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# The Weed Killer Cometh!

*A mentor should bring objectivity and focus to a situation in an environment of total confidentiality and discretion. In this article Philip de Lisle, the business mentor to many well-known entrepreneurs and business leaders, reveals the secrets of making the process work for you.*

I've lost count of the number of times I've heard people say "why on earth do I need a mentor?" Yet most of us, at some point in our business lives, can feel lost and lonely and we don't feel we can't share this with our colleagues.

Unfortunately the press seems to interchange the words "mentor" and "coach" at will, which does neither role any favours. So let's start by getting one thing clear at the outset. A mentor is not a coach. And a coach is not a mentor. The role of a coach is to encourage and question in order to get the individual to be the best that they can be. A mentor is solely concerned with challenging so as to get the best out of you and your business.

Clearly mentoring has an element of coaching within it and vice versa, but the focus of the role is very different. A good mentor will not tell you what you need to do even if it is blindingly obvious but will pose questions so that you find your own solutions.



*A mentor can help you clear away the weeds that may be blocking the path to your success*

## How do you choose a mentor?

What follows are some suggestions:

**1** You must like them as an individual and they you, otherwise you won't feel comfortable baring yourself and the experience will be an unhappy one for you both.

**2** Look for someone who will stand up to you and challenge you; you must be prepared for a bumpy ride in some of your sessions. I always tell potential clients that part of my job is to ask the "unaskable" and say the "unsayable".

**3** Decide whether you want a mentor who has experience of your industry, but bear in mind that the disadvantage of using a mentor like this is that their vision might be as clouded as yours.

**4** Before selecting a mentor be clear what outcome(s) you want or need. You must never forget that you control the relationship - the mentor can only work with what you choose to share.

**5** Be wary of those who claim to have a defined process (i.e. a formula) for mentoring. In my experience, mentoring needs to be flexible if the mentee is to get the most value from it - the mentor should have no preconceived ideas about the issue(s) otherwise a vital nugget of information that can unlock the problem might be missed.

## Should a mentor be a non-executive director of your company?

A good non-exec chairman will consider mentoring to be one of their roles, so you may choose to select a chairman for this reason.

If you find a mentor you really like and they are making a significant difference to your bottom line, you may want to consider appointing them to the board.

However the counter argument is that appointing a mentor to the board means that they become an integral part of the team that can blunt their objectivity - the "turning native" scenario.



Philip de Lisle

## So how do you find these people?

Personal recommendation through your network is undoubtedly the best way. But don't just ask for mentors as you might miss out on someone who has never thought about mentoring but who could be perfect for you.

## Should you pay for mentoring?

A thorny question! If you can find someone who is prepared to devote a considerable amount of time to helping you for free then you won't need to. The downside of not paying for a mentor is that you are reliant on their generosity - and their schedule. Paying a mentor immediately puts your relationship on a professional footing and allows you to agree your expectations at the outset. Professional mentors are more likely to make a real difference to your business because they are being paid to do so and can (and should) be judged accordingly.

Assuming that you have chosen your mentor, what happens when you feel that they are either not delivering on your expectations or that you have outgrown them as may easily happen? A good mentor will have spotted these problems occurring and should have raised them already. If they haven't, are they right for you?

So what is the role of a mentor? To clear away the weeds so that you can find the path.