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PMC-PD

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**THE ART OF MENTORING:**  
A Meaningful Way  
to Create Mutual Growth

PMC SAYS



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## The Art of Mentoring: A Meaningful Way to Create Mutual Growth

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**P**icture this: an old master is giving advice to a young pupil. The student listens intently to everything the master says, eager to absorb the older person's wisdom. The flow of knowledge runs in one clear direction, from one to another. We are all familiar with this picture of mentorship. But is it accurate? Have we forgotten the art of mentoring? How does this apply to consultancy?

### WHY SEEK MENTORSHIP?

In startup hubs across Singapore, mentoring is making a comeback. And for good reason. In an industry where Forbes estimates as many as nine out of ten enterprises fail, it makes sense to learn from someone else's mistakes rather than your own.

For an SME owner, having a mentor can be a low-cost, strategic advantage for growth and development. It is a chance to hear a neutral outsider's perspective of where your business is heading. This type

of wholesale appraisal is priceless. Studies have shown that mentored businesses perform three times better than those without a mentor, and mentored businesses survive more than five years which is double the rate of non-mentored business.

The long-term relationships that result from mentorships can also be a safeguard against the mood swings of a fast-changing economy. Imagine having a trusted advisor on-call to give you advice when the market suddenly turns. The beauty of mentorship is that it doesn't have an expiry date; you can return to it at any time.

### WHAT IS MENTORING?

Despite its buzzword status, mentoring is not well understood, nor widely practiced. It's so low-profile that mentors often 'fall' into the role and don't even realise they are mentoring until someone points it out to them. Here are a few characteristics that set mentoring apart from other business relationships:



### ▶ Equality

While it's obvious who is teaching whom in a mentorship, learning is a two-way street. It's accepted that both parties have valuable knowledge and experiences to share. Mentors don't need wrinkles and grey hair anymore either. Anyone with the right expertise and attitude can be an effective mentor, which is why you can now find young, tech-savvy professionals mentoring older executives in the use of digital technology and social media.

### ▶ Informality

Unlike coaching, mentoring is more informal and likely to form organically between people with similar aspirations or by word of mouth. Because mentoring is not constrained by deadlines or the pressures of showing a panel how successful it has been, mentorships tend to unfold naturally over months or years, depending on the needs of the mentee.

### ▶ Perspective

Consultants are employed by businesses to provide hard and fast solutions to operational or technical problems. While coaches are task-oriented and performance driven, mentors are more concerned with the business owner (relationship-oriented) and the overarching strategies that guide a business (development driven). By unpicking a business from the top-down, mentors are able to provide perspective, rather than solutions; to empower the mentee to make his own decisions, not simply dictating the 'right' course of action.

### ▶ Cost

Mentorship doesn't cost a thing, except time. Good mentors are driven by the joy of empowering someone rather than by feelings of obligation. Similarly, a good mentee is one who doesn't waste a mentor's time and squander valuable advice frivolously. The relationship is one

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that is built on mutual respect, not just money. This can lead to stronger bonds of trust between mentees and mentors, which help build a long term, possibly fruitful, business relationship for both in the future.

### BENEFITS OF BEING A MENTOR

Mentorship doesn't just benefit the business owners. It is especially beneficial for business professionals looking to advance their careers. The Forbes study in the US showed that mentors advance six times more than those who didn't mentor. Perhaps the very act of teaching is a form of personal and professional development which allows mentors to analyse diverse situations, solve problems, and practice empathy. It gives one the opportunity to articulate thoughts and ideas, exercise leadership, and cultivate relationship building. All essential qualities of a good consultant.

Many mentors cite the personal fulfilment of imparting knowledge and seeing their mentees thrive as the reasons they choose to mentor. In a practical sense, consultants who undertake mentoring work inevitably build up goodwill with clients, improve their reputation, and create stronger professional networks and opportunities for new consultancy work in the future.





### WHAT MAKES A GOOD MENTORING RELATIONSHIP?

Now that we have outlined the nuts and bolts of the mentoring relationship, let's take a closer look at what makes mentoring an art form. History gives us a clue. One of the world's greatest mentors, Confucius, did not believe he possessed wisdom. Rather, he thought that true knowledge came from accepting the fact that you don't know everything.

For one, confessing that we aren't wise and all-knowing can be downright embarrassing. It's even harder in business, where the fear of losing face often dominates our nobler senses of honesty and accountability. For a business owner, acknowledging the need for a mentor is not a sign of weakness but instead is a move to improving leadership and potential for the firm. In the long term, good mentoring can help make the difference between a good organisation and a visionary one.

Other characteristics of a good mentorship is one that has a sustained relationship and one that focuses on critical business issues. This is where a good mentor makes a big difference. Other than having good listening skills, a good mentor reserves judgement and is interested in guiding, not instructing. Keeping this kind of neutral perspective invites mentees to be more open and honest. After all, developing mutual trust is key.

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### STEPS TO A MENTORING RELATIONSHIP

Now that you've decided to reach out or offer help, how do you get started? What steps should you take to find a good mentor or mentee?

Here are some steps you could take:

- Ask yourself **WHY** you want to be a mentor or a mentee
- Identify opportunities of engagement by making a list of those who inspire you, attend forums or seminars where you would meet people who **SEEK** learning and growth opportunities.
- After making the first contact, come up with a list of **GOALS** you would like to achieve and explore how the mentoring relationship would work for both parties.
- Once the relationship is established, meet on a regular basis to **DISCUSS** the progress and **REVIEW** learnings.
- Every time an achievement is accomplished, celebrate and look at what's ahead, what's **NEXT**.

### WHAT'S NEXT?

Confucius was willing to teach even the simplest peasant, as long as they met him halfway. As such, mentorship is only as strong as the time and effort both parties invest.

Time? Effort? Who can afford that! Many of us feel our time is too scarce to spend on someone who isn't going to provide us with any immediate benefits. But to those who've undertaken it, mentoring is far from draining; it's invigorating.

Throughout history, mentoring has shaped some of our greatest thinkers. But in today's business world, we seem to have forgotten how to do it. We have forgotten its value as an art form that can truly transform lives. The good news is, almost anyone with the right attitude can give or receive mentoring. And if we can better understand how it works, much rich experiences and knowledge could be shared with one another. So get out there and unleash your inner mentor or mentee. ■