

## ONGOING INTERACTIONS

Once matched, the typically less centrally controlled elements of the mentoring program begin. A structured program can guide the participants through their ongoing relationship by providing timely support, resources, and accountability. The rigor of structures can range from very flexible to highly controlled. Successful ongoing interaction best practice includes:

### 1 Set up and regularly revisit objectives for each interaction

**It is great you speak every week, but if you do not have objectives, it is just conversation.**<sup>57</sup>

Mentoring programs risk failure especially when there is a lack of clarity about roles and purpose and no clear, measurable objectives.<sup>58</sup> These objectives may vary by relationship but should establish a mutually agreed upon idea of what success looks like with interactions. Without clear objectives, the mentoring pair may meet but not make progress against the mentee goals.<sup>59</sup> A balance between rigid agendas and open conversation is best. Program managers also play a critical role in ensuring objectives are discussed, rigorous, and revisited.

### 2 Regularly revisit indicators for assessing progress against objectives

Once objectives have been established, indicators are needed to measure and evaluate the success of the relationship. Without indicators and structure to measure against, it is often difficult by the end of a mentoring relationship to know whether the relationship was successful or not.<sup>60</sup> Having early assessment points can be useful for checking progress. It is advisable to set these check-in points frequently, to ‘fail fast’, if the match is not beneficial.<sup>61</sup>

Examples of indicators may include measuring activities (e.g. meeting frequency and length) and outcomes (e.g. increased business sales, employment creation, commercial linkages, access to finance, expanded network connections, additional investments).<sup>62</sup>

### 3 Set regular mentorship check-in milestones, including with the program manager

These check-ins should be deliberate sessions meant to pause and ensure the mentee is using any advice, both parties are still exchanging value, and are adhering to program guidelines. Research has shown that there is no ideal meeting frequency. In research conducted by St-Jean and Audet, mentee satisfaction was obtained in cases where meetings were held as often as twice a month and as rarely as once every two months.<sup>63</sup> While structured check-ins are advised, keeping a degree of flexibility, and practicing regular adjustments can decrease chances of dissatisfaction.

If using technology, ensure that the systems are accessible for both parties. Mentees often report frustration with mentoring because they cannot easily access platforms such as Skype or email.

### 4 Revisit and refine roles and responsibilities

Both the entrepreneur and mentee need to be clear on the evolving expectations of their role within the mentoring program. For example, mentors should promote the exploration of the mentee’s ideas, rather than

<sup>57</sup> Artiga, 2020, <sup>58</sup> Klasen and Clutterbuck, 2002, <sup>59</sup> Artiga, 2020; Vargas, 2020, <sup>60</sup> Artiga, 2020, <sup>61</sup> Guttentag, 2020, <sup>62</sup> Artiga, 2020,

<sup>63</sup> St-Jean and Audet, 2009,

offering them a direct answer to their problems. At the same time, mentees should be willing to actively share information, drive, and participate in learning.

In addition, regularly define expectations on outreach and follow-up outside of one-on-one interactions. If both the mentor and mentee are comfortable, send a note taker or record each meeting, to capture the conversation and assemble a list of action times. Particularly in relationships where check-ins are more spread out, having a written summary of past conversations can increase effectiveness and help maintain enthusiasm.<sup>64</sup>

## 5 Regularly establish trust and respect

Across the board, interviewees named trust as an essential component for effective mentoring.<sup>65</sup> SQW Consulting shares that mentoring is essentially about human relationships and for those relations to work they need to be based on respect, honesty and trust.<sup>66</sup> The latter is emphasized by Dr. Kram's research, which finds trust as enhancing mentoring quality and efficiency.<sup>67</sup> While trust building is a direct and indirect intended output of all the stages above, it is advisable to reestablish the level of trust during the engagement. Trust building elements include:

- **Trust through business experience and success.** Trust can be built through the mentor having the right experience and proven success. Shared experience can be a powerful bonding link.<sup>68</sup>
- **Trust through local experience.** Like having relevant business experience, trust builds when a mentor has a deep understanding of the market the entrepreneur is operating in.<sup>69</sup>
- **Trust through reliability.** The most effective tool for building trust is consistency and follow-through. This 'showing up' helps demonstrate the relationship is a priority for both parties.<sup>70</sup>
- **Trust through learning the tools and mindset of mentoring** during mentor training. This prepares the mentors for how to build trust-based relationships in an accelerated manner.

## 6 Ensure length of relationship is adequate

Regarding the length of the relationship, it is difficult to establish correlation between length and effectiveness. Some studies suggest 9-12 months is common for meaningful engagement.<sup>71</sup>

<sup>64</sup> Interview with Rhett Morris, Endeavor Insight, 2020, <sup>65</sup> Artiga; Holzman; Ramachandran; Salas, 2020; Bury, 2020,

<sup>66</sup> SQW Consulting, 2010, <sup>67</sup> Kram, 1985, <sup>68</sup> Holzman, 2020, <sup>69</sup> Holzman, 2020, <sup>70</sup> Holzman; Ramachandran, 2020, <sup>71</sup> Grossman et al., 2012