

## Selecting a Mentor: Guide for a Protégé

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**Abstract:** The development of entrepreneurial skills within the education system increases the possibility of producing more entrepreneurs in future. Many economists now believe that entrepreneurship plays an important role in economic growth of a country. Entrepreneurial education can be used as a mediation tool for impacting attitude of people towards entrepreneurship. A Mentor plays an important role in entrepreneurial development of an individual. It is a mentor who guide entrepreneur from conception of business to product development and business growth, but in order to provide mentoring a mentor need to have certain qualities and a proven track record. Select the right mentor is most important because a mentor who is incompatible with entrepreneur's personality or requirement may cost entrepreneur the whole business. This research puts a light on subjective and objective qualities a mentor should possess and will provide a guideline to protégé regarding selection of appropriate mentor.

**Key words:** Mentoring • Entrepreneurship • Protégé • Eco System

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### INTRODUCTION

In recent years mentoring for entrepreneurs has become a hot topic of debate with many people implementing it at a regional level. At a national level there is still a lot to be desired all around the world. The role of a mentor is to empower the entrepreneur to replicate on action and perhaps to modify future action. Critical incidents that occur throughout the business process enable entrepreneur to take strategic and operational decisions. The most influential learning is often provided by the mentor to protégé in a relationship which provides both task based learning and socio-emotional learning. To create an effective mentor-protégé relationship it requires the capability to create increasingly trust-worthy surroundings. It seems that mentoring does have deep effect on subsequent success in various professions. Like in business, an association between strong mentoring relationship and positive career outcome is correlated. Or higher the earning power at a younger age, greater the career satisfaction, the same applies to science. According to study conducted by Harriet Zuckerman of 92 Nobel laureates, Harriet found that more than half or 48

of them had worked with older Nobel laureates either as students, post-doctoral fellows or junior colleagues. Harriet found out that the relationship between the mentors and the future Nobel laureates were not just about the transmission of knowledge and skills but also a "style of thinking" regarding solving important problems. Later, as mentors themselves, these scientists were inclined to transmit these values and attitudes to their protégés.

The issue of standards in mentoring has arisen for two reasons. First, the rapid spread of mentoring programs aimed at young and vulnerable people requires close attention to risk management and Government-supported programs require standards as an element of impact measurement. Second, the rapid growth of executive coaching and mentoring inevitably gives rise to calls for regulation, given that anyone can claim to have the necessary skills and experience. The increasing volume of qualifications offered in coaching and mentoring does not necessarily help, as they tend not to be specific about the level of competence required (length of experience does not equate to quality of performance), nor about the audience specific factors that may demand

additional competencies (for example, knowledge of cognitive development and skills in behavior management for mentors of children and persons with special needs.)

**Problem Statement:** Start-ups survival rate is very low as research by SBA (Small Businesses Association) found out that only 50% of business survives till 4 years. Mentoring is suggested to be an option to increase survival rate of start-ups as good mentoring can increase the survival rate of start-ups [1]. Effective mentoring requires pre-screening of potential mentors. Unskilled or inexperienced mentors, social space and a disparity between the values of mentor and protégé, insufficient designation of roles and ground rules can jeopardize mentor protégé relationship [2].

Evidence suggests that as entrepreneur grows they expect different set of skills and support from their mentors. Clutterbuck [3] argued that when entrepreneur develops the “Personnel Chemistry” between entrepreneur and mentor changes hence entrepreneurs feel the need of another mentor who can guide them forward. This paper highlights the subjective and objective qualities a protégé look for while selecting a mentor.

**Definition of Entrepreneurial Mentor:** The term mentor originates from Homer’s *Odyssey*, where Odysseus placed Mentor in charge of his son Telemachus while away on his voyage [4]. Mentor was to see to Telemachus’ education and the development of his identity in the adult world. Similarly, in modern times, this term has come to denote a person with certain qualities, or who is in a position of authority that watches benevolently over a younger person, who benefits from counsel and support from the mentor. Mentoring differs from other similar forms of individual support, such as coaching, in that the mentor places the interests of the individual to whom he is providing support as an absolute priority and not as part of a set of priorities [5]. Mentoring can be practiced in a variety of contexts, such as providing help to troubled youth. Similarly, many mentoring programs have been developed within large organizations. The main goals of these programs are to promote hierarchical ascension and wage increases for the protégé. As the mentor is often in a position of authority, he can ensure increased visibility, promote his protégé and advise him regarding opportunities for advancement and so forth.

