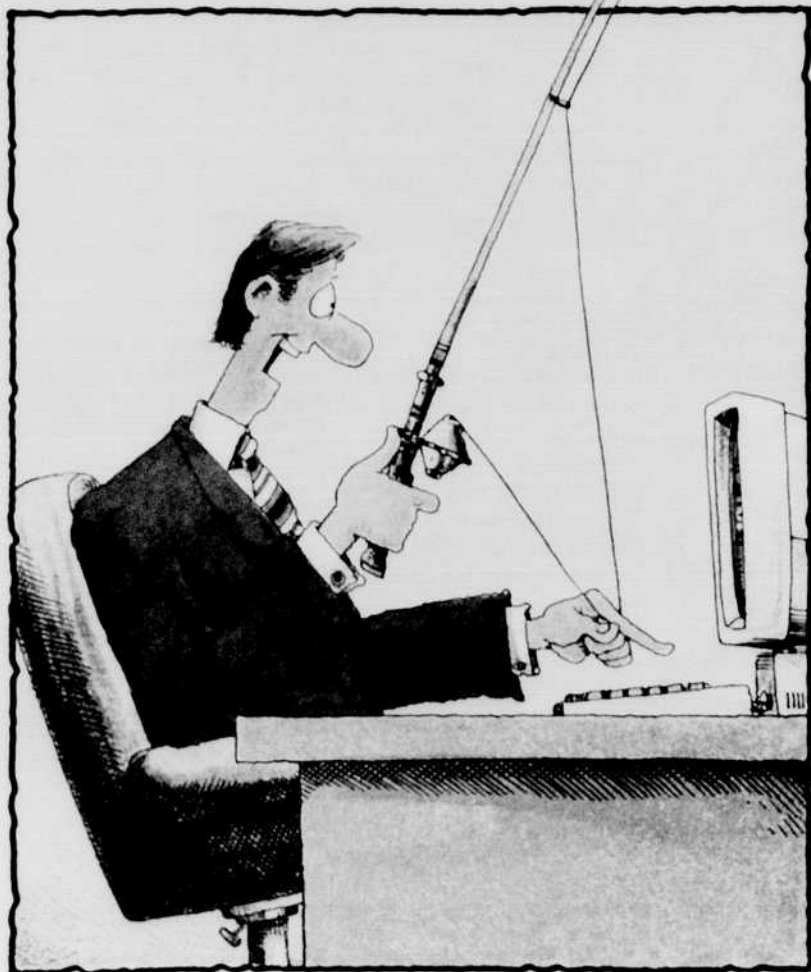
Ten critical skills

To help you develop the qualities needed to attract the attention of mentors, examine the following 10 critical skills. Each skill on its own can represent a comprehensive area of learning. In some cases, you may want to read literature or take a course to help you build knowledge in an area where your skills haven't developed as much as you would like.

#1. Learn how to listen.

Never interrupt others before they have completed their comments. That is a sure sign of immaturity. Look for opportunities to demonstrate

that you're listening carefully by summarizing what the person has said before adding your thoughts. No one is willing to mentor a "know-it-all" who doesn't appear interested in



Attracting a Mentor

By Lawrence S. Brewster

But it doesn't come easily

Too often, college students naively assume that powerful mentors, like so many Obi-Wan Kenobis, are waiting to turn them into