

# Choosing a Mentor

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## 1. Do I really need one?

In this world of fast moving technology, a manager in a small business often does not have the time to pay proper attention to niceties like developing 'people', operational efficiency or the details of delivering effectively. This is certainly true when managing an IT team. Although it may seem heroic to manage your team by the seat of your pants, it is not the way to succeed in today's competitive marketplace.

It has been said that the sure sign of a wise man is one who knows his own limitations.

If you do not mind muddling through whilst your competitors are growing and taking over your market then, perhaps, a Mentor is not for you.

However, if you want to grow and achieve any kind of dominance in your market, to get the best value from your highly skilled staff, to create IT products that are both cool and revenue generating, then a Mentor could be what you need to make this happen.

## 2. What can a Mentor do for me?

Having a Mentor working with you can give you someone to help to you think about your options, set goals, and support you to stay focused in the pursuit of those goals. You can discuss issues in confidence with an independent person who can provide a different perspective and build your confidence. They will have experience and skills that are complementary to your own, and the ability to share these in a way that makes you and your business stronger.

Management expertise alone is not enough. They must also be able to share this with you. They should be patient, be proactive, have good communication skills, integrity, flexibility, emotional intelligence, insightfulness, creativity, and be wholly trustworthy.

## 3. What sort of problems do they solve?

- I need to understand the core management skills needed to lead a team successfully
- My customer and supplier relationships don't work as well as they should
- There isn't enough time to do everything
- I've got an unexpected management challenge, and am not sure how to proceed
- I sometimes don't feel very confident about making decisions
- I need to delegate more, but find it difficult to let go
- We are not delivering, and I'm not sure why
- My colleagues don't work well with me
- I need to recruit some more technical staff, but haven't done this before
- My team does not work as a team, but keep doing their own thing
- Our Projects are coming in late and/or over budget
- How do I promote someone without upsetting the rest of the team?

## 4. What questions should I ask?

- Do you have broad experience of a managing people? *You want to work with someone who knows how teams like yours work in practice as well as theory.*
- How long have you been a Mentor? *A track record is good, as is someone who is making a career of being a Mentor.*
- Do you have any relevant professional qualifications or current memberships? *You want them to be 'verified' with an external body, and to be up to date.*
- How will we work together? Agree how often you can contact them, and when you will meet.
- Will it be you, or someone else who helps us? Agree who will do the work with you (you want the organ grinder not the monkey!)
- What will I learn from the experience? *This will help you assess and agree the benefits.*
- Who have you helped before (and can I talk to them)?
- What do you charge? Ask them if they will work on a fixed price for a set result, or on a monthly retainer/on call basis. *This will help you avoid unexpected costs.*

## 5. How to make it a cost effective experience

- Define the problem as clearly as you can.
- Define your objective for working with the Mentor.
- Choose wisely. If in doubt, work on a small easily defined project first.
- Recognise that they are not an employee. Agree when you will meet, how you will communicate etc.
- Be involved. They are not there to do work for you, but to help you to improve what you do.
- Monitor progress. Agree interim goals/milestones.
- Evaluate the results.
- Give feedback in the form of a reference.

## Further Information

[Join our mailing list](#) for more checklists, tips and other ideas for improving how you manage and lead your organisation.

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Jacqui Hogan has been mentoring business managers/owners to achieve their goals since 2003. Prior to starting her own business, she worked in senior management and leadership roles for a variety of large and small commercial organisations.

Jacqui has an MBA, specialising in Financial Strategy, Managing in the External Environment (Marketing), and Creative Management (Managing Innovation) where she graduated with distinction. She is uniquely qualified in both IT (MBCS, CITP) and Business Management (MBA, FCMI). Jacqui is an approved Business Adviser with [ibd \(initiatives in business development\)](#), Fellow of IOEE and an accredited Master Mentor (IIC&M)