The original meaning of the word mentor refers to a father figure who sponsors, guides and develops a younger person. Throughout history, mentors have

played a significant role in teaching, inducting and developing the skills and talents of others. Indeed, there are many examples of mentors in the biographies of famous artists, scientists and musicians byrne [6] who have played a key role in shaping their protégé’s destiny. Entrepreneurial mentoring involves a support relationship between an experienced entrepreneur (the mentor) and a novice entrepreneur (the protégé), in order to foster the latter’s personal development. A mentor plays many roles. In the historical sense, a mentor is one who is a loyal friend, confidant and advisor. He acts a teacher, guide, coach and role model. Mentors are entrusted with the care and education of another and have knowledge or expertise to nurture another person of ability. They are willing to give what he or she knows with no expectation of reciprocation or remuneration and represents accomplishment, knowledge, skill and virtue. The most effective mentors offer support, challenge, patience and enthusiasm while they guide others to new levels of achievement. They expose their protégés to new ideas, perspectives and standards and to the values and norms of society. Although mentors are more knowledgeable and experienced, they do not view themselves as superior to those whom they mentor.

**Role of Mentor in Entrepreneurial Development:** One of the main causes leading to the failure of start-up businesses is the lack of experience and competency on the part of new entrepreneurs, as evidenced by their lack of vision and their difficulty or inability to find a Profitable niche for their business [7]. Researchers found out that main reason of failure of new start-ups is that training needs of new entrepreneurs do not appear to be adequately considered in the design of their support programs. Many complain that the training they receive is not tailored to their needs, suggesting that a more personalized learning process may be more appropriate. Research also suggests that in a situation where there is not enough time for training, mentoring sufficiently helps a novice entrepreneur to develop skills to manage the business [1].

Mentoring is to support and inspire people to achieve their own wisdom in order that it maximise one’s potential. A mentor is the key to higher management for the aspiring young entrepreneurs. The trick is to pick the right one-someone who has the knowledge and influence you need. In selecting the mentor-protégé pairs, a very important criterion is compatibility, because the mentor and protégé are working in close cooperation during the whole process [2]. An aspiring entrepreneur should have two mentors:

**Personal Development Mentor:** A personal development mentor personally develops entrepreneurial mind-set of protégé for success by expanding protégé's horizons emotionally. Mentoring is a powerful personal development and empowerment instrument. It is an effective way of helping people to progress in entrepreneurial career. It is a partnership between two people (mentor and protégé) not necessarily belongs to same industry or share similar interest. Personal development mentor helps the protégé to boost self-belief, confidence and help protégé achieve goals.

**Entrepreneurial Development Mentor:** The role of entrepreneurial mentor is to enable the entrepreneur to reflect on actions and as result modify future actions. Entrepreneurs usually obtain capability to learn through experience and that experience comes from an incident in which entrepreneurs learn to make strategic decision and this is where entrepreneur need a mentor who can advise about strategic decision [1]. In order to select a mentor different approach is needed to select both personal and entrepreneurial development mentor. This paper identifies 11 different qualities an ideal mentor should have, but personal development mentor do not need to have all qualities that are required for an ideal entrepreneurial mentor or vice versa.

**Educational Mentor:** According to the Nadler [8] model, Employee education is crucial in a person's professional development provided that the new or different role is within the same or different organization. Education Mentor has a wider role which requires foresight and understanding of how employees develop and grow during an occupation. An educational mentor at this stage of employee's career looks toward the future and may help employee with a plan regarding educational activities and related work experiences [9].

**Subjective Characteristics/Qualities of Mentor:** A mentor is an individual with skills and knowledge and helps protégé in developing career. Usually a mentor helps protégé in developing two main aspects of personality of the protégé. The career related (Entrepreneurship in this research) function of mentor establishes the mentor as a leader who provides guidance to enhance the protégés entrepreneurial capabilities and skills. The psychosocial function presents mentor as an icon for the protégé. Both functions provide clear and implicit lessons related to entrepreneurial development as

well as personal life balance. To become a role model a mentor need to possess certain qualities which can force protégé to accept mentor as superior, better and successful person than mentor.

