



Role models

Mentorships are becoming increasingly popular among B2B marketers as a way of supercharging a career. But how do you ensure both mentor and mentee get the most out of the relationship?

Lucy Fisher investigates

The *B2B Marketing Leaders Report* has revealed that more than two thirds of marketing leaders are planning 'mentoring and coaching' activity to develop their team's skills sets, as opposed to formal qualifications and training. While it is possible that financial motivations lie at the heart of this – given that mentoring often involves individuals offering their wisdom free of charge – senior figures in the industry suggest, too, the economic

downturn has led to a growing trend for individuals to seek out others as part of a plan to seize control of their career development.

Since the recession, suggests James Trezona, managing director of agency Mason Zimble – and as the impact of making the wrong business decisions has grown – people have become much more willing to look externally for advice and solutions. "An outside perspective can help you to see the bigger picture," he says. "Sometimes all you need is fresh eyes."

Trezona believes that mentorship arrangements can be of benefit to the most senior as well as the more junior members of staff, given they can create an often much-needed opportunity to step back and take stock of a situation.

For busy managers or chief executives being pulled in a number of directions, he says, talking to a mentor and enjoying a confidential and frank exchange can make it easier to remain rational and objective when under pressure. Meanwhile, for organisations, mentorship schemes can be of huge benefit as they can help

to reduce staff attrition rates, boost company loyalty and even attract talent.

While there seems to be some looseness around terminology it is generally accepted mentorship involves a senior figure imparting knowledge to someone more junior.

Often, this centres around 'softer' skills such as presentation, communication and leadership as opposed to more specific or technical know-how. Mentorship can be as simple and short-lived as a single, but influential, meeting over a coffee or it can be set up as a formal scheme involving weekly catch-ups over a defined period of time with set KPIs. And while many large organisations have enabled a framework for mentorship as part of their company-wide personal development processes, mentoring – unlike coaching – is generally voluntary on the part of the mentor and the mentee.

Often, mentors are more than happy to give up some of their time, having benefitted themselves from mentorship arrangements. Many say they find it hugely rewarding as well as stimulating.

Nicholas Green, founder and managing director of Printed.com says that he is a huge believer in the principles behind such schemes but thinks it's important

to differentiate between a manager and a mentor. "Mentors can help you tackle things like not getting a promotion," he says. "They can help you to stay positive. For it to be successful, I think there's got to be a spark."

Many suggest that such arrangements don't work so well if you're being mentored by your line manager. "Mentorship can help you identify your strengths and weaknesses," says Shane Redding, managing director of consultancy Think Direct. "It can allow you to ask whether you are in fact in the right role." It can be key for middle management looking to take the step up to senior management or for senior managers looking for a place on the board, she says, having discovered, too, that the role of a non-executive director is often to mentor the CEO.

Formalising mentorship

Debbie Williams, chair of the Institute of Direct Marketing's (IDM) B2B Council and an independent consultant, says having benefitted from mentorship on an informal basis throughout her career, she now feels she is in a position to offer a paid-for service of value to individuals looking to further their B2B marketing careers. "I think mentorship is very different to coaching. It can be unstructured," she says. "It's more tailored to the individual, whereas coaching tends to cover very specific topics."

"Individuals may have knowledge but struggle with its application. Someone with experience can talk about what works and what doesn't. The application of theory isn't something you can always learn from a textbook," she adds.

