

What to Expect and Not to Expect From a Business Mentor

Posted By [Annie Pilon](#) On February 8, 2014 @ 12:00 pm



Businesses that receive mentoring are 20% more likely to grow than businesses that don't, according to [research from the UPS Store](#) ^[1]. Business mentors are usually more experienced business owners or industry professionals who can provide advice and guidance.

But how exactly does mentorship work? And how do you know what to expect from a business mentor?

[SCORE](#) ^[2], a non-profit association focused on business growth and mentorship, offered some insights on the mentorship process in a recent email interview with Small Business Trends.



What Does a Business Mentor Do?

A business mentor's particular duties can vary greatly based on each business's individual needs. Some businesses secure mentors at the very beginning and work with them throughout many years, and others just use mentors for short-term or specific issues.

The format of these mentorships is also based on those needs and the availability of both the mentor and the business owner. In the email interview, Ken Yancey, CEO of SCORE explained:

"Some mentors and mentees may set up a standing meeting time and place where they check in on a regular basis. Others may only get in contact when an issue arises that requires their joint effort to tackle."

How Can Businesses Find Mentors?

SCORE currently has a network of over 11,000 business mentors around the country and online. Interested businesses [can visit the website](#) ^[3] to connect with a mentor, free of charge.

Alternatively, business owners can ask for assistance from personal connections or on social media or professional networking sites. Mentors themselves can even be resources for finding more people who can provide experience and guidance.

Yancey said:

"One great thing to keep in mind is that you also don't need to have just one mentor. Try to take advantage of each mentor's different expertise and ask them to recommend others who may be able to fill in with complementary fields of expertise."



How Do You Know What to Expect From a Good Business Mentor?

Discussing SCORE's volunteer mentors, Yancey explained:

"Some key traits we look for in our volunteers is that they are open-minded, encouraging, good listeners and have a wealth of experience to bring to the table."

But aside from those basic traits, a good mentor can be different for each individual business. Some businesses can benefit from a more involved mentor they can constantly bounce ideas off of. Others might want someone who they can seek out when they have specific questions. A good mentor will listen to the business owner's wants and respond accordingly.

How Should Businesses Interact With Mentors?

DO Set Goals

Because mentorship really depends on what the business owner hopes to gain from the experience, it's important to decide what that is before starting out.

In the email interview, Yancey wrote:

"Some of us may want someone to hold our hand through each step of the process of starting a business and others may just want a spark of inspiration or a key piece of information that will start them down the right path."

Figure out what type of mentor relationship you're looking for and what you'd like to accomplish in your business so that your mentor has clear instructions on how to guide you.

DON'T Do All the Talking

While it's important for you to let a mentor know what you're looking for, it's equally important for you to hear what they have to say.

Yancey explained:

"A mentor may view your business from a completely different perspective than you. Be fully open to their ideas and try to understand their view. This doesn't always mean taking their advice verbatim but it's important to be able to see your business from multiple viewpoints."

DO Stay Organized

Aside from your initial goals, you should constantly update what you hope to accomplish in the short term and track your progress:

"Make sure you organize your thoughts and materials in advance of each meeting and set a goal for what you want to accomplish in that session. Take notes and report back to your mentor to let them know your progress and show them the results of your collaboration on a regular basis."

DON'T Expect Them to Do Your Work

Yancey explained:

"Think of a mentor as your own personal business guru – someone to inspire and push you in the right direction, but the work is up to you."

DO Explore All Your Options

Not every business can use just one mentor. And not every mentor can necessarily benefit your business. Assess your goals and your progress, and if you're not happy with the results, it may be time to move on.

Yancey said:

"The only way to know is to try them out. Try as many mentors as you like until you find one that is a perfect fit."

Images: SCORE

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[1] research from the UPS Store: <http://www.theupsstore.com/about/media-room/Pages/the-ups-store-makes-mentoring-month-matter.aspx>

[2] SCORE: <http://www.score.org/>

[3] can visit the website: <http://www.score.org/mentors>