



Who Cares?

The financial services sector is alive with mentoring schemes. So what makes a successful mentoring partnership, asks Laura Powell, and what's in it for the mentors?

Exactly 16 years ago Peninah Thomson, former director in PwC's corporate transformation practice, found herself coaching nine young businesspeople - six male and three female - and hit upon a problem. "My female clients were very confident and experienced but they weren't progressing anywhere near as fast as my male clients," says Thomson. "I started researching and realised there were factors holding them back." The reasons, she says, are many (and the basis of a whole other feature). But what's interesting is how Thomson responded.

Determined to help, and to address the fact that women then held just 6.2% of FTSE 100 director positions, Thomson decided to set up what would become the FTSE 100 Cross-Company Mentoring Executive Programme. Established in 2003, it links female executives with chairmen and chief executives of both genders. "There was absolutely nothing like it," explains Thomson. "Then a few years later other embryonic mentoring programmes started bubbling up. It was wonderful. People were starting to get active."

Fast forward a decade and the scene is very different. Thomson's programme currently has 63 mentees and 70 mentors on its books, including industry heavyweights like PwC chairman Ian Powell, and the model has been copied in 13 countries. Thomson earned an OBE for her efforts and the financial services sector is now humming with mentoring programmes.

Earlier this year the 30% Club launched its pilot cross-sector mentoring scheme, targeting mid-career women, and in September Paul Viner quit as CFO of Giraffe to build Intelligent Goat, his new mentoring business with male and female clients (see page 24 of this issue).

And there are many more like it: The Mentoring Women in Business Programme run by the Cherie Blair Foundation for Women has mentors in 45 countries and mentees in 55; and all of ICAEW's leadership programmes have mentoring at their heart with roughly 180 mentors and mentees. In-house mentoring programmes are also surging in popularity; the one in BT's finance division has 100 participants and counting. Even Sir

Richard Branson, who agreed to mentor five budding entrepreneurs earlier this year, had his own mentor for many years - the late Sir Freddie Laker, founder of one of the earliest no-frills airlines.

Some programmes are free, but professional mentor David Carter, who currently advises eight chief executives, charges between £5,000 and £10,000 per day. Given that he meets his mentees monthly (for roughly three years), this makes it a lucrative trade. So why do people who have built highly-successful careers and businesses turn to others for a helping hand - and shell out handsomely for the privilege?

The reasons are threefold. First, the nature of boards is changing. The chief executive's role can be a lonely one as the role of the board shifts from a sounding board to a "glorified policeman", with an increasing emphasis on compliance. "A mentor can give them that release and can be a critical friend who asks 'what if'," says Ian Sandison, MBA mentor at Cambridge Judge Business School.

Second, the new generation of professionals are less resistant to the idea of a helping hand than those before them. As Carter puts it: "For Baby Boomers having a coach, mentor or therapist was a sign of weakness but Generations X and Y are open to any kind of support they can get." A study of female professionals in the US by LinkedIn certainly seems to support this. It found that only 38% of Baby Boomers have a mentor, compared to 51% of those in Generation Y.

Third - in the case of the mentoring programmes run by the Mentoring Foundation, 30% Club and Cherie Blair Foundation for Women - it is a way of helping redress the imbalance of women and men in senior roles. But Thomson is adamant that it could help other groups too. "We know this method of mentoring works and could be applied to helping people with disabilities play a wider role in the world of work or increasing the number of ethnic minorities in very senior roles," she says.

The cleverest mentors and mentoring organisations appropriate these reasons when "matchmaking". Thomson, for example, "matches for empathy and mismatches for change" so if a

Left: Peninah Thomson

BASE

In September, the winners of ICAEW's 2014 BASE (Business, Accounting and Skills Education) competition interviewed chief executive Michael Izza before accepting their cash prize. Amy Meeks, Emily Bain, Hannah Paton and Eva Hurst, from the Jersey College for Girls, are exactly the sort of people the profession wants to attract. And members can now get involved with BASE as a team mentor, judge or exhibitor at the regional heats and national final. As a mentor, you'll use your knowledge, skills and experience to guide your team through the business case study, helping them to achieve their goal of winning the heat and securing a place at the final. You won't be expected to teach students or have a significant input into their decision-making, but you'll be there to encourage them to stay on task and understand the concepts presented to them. If you fancy getting involved, then regional heats across the country start this month.

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mentee is working in a gruelling or "hostile culture where she is fighting to stay afloat", Thomson will pair her with someone on a similar emotional intelligence level. Meanwhile Carter, founder and former chairman of business leader mentoring company Merryck & Co, only accepts a very specific type of mentee. Namely, alpha personality types whose business has reached a roughly £200m turnover and is at a "massive inflection point".

Mentors are also unanimous that relationships are most effective when the mentor and mentee work for different organisations. "With internal mentoring there is always an agenda - the company's agenda," says Carter. "When you're part of the same organisation it could lead to a degree of conflict," agrees Tony Chanmugam, group FD of BT Group.

Even Thomson, who believes "any mentoring is better than no mentoring", warns that it can be a restraint: "When the mentor and mentee are in the same organisation it would be extraordinary if there were not a certain level of guardedness."

This perhaps accounts for why internal mentoring programmes are often less popular than those run by designated mentoring organisations - an issue that ICAEW urges government, with the help of professional bodies, to address. Sharron Gunn, executive director, commercial at ICAEW, says: "While businesses have begun to offer in-house mentoring, I believe the uptake is generally quite poor. That is why we urge government to form partnerships with professional bodies to access a mentoring pool and provide grants and funding for those who are unable to access knowledge in this way - particularly SMEs."