**Successful Track Record of Mentoring:** Experience is always a best teacher and that seems to be true for a mentor as well. The experienced mentor often feels more comfortable in the relationship because mentor has a better understanding of the role. Experienced mentors, as opposed to inexperienced ones, tend to be more difficult to get because they are often pursued by many aspiring entrepreneurs and here comes the mentors choice to select what mentor think can be best protégé. In order to select protégé, mentor makes sure that protégé want to learn to become an entrepreneur and is willing to work hard to become one [10].

**Interpersonal Competency:** Key responsibility of a good mentor is to provide direction and constructive advice to the protégé. This is where the protégé will most likely to develop the most by identifying their current strengths and weaknesses and learning how to best use the strength and overcome weaknesses in order to be successful in the field. A good mentor also possesses outstanding communication skills and is able to bend their communication to the personality style of the protégé. A good mentor will always provide the protégé with challenges that will nurture professional development and a feeling of achievement in learning the field [11].

**Attitude of Mentor:** A good mentor shows the individual attributes it takes to be successful in the field. By showing the protégé what it takes to be creative and successful, they are demonstrating the specific behaviour and actions required to succeed in the field. It is a good to pick a mentor who shares your values and has a positive attitude, the one who is not afraid to criticise constructively and the one with whom you can talk freely without hesitation [12].

**Interest in Mentoring:** Good mentors take their responsibility very seriously. Without interest no matter how good is a mentor, the relationship between mentor and protégé will always be an imposed relation arranged by university. Mentors should feel devoted in the success of protégé. Usually this requires a mentor to be someone who is experienced, kind and possesses the attributes of a good teacher and trainer. A good mentor is

devoted to helping their protégés find success and satisfaction in their chosen profession. In general good mentoring requires empowering the protégé to develop own strength, philosophies and personal attributes [13].

**Time:** A mentor must have time freedom. This is important because if a mentor cannot give proper time to protégé when needed or is too busy because one is mentoring too many protégés than it will neither help mentor nor protégé. A protégé must look into time schedule of mentor and decide whether mentor have enough time for mentoring [14].

**Mentor Must Keep Up to Date:** Good mentors must be dedicated and should be open to investigating and learning practices that are new to the field. Mentors should continuously read professional journals for current trends and also write articles to share their expertise and experience they gained in the field. Writing articles in journals will also help protégés to select appropriate mentor which matches with their criteria. A mentor not familiar with current trends of the market cannot help protégé in developing product and will ultimately lead to not only financial loss of protégé but will also affect protégé's entrepreneurial capabilities [10].

**ICT Competency:** Information and Communication technology have played a critical role in enhancing the quality of mentoring. E-Mail, Video conferencing and other ICT tools have replaced face to face mentoring with e-mentoring. Though face to face communication is necessary for effective mentoring but mentors must be familiar with current ICT trends and technologies for better communication with protégés. Use of ICT have been proven as most effective but still in development method and it have replaced short face to face meetings with video conferencing and E-mail [15].

**Respected By All:** Protégés want to follow someone who is well respected by colleagues and associates and all those whose contribution in the field of mentor is appreciated. Ideally it is because protégé look up to their mentors as role models and want to see themselves mentoring others in future. A mentor may be well experienced and a successful entrepreneur in the field but if not respected by colleagues or under staff then it won't leave a good impression on protégé and will not helpful in personality development of protégé [16].

**Mentor Network:** A good Mentor should have good contacts and social network. Building relationships with others in surrounding help mentor to know that who to contact for immediate help. Social contacts of mentor can be a great help for protégé as mentor need not to be expert in every field so a protégé can have multiple mentors recommended by mentor [17].

**Shared Values:** Mentors and protégés should share interest and values which will found a common ground. The mentor and the protégé become familiar and informally explain their common interests, shared values and future goals and vision. The relationship may get a good start if mentor and protégé give a high priority and take time to become familiar with one another's interests, values and goals [18].

**Objective characteristics of Mentor:** Beside subjective characteristics like experience, network, time, communication skills etc., objective characteristics e.g. Age, Gender, Ethnicity, religion may also affect the mentoring outcome as these characteristics shape the need of protégé [19].

