



THE MENTOR

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Because I'm a paid mentor who's worked with hundreds of entrepreneurs, you may discount my perspective that every entrepreneur needs a mentor. But as a still-practicing entrepreneur, I can tell you even pro mentors need a mentor.

Entrepreneurship is part art, part science. One can learn the science academically, but the art part is learned experientially, and that's where the mentor comes in – to head off preventative painful lessons, to help assure the unforeseen tough stuff doesn't happen again, and to find ways the successes can be replicated predictably. Actually, unless one bases the definition of entrepreneurial success solely on profit, even the science of business requires experienced interpretation to assure an entrepreneur is building business in a way that will meet his/her individual definition of success.

My best mentors, and the results I've created mentoring others, teach me what makes a great mentor, a bar I strive to exceed daily. The best mentor is not an accountability coach or consultant. A great mentor:

- is an active entrepreneur keeping up with the changing context and technologies of business willing to share what he/she is learning.
- has experience from founding multiple ventures with accumulated knowledge about patterns that create success. More than one venture provides evidence that the mentor's experience is more likely the result of accumulated knowledge than luck.
- has at least one epic fail. "Failure is a part of success," as Arianna Huffington famously says. A mentor who uses failure to improve results also will have empathy and advice about how to rebound.
- brings out an individual's preferences and entrepreneurial skills instead of imposing opinions. I've seen more than one entrepreneur frustrated, confused and even derailed by advice that is completely outside the context of his/her definition of success.
- has worked in the mentee's industry to provide contextual understanding.
- or hasn't worked in the mentee's industry to provide a perspective that isn't constrained by how others are doing business.
- looks for ways to make an entrepreneur's vision probable.

New entrepreneurs are not the only ones to benefit from mentoring with one who has years of experiential training. Seasoned entrepreneurs also benefit from objective advice from one who has more, or different, experience to ward off blind spots, fill in technical information, provide guidance through ever-changing conditions in every venture, and create focus.

I watch the measurable and intangible value of my conversations each day. They are the reward, and bonus posterity, for all I continue to learn about entrepreneurship and business through the University of Hard Knocks and Cool Opportunities.

Comments



Joshua Schukman – 2015-05-05 21:05:21

Excellent post Dodie. I especially like the idea of bringing out preferences as opposed to imposing opinions. Such an important concept, and something that is far too uncommon!