Asked which ingredients make an effective mentoring relationship, the majority of mentors agree that it boils down to the intangible concept of good chemistry. "Good chemistry between people is the basis for trust," explains Thomson. "When you have trust, you have the good foundations of a strong mentoring relationship."

Whether that chemistry exists is usually established in a preliminary meeting. Chanmugam, for example, uses this meeting to learn the "DNA" of his mentee, and asks about their career goals, working style and family life. "That helps me decide whether we can work together and whether we have a personal chemistry," he says. But, like many other mentors, he finds it difficult to explain what creates that chemistry. "There's no formula. It's like getting married, there are a number of different answers as to how chemistry works."

Carter believes that "opposites attract" in mentoring-mentee partnerships, but Thomson argues that it is impossible to explain so simply and that each mentee must be judged on their individual merits. Certainly their respective methods seem to



work: Carter has never prematurely lost a mentee in 18 years and Thomson only cites one failed partnership in the last 11 years. (The reason, she says, was a clash of diaries.)

Mentors also tend to disagree on what their role entails. "Mentors need to support ideas, rather than saying 'I wouldn't do that', even if the mentee comes up with a wacky idea," says Sandison. But Carter, who styles himself as the "world's leading mentor", is adamant that telling mentees when they're being "bonkers" is part and parcel of the mentor's role. "If I didn't give advice to my clients and tell them 'you're nuts, that won't work', they'd say 'why am I paying you'? If my mentee has never taken a company public before, of course I'm going to offer direct advice."

Carter estimates 90% of time during mentoring sessions is spent discussing the "hard crunchiness" of business and 10% covering personal issues. He explains: "By hard crunchiness I mean supply chain, business strategy, raising money, expanding overseas or going public. But it's also important to have personal conversations and for the mentee to ask 'am I the right person to lead this company?'"

Younger professionals can also benefit from mentors. "Without our mentor, I don't think we would have won the heats, never mind the final," says Maisie Goodson, A-Level student at Lady Eleanor Holles School in London and runner up in ICAEW's BASE competition. And when Greg Pateras, now CFO of Shop Direct Group, was an ACA student at KPMG, he was offered a temporary acting role on *Brookside*, having done some extra work in the past. "I sought advice from a mentor within KPMG on whether I should take the part," he explains. The mentor helped Pateras negotiate a 12-month contract with the television company, alter his KPMG contract and ease back into the firm afterwards.



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MARTIN BURTON, INDIRA FLACK, GU PHOTOGRAPHY, RICK PUSHINSKY, JON SNEDDEN

Yet Thomson warns against leaning too heavily on a mentor. "You shouldn't ever be reliant on a mentor," agrees Chanmugam. Many mentoring programmes, including the FTSE100 Cross-Company Mentoring Programme, limit the relationship to two years for this very reason. "After that, it turns into a personal relationship not a professional one," says Thomson. She also recommends meeting at the mentor's office. "This is not a friendship," she says. "If it was held in a bar with alcohol, for example, it would be a whole other set-up."

So what exactly do mentors, most of whom have little time to spare, get out of the relationship? Is it more than just altruism? All agree that there is a degree of personal satisfaction involved. "I made a number of mistakes in my career and wanted to ensure others didn't do the same," says Chanmugam. He says he moved from area to area within BT Group based on job opportunity rather than career planning. Today he advises his mentees to plan well.

Seasoned mentors also claim to absorb some of the energy from their mentees. "Watching their drive and enthusiasm helps to sustain my own passion," adds Chanmugam. And Sandison, who

Opposite left: David Carter. Above from left: Julia Morris, Maisie Goodson



spends roughly two hours a week mentoring his MBA students, says: "They often challenge me and look at problems in a way I wouldn't look at them."

Then there is the added benefit of learning about a new industry. Viner, for example, has learned a great deal about the advertising technology sector from a mentee. But what is surprising is how much mentors say they learn about themselves too. "It's a reflection of your mentoring style and leadership style," says Julia Morris, a BASE mentor.

An astonishing 75% of US private sector executives say mentoring was critical in helping them reach their position, according to a survey by the American Society for Training and Development. Thomson also points out that in a recent survey of 46 of her mentors, every one said they would recommend the programme.

But for Thomson the greatest reward is the wider benefits: The figure of just 6.2% of women holding FTSE 100 directorship roles when she began in 1999 had leapt to 17.3% last year. She says: "The power in a committed helping relationship is immense. And that's what these relationships are - they're helping relationships." ■

ME AND MY MENTOR

Tony Chanmugam, Group FD at BT and Greg Pateras, CFO designate at Shop Direct Group. They were partnered through ICAEW's Financial Talent Executive Network (F-TEN) scheme



Tony

"When Greg and I met six months ago he was FD of Shop Direct's retail division and his goal was to become a CFO. I don't recall any single pieces of advice I gave him in our five meetings - you don't get silver bullets like that - but the important thing about the relationship was that Greg led it, not me. That's always the case in a successful mentor-mentee partnership; the mentee does the work. Our relationship was a short one as Greg has achieved his goal. He worked really hard and deserves it. I am absolutely delighted for him."



Greg

"When we first met, Tony said: 'I'm a busy man, I want to be as effective as possible, so we have to be quite clinical and get to the point quickly. Are you OK with that?' I was. He quickly evaluated my strengths, made sure I emphasised those, and advised me on the investor-facing side of things, which I had little experience of. Seeing him in action was invaluable but above all he was very reassuring. The psychology of management is important to him and he played a big part in making me feel confident to take the next step."