

HOW TO CHOOSE A MENTOR

To help you get the right mentor, it is important for you to understand what makes a good mentor. Here are some of the points to think about, to look for and to discuss with a potential mentor to support you in your journey.

WHAT IS A BUSINESS MENTOR?

A trusted guide and 'teacher', an independent and objective source of support, someone who has experience of the sector or industry of their mentee, who can empathise and of business in general. Someone who brings their knowledge and experience to help their mentee develop both professionally and personally, to see the options, to take opportunities to get results and to be fulfilled. The relationship can last a number of years.

We could describe mentoring as 'a process where one person offers help, guidance, advice and support, using empathy and practical experiences of their own, to facilitate the learning or development of another'. The principal function of mentoring therefore is to enhance performance and to support people in their natural business/career development.

A good business mentor sits at the side of the business owner or mentee, listening, guiding, helping and suggesting other ways of doing things whilst bringing experience to the conversation. They are a sounding board, a confidant, a valued assistant that offers support, constructive criticism and challenges in a considerate, thoughtful way that helps the mentee find their own answers by clever questioning.



WHAT MAKES A GOOD MENTOR?



Empathy



A strong desire
to help others



The ability to listen
effectively and care
about the mentee



Be well
networked



A desire to give
something back

In general, a mentor provides support by offering information, advice and assistance in a way that empowers the mentee. The mentor is primarily concerned with helping the individual grow and develop, helping them to achieve their goals and aspirations in life, in career, or in business.

CHARACTERISTICS OF AN EFFECTIVE MENTOR

- They will have strong listening skills and will be self-aware
- Ideally, they will have a track record in developing others
- A strong understanding of how organisations work (formally and informally), and ideally a knowledge and understanding of the key players in the mentee's organisation. They will combine this with an understanding of both the strategic direction of the organisation and what its drivers and those of the wider industry are
- They may feel that you have more to offer than you are currently contributing
- Will be able to understand and deal with cultural and gender differences and be sensitive to these differences
- A strong desire to help others to grow and develop
- They may in the past have been referred to as a "gardener manager"; helping others to grow



They will also:

- Reinforce rapport at each meeting
- Hold back from giving their own experience until the mentee has fully explored their own issues
- Summarise during the discussion but ensure mentee summarises at the end
- Challenge and encourage when the need arises
- Talk less than 20% of the time, and listen more than 80%
- Make use of very good penetrating questions
- Offer considered advice when it is asked for
- Make use of silence to ensure the mentee has sufficient reflective space to consider the implications of their own insight

A mentee must be prepared to take feedback so as a mentee you need to "click" with the mentor in such a way that you will be able to take that feedback, be it praise or constructive criticism.

Whilst it's good to know what makes a good mentor, it's worth stating what behaviours a mentor should not possess:



- Not turning up for meetings or cancelling meetings
- Not showing this is a priority
- Criticising and being judgemental
- Telling the mentee what to do and talking at them
- Interfering and intervening on behalf of the mentees
- Discussing the mentee with others (without permission from the mentee)
- Agreeing to do something and not carrying this through
- Giving false information
- Having an alternative agenda
- Talking about how it was in 'your day' or 'what works for you'
- Solving the problems for the mentee
- Asking closed questions
- Making assumptions and taking actions on behalf of the mentee

WHAT TO CONSIDER WHEN CHOOSING A MENTOR

When considering choosing a mentor, you may wish to think about the following:

- Compatibility** someone that will put you at ease, you can talk with freely and establish rapport
- Contrast** different to you and will help you to step out of your comfort zone, for example, someone with different personal and professional background and expertise
- Challenge** a mentor that will challenge you, asking challenging and powerful questions which have the potential to change your perspective
- Context** someone with the knowledge and expertise to guide and support you on your journey
- Care** compassionate and has emotional intelligence, self-aware and empathetic

A mentor will look for certain qualities in you as a mentee, so think of the following when presenting yourself to the mentor, to make it easier for both of you:



- Openness to learn** someone who is curious to learn, develop and grow
- Respectful** mindful of time, energy, boundaries and the contractual agreement
- Committed** mentoring can often be a long-term relationship, therefore committing to the mentoring relationship and subsequent actions is important
- Willing to be challenged** someone that is open to challenge, curious and welcomes challenging and powerful questions
- Receptive to feedback** a mentee willing to hear, accept and act on feedback

Worth bearing in mind...

Prior to the covid-19 pandemic, the vast majority of mentoring was carried out face-to-face and usually on a one-to-one basis. This allowed the mentor to focus 100% on the challenges and issues of the individual mentee. The advantage of face-to-face mentoring is that the mentor can gather an enormous amount of information from both verbal and non-verbal communication opportunities. In the post covid-19 world, where virtual meetings, on Teams & Zoom, are the norm, much of this is lost, so can you make up for it in other ways if your sessions are all online?

What else can you do?

- Research
- LinkedIn - are they connected to someone you know?
- Testimonials
- Case studies
- Client references
- Look at their biography
- Insurance
- Professional association and trade body membership

