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More mentoring for your money

Michele Jobling works for a mentoring company, while Jonathan Davies is a vice-president at CNN, but paying to be mentored is not an issue for them

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Typical mentoring relationships rarely involve money changing hands. Often this is because mentor and protégé work for the same employer, so mentoring can take place on company time; other relationships, such as those arranged through professional networks, tend to be voluntary. Indeed, when managers pay someone for advice about improving their performance at work, they're usually talking to a business coach.

But **Michele Jobling**, a retail consultant and former chief executive who works as a professional mentor at Merryck & Co, says that she is most definitely a mentor and not a coach. "A mentor combines business expertise with coaching attributes while coaches tend to come from a psychology background," she says. "We are business people... As far as being the leader of an organisation is concerned, we have seen the good, the bad and the ugly, so we can help clients."

Jobling, who mentors eight senior business people, spends about half a day a month with each of them. "Others require more time, so we adapt to meet their needs," she says. For example, she may be asked to observe a board meeting and advise on her client's behaviour.

She's been working with Jonathan Davies, an executive vice-president at CNN, since the chairman of Merryck paired them up a year ago. After an initial meeting to make sure that they got along, Jobling and Davies went on a two-day retreat. This process, held in a "nice hotel", was so that she could build an understanding of his needs and they could develop a mutual trust.

That the relationship involves money makes it more effective, she says. "Some mentoring relationships can go on for years and become a dependency, but a paid relationship has a finite time and [the end] will come when it's no longer as valuable and it comes to a natural conclusion." Unpaid mentors may find it hard to bring a relationship to an end, she says.

Jonathan Davies spent years working in advertising and marketing before becoming executive vice-president of CNN International a year ago. It was a huge step up the corporate ladder so he decided to call on outside counsel for help in developing his leadership abilities.

However, his relationship with Jobling is not simply about developing soft skills. "It's also about hard business issues, strategic issues facing the business; how do we become larger and more profitable," he says.

Their deal means that he has unlimited access to her advice. "I've found it invaluable. I drop her an e-mail or pick up the phone whenever I have a particular issue. We also meet once a month to discuss longer-term issues."

While this description begins to make Jobling sound something like a management consultant, Davies says there are significant differences. "Many consultants will encourage you to look outside for solutions... when really the starting point should be looking at yourself."

He says that while junior managers can benefit from having an internal mentor – indeed, Davies mentors some CNN staff – this doesn't work with senior leaders. "At board level you need something different. You need someone who has worked at this level as well."

He also appreciates Jobling's external perspective. "She does not know the internal politics so she can take a step back and look beyond the day-to-day," he says. This means that he's confident that they are dealing with the real issues rather than simply personalities.

“It’s easy for a mentor from the same company to get very close to your issues. They come around and say, ‘You should do this.’ But Michele works with me to offer advice. It’s more consultative.”

This means that he’s learning how to make his own decisions rather than relying on someone else’s judgment.

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