As such, many suggest that mentorship can work well in tandem with more formal training schemes. In recognition of this, and as a response to interest among its membership base, the Chartered Institute of Marketing (CIM) has been operating pilot mentorship schemes and

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AMANDA RENDLE,
GLOBAL HEAD OF MARKETING
& PROPOSITIONS
HSBC

Steps to success

Ten top tips for successful mentorship

1. Be clear about what you want to achieve.
2. Impose some structure to meetings if that helps.
3. Ensure both parties can be 100 per cent honest.
4. Choose mentors carefully based on the skills you want to learn.
5. Find a mentor you admire.
6. Remember individuals outside your business function may offer a new perspective.
7. Take responsibility, as a mentee, for your own career development.
8. Listen and keep an open mind.
9. Consider whether you need a mentor from within your organisation who is familiar with internal policies or politics.
10. Remember that no matter how senior you are, we've all got something to learn.

is now in the process of rolling out a formal scheme across the UK. Thomas Brown, head of insights at the training body says many mentors are keen to get involved despite the fact they are not being paid. "We've found that as many say they'd like to be mentors as mentees," he says. "It may be that their careers have progressed to a certain point and there's an element of philanthropy – of asking, 'How can I give something back?' There's also a degree of fulfilment to be found in helping to guide the next generation."

Making it work

Yet despite the clear benefits to individuals and the compelling business case to be made for such schemes, they can involve significant time and commitment. Those with experience stress it is important to remain focused on the overall objectives. And while informal approaches are often sufficient, there can be benefits to the implementation of structure within a mentorship arrangement. "It may be there is an added sense of pace and progress if expectations are set," advises Brown.

What's more, honesty on the part of both the mentor and the mentee is key to successful outcomes. For this reason many experienced mentors suggest it can be of benefit to seek an external mentor even if you are fortunate enough to have access to a pool of mentors

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with your organisation. Paul Berney, CMO and managing director of the European branch of the Mobile Marketing Association (MMA) and one of the mentors from The Marketing Academy's scholarship scheme says that he would be reluctant to mentor someone from within his own company. "An element of distance helps," he says. "There is little value in either party being less than 100 per cent honest. Senior people can get very used to telling a story in a particular way but you have to remove the head-hunter spin and reveal the actual details."

And it's not just honesty and commitment that is necessary. Amanda Rendle, global head of marketing & propositions for commercial banking at HSBC believes there needs to be an affinity with a mentor. "It doesn't work if you don't trust, respect or get on with

your mentor" she says.

Despite the fact HSBC operates a mentorship programme via its HR function, Rendle says she has frequently found it of benefit to seek the advice of people outside her business function or organisation. She says, "I'm a great advocate of building networks. You need to pick mentors carefully for what they can offer, based upon what's in your personal development plan."

What's more, it's crucial that, if mentorship is to work, the mentee must take responsibility for his or her development. And the fact your company may not run a scheme is no excuse.

Rendle concludes, "If someone says to me, 'Can you find me a mentor?' I say, 'No! Fix yourself up. Go to the Marketing Society. Go on LinkedIn. Take the initiative. Go and find your person.'"

Mentorship on the frontline

What's it like to get involved in mentorships?

Ian Symes, head of marketing, Cisco UK and Ireland, reveals all in this quick-fire Q&A

Q: Have you been a mentee or a mentor, and how useful was this experience?

A: I have been both. In the best mentoring relationships both parties will benefit. We are all on a continuous learning curve. Mentoring can work in terms of sharing experience, on a technical skills level or simply in providing an independent perspective.

Q: Do you think mentorship works best when informal or formal?

A: Both have merits. We have a formal scheme at Cisco where mentors can register within our online collaboration community to volunteer and mentees can seek an appropriate mentor.

Q: Many individuals also establish informal mentorships by approaching individuals. What advice would you have for someone entering such a relationship?

A: Be clear as to what you want from the mentorship. A good relationship is key – the mentor is investing time in your personal development, so it has to be fun for both parties. Set clear expectations and remember you may need more than one mentor to adequately address your needs.

Q: What does it take to be a good mentor?

A: Generally, great mentors have a number of years' experience, not only in the technical disciplines but also in the soft skills.

Q: How often do you think you should meet your mentor, and do you need to meet face-to-face?

A: A combination of face-to-face and use of collaborative technology is ideal. Frequency will be dependent on what you are trying to achieve, but as a rule of thumb once a month is a good frequency.