**Age of a Mentor:** There hasn't been much concern about age diversity in mentoring a relationship; it is because the concept of a mentor has been associated with seniority and experience [7]. Lisa [20] maintained that age difference of mentor and protégé should be between 8 to 15 Years, as protégé will not be comfortable with an older mentor because due to age difference a friendly relationship may not develop and it will take on qualities of parent and child relationship. Levinson also maintained that mentor should not be too close to the age of protégé because relationship may develop as a friend or peer relation. Lisa M. Finkelstein [20] maintained that age mismatch for both protégé and mentors can be problematic. For example, older protégé may feel embarrassment for being a subordinate of mentor in a relationship and younger mentors can be perceived as unskilled or inexperienced.

**Gender of Mentor:** Researchers have advised that resemblance in race and genders are significant considerations in pairing mentor and protégé, [21]. Therefore, the amount of similarity between the mentor and the protégé, either real or supposed, could affect the quality of the mentoring relationship. Research also shows that people form first impressions of others based

on noticeable apparent features of the people, such as gender and race and classify the persons based on their gender and race similarity [22].

Many organizations provide formal mentoring programs, which match mentors and protégé's in finding a mentor [23]. These mentoring organizations may also impact gender differences as research have found out that men usually hold most of the high level organizational positions, will more likely prefer to mentor other men [21]. Since most organizations have very few number of women on top slots, these women may not be able to entertain all applications to serve as a mentor to women working on lower level slots making it more probable that men will engage in same-gender mentoring relationships than will women. For women who are able to form mentoring relationships with male mentors, the results of male mentoring female protégé relations are naturally lesser than the outcomes for male mentoring male protégé relationships. For instance, male mentor-female protégé relations are less likely than male mentor-male protégé relationship to meet both active and communicative requirements [24]. On the other hand, some researchers have established that female protégés like female-female mentoring relationships more than female-male ones [25].

**Ethnicity of Mentor:** Researchers have established that mentoring relationships work in most of the cases but not all mentoring relationships are effective and sometimes these relationships can do more harm than good [27]. There is need of research to answer few questions about mentor protégé relationship based on race and ethnicity.

- Does it really matter if mentor and protégé are matched on just race and ethnicity?
- Will same race matches be more productive than cross race matches?
- Does relationship of mentor and protégé get affected by race and ethnicity?
- Should mentoring programs also focus on cultural sensitivity when designing the program?

Little research have been done on mentor protégé relationship with focus on race and ethnicity, but some research on college going ethnic minorities suggest that cultural difference does play role in prospect, achievement and experience of mentoring [27]. Kalbfleisch [28] found

out that black mentors frequently started connection with black protégés for their professional and personal development than white mentors. Likewise Latino students who were paired with mentors of same race were more satisfied with their mentors and found them helpful in their personal and career development than students paired with mentors of different race [29]. Studies of informal mentoring relationships show that when protégé choose their own mentors, they incline to pursue mentors from the same ethnic or cultural background [30] [31].

**Language of Mentor:** Language barriers can have substantial impact on effective communication and both mentor and protégé are required to understand of what is being written and/or said [32]. When working through different cultures, language is usually acknowledged as a likely barrier in communication. The level of proficiency in the common language used during the interaction in the mentoring session is vital. Both Mentors and protégés should settle on the language to be used throughout mentoring period. Also, they should feel easy while using this language and asking for interpretation on vocabulary. Words can have a positive or negative meaning subjective to the language and culture. In order to avoid mismatch there is need of matchmaking based on language both mentor and protégé can fluently communicate. Not matching mentors and protégés on language differences would possibly lessen ideal pairs due to communication gap [33].

## CONCLUSION

The research highlighted in the paper focuses on selecting an appropriate mentor. This research will not only provide a guideline to protégé's seeking mentor, but it will also help organizations with formal mentoring programs in mentor-protégé match making. Mostly organizations with formal mentoring programs select mentors based on subjective qualities like experience, communication skills etc., while totally neglecting the impact of objective qualities like Gender, Ethnicity and language of mentor and its effect on protégés development. This paper highlights that in certain cases protégés can compromise on mentors experience and skills but not on gender, language and ethnicity. In such cases formal mentoring organizations should conduct personality profiling of protégés first and attach them with mentors of their priority.

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