

Getting the Most from Mentoring

In recent years much has been made of mentoring and its role in successful business and personal development. Those in business, both new and established are regularly advised to consider how mentoring might help them not just to survive – but thrive.

Accessing external insight and advice is crucial to anyone getting started in business, but it can also be helpful throughout a business's life-cycle, not to mention for any individual's professional development. The old adage of knowing what you don't know, and not being afraid to ask for help, is certainly borne out by the benefits of mentoring.

The role of a mentor is to provide advice, support and expertise; to create a learning relationship which ultimately benefits the mentee by offering them insight and knowledge, as well as the perspective, they might not readily have themselves.

Mentoring is two-way and as such, also places a responsibility on the mentee as much as the mentor, to engage, question and discuss challenges and ideas openly. It's not a passive relationship but rather one that provides for honest dialogue, goal-setting and information sharing. The onus is on both parties to make it work, and be frank about expectations.

Many professionals have several mentors – some take the form of an older friend or former boss, a 'wise owl' – for others, it's a professional mentor they've engaged, with a specific skillset in mind. Either way, the role of the mentor is to offer a specific support, and one that the mentee benefits from.

Mentors can provide access to networks and contacts, offer key insights and expertise and share their own experiences of situations and challenges. They offer a 'birds-eye' view of your business and your career, the opportunities, threats, strengths and weaknesses and provide the perspective it can be very easy to lose sight of in the demands of the day-to-day.

How can you effectively leverage a mentoring relationship?

One of the most important elements of a mentoring relationship is having a clear set of goals for what it is you, the mentee, want out of it. It might be the simple necessity of having a touchstone or 'sounding board' – someone you can discuss ideas with, or check-in with on your professional development trajectory.

You may need a very specific type of mentor; someone with keen financial acumen or a specific understanding of internationalisation; a digital expert or people management guru. Whatever your development need is, be clear from the start about what it is you want to gain from the relationship, and go from there.

Knowing what you want to learn or the knowledge you want to have access to also leads you to the type of mentor you need – and the background, expertise and insight you'd expect them to have. Having a clear profile of the mentor you wish to engage with will ultimately play a significant role in the success of your mentoring experience.



Of course, this poses the question almost immediately of – that’s all good and well, but where do I find this person?! There are a whole series of different routes to finding a mentor – they may be within your own network, or a former boss or colleague – they may be a member of a mentoring panel with your Local Enterprise Office or Enterprise Ireland, or your AIB Relationship Manager may be able to recommend a mentor to you.

It’s also really helpful to consider personality fit and the traits you work best with – if you tend to be responsive to direction, then a more ‘hands-off’ style may not suit you – for others, this might be off-putting. You might find regular check-ins helpful, or may respond better to a longer timeframe to work on your KPIs. So, have an idea of person-fit and the type of approach that will work well for you. Building rapport and having a good relationship with your mentor is important, but boundaries are also necessary to ensure objectives are met, and complacency doesn’t set in! Mutual respect is paramount.

Being an effective mentor

For mentors, many of the same guidelines apply – you do need to be focused and clear – setting out expectations, on both sides, and ensuring clarity of understanding. A mentor shouldn’t be afraid to be firm but must also be fair, and offer stretching objectives whilst not making them so challenging, they’re not deliverable. A handy reference point is the often-cited SMART model of goal-setting – ensuring specific, measurable, achievable, realistic and time-bound goals are set early on and reviewed on an ongoing basis, will add greatly to both parties’ experience.

A very obvious but extremely important skill for mentors? Being an active listener. At times, a mentor’s need to convey knowledge and guidance means they can miss the issues being presented to them or overlook simple cues that could require further investigation. Being an active listener means moving from a position of passively “hearing” the messages of the mentee to fully concentrating on what they’re saying. Know the subtle difference, and ensure you’re actively listening to your mentee.

Ultimately, mentoring really is a brilliant tool for building skills, confidence, knowledge – as well as accessing contacts and information. The once popularly-held myth that mentoring somehow inferred a deficiency or lack of ability, has been replaced by the reality of what it offers – an unparalleled opportunity to develop yourself, your organisation and in the process, massively improve long-term, ongoing success.

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How to Access Mentoring:



Network Ireland is a progressive and dynamic organisation supporting the professional and personal development of women. They have a membership made up of a diverse group of women from entrepreneurs to professional women in all sectors of private and public-sector roles. They are passionate about supporting members in leadership development and facilitating

collaboration and growth of their collective businesses.

As part of their membership they have a peer to peer mentoring programme, '*Mentoring for Success*', where members give their time and expertise to coach other members to support them around a particular area of their business or professional development.

The programme is about fuelling success, it is about giving members the opportunity to scope out how to grow and develop with the support of an experienced peer. You can select a member with the skillset that best suits you on their Mentor Database www.networkireland.ie/mentors-database



At AIB, we're backing our business customers. That's why we created '*AIB Women in Enterprise*' giving female business owners a unique Education and Mentoring Programme specifically designed and delivered by entrepreneurial experts, The Entrepreneurs Academy.

Our mission is to empower, educate, mentor and bring together ambitious, entrepreneurial businesswomen to create an extraordinary network, where women can redefine what's possible for themselves and their business.

Comprising of a series of masterclass events and academy style workshops, this innovative initiative is designed to help women grow themselves and others, both personally and professionally, through leadership, education and networking support, fast-tracking them to real entrepreneurial success.

To attend our Masterclasses or Academy, please visit:

<https://entrepreneursacademy.ie/aibwomeninenterprise>

For further information on AIB Women in Enterprise, please visit:

<https://business.aib.ie/my-business-is/women-in-enterprise>