

How to find a business mentor

No matter how good you are in business, there will always be someone who knows more, and who will be able to give you some valuable advice. The right mentor can be a huge asset to you and your business.

A mentor is someone who can offer experienced insight, a fresh point of view, dedicated expertise and support. Any business can benefit from having a mentor, from the newest of startups to long-established businesses that need a shot in the arm.

What is mentoring?

In essence, mentoring is about accessing the knowledge and experience of a seasoned business professional so that you can learn how to run your business more effectively. It is not about getting someone to run your business for

you. Mentors are there to provide support, guidance and, when necessary, introduce you to key contacts.

Mentoring can be mutually beneficial. An experienced business person can offer valuable direction to a start-up or early-stage business, while a 'mentee' can also help a mentor stay connected to the sector (after retirement, perhaps) or further their knowledge of that sector.

Sourcing a mentor

If you want to access a formal mentor, there are state supports available. For example, your Local Enterprise Office will also be able to match your business with an experienced business practitioner in your area. If you want to go it alone, there are a number of steps to take to source an appropriate mentor:

- Determine your needs.
- Take the time to network.
- Listen, rather than talk.
- Be flexible with your time.

What a mentor can offer you

Here's what you can expect a mentor to offer:

- **Advice and focused direction.** Mentors have seen it all before, so pick their brains as often as you can.
- **Moments in a conversation that foster development.** Inexperienced entrepreneurs are often a blur of ideas, thoughts and action. A good mentor should be able to take a nugget of seemingly random information and emphasise its importance.
- **Help with identifying pressing problems and suggesting solutions.** Negotiating road-blocks is old pat for mentors. Remember that your particular problem is not unique, and that others can help with some experienced thinking.
- **Identifying innovative ways of reviving the business.** You may not see the light at the end of the tunnel. But if there is potential, a good mentor will

lead you in the right direction.

- **Help with the decision-making process.** Procrastinating or failing to make sound decisions is a common mistake new business owners make. Put your pride to one side and listen to the expert.
- **Experience and knowledge.** As tough as it is to admit, you don't know it all yet. Be a sponge and retain as much knowledge and information as you can.
- **Structure and context based on previous experiences.** Fail more, and fail better. Everyone has hit a brick wall, so find out how your mentor recovered from setbacks.
- **Instructions as to how you can formulate a strategy and a business plan.** This is critical for a new business owner, and shouldn't be discounted.

What mentees do

As a mentee, you need to know what to expect and what value you bring to the table for a mentor. You should be determined, while realising that you don't know it all, and you should be able to accept constructive criticism, no matter how much it may grate on you.

The relationship with your mentor must be based on trust and respect. If you are not ready to accept a different opinion or that your business must diversify, then you are not ready for a mentor.

You should arrange to see your mentor regularly, to get the most out of them. Set yourself regular goals, and remember that this investment should reap benefits you wouldn't have seen without their involvement. You must also be dedicated, and willing to put a significant amount of

time into developing or diversifying your business. Running a start-up is tough work. Be sure you're up to the task.

Setting boundaries

Your mentor is not there to run your business. They are there to give you advice and guidance. This is a crucial distinction, and understanding it could be the difference between developing a lasting relationship and incurring the wrath of a seasoned professional.

Remember that your mentor has other pressing business to attend to, so be sure you agree how often and when you will meet. Be sure that your meetings are structured, to avoid wasting time. Also, don't presume that your mentor will help you financially. This should be common sense, but must be remembered.

Trading Online Voucher Scheme

Grow your business with help from this Government grant scheme, designed to assist small businesses.

It offers financial assistance of up to €2,500 along with training and advice to help your business trade online. Participating in this scheme can make the process of trading online much easier for you.

Making informed decisions is vital for all business, so the free help and training provided by your local enterprise office puts you in a position to decide what is best for your business.

Cutting the cost of developing your online trading capacity by up to 50% can make the investment very affordable for many small businesses out there.

Information sessions cover various topics, including developing a

website, digital marketing, social media for business and search engine optimisation. The information provided is impartial and will help you decide on what trading online options, are right for your business.

To qualify for the scheme, businesses must have:

- no more than 10 employees;
- less than €2m in turnover;
- be trading for at least 6 months and
- be located in the region of the local enterprise office to whom they are applying.

(additional T&Cs apply).

Over 2,000 businesses, have already benefitted from the scheme. Don't get left behind. Your Local Enterprise Office can help and support you throughout the process. Voucher numbers are limited so contact them

today for more information and application details.

Businesses that participated in the scheme reported that, on average they saw their sales increase by 20%, with an 80% jump in sales leads and 3 in 5 exporting for the first time.

For many businesses, the question is not whether to trade online, it's how to start. At least 2,000 small businesses have found answers to that question and a helping hand to take that step through the Trading Online Voucher Scheme. Some of them are your competitors.

Link: <https://www.localenterprise.ie/Discover-Business-Supports/Trading-Online-Voucher-Scheme-/>

Small business sentiment sours in 2019

Confidence among small business owners has soured, according to the latest 'Small Business Sentiment Survey' report from the Small Firms Association (SFA). 35% of SFA members feel that the business environment is improving, compared with 45% in May 2019.

Small business sentiment down 10 points since May 2019

Sven Spollen-Behrens, SFA Director, said: "2019 brought a number of significant challenges from a small business perspective. Increasing costs and regulatory burden, Brexit related uncertainty, global trade tensions and a tightening labour market. As we face into a new decade there is little doubt that these mounting challenges have led to a large fall in small business owner's confidence.

"Two thirds of survey respondents indicated their intention to invest

in their business and recruit over the coming year. Highlighting our healthy economy continues to drive ambition among our small business community.

Survey respondents indicate their intention to recruit and invest in 2020

The survey results, however, also focus on several areas of concern for small firms. Spollen-Behrens continued: "A number of risk factors for 2020 have been identified, such as Brexit, the ability to attract talent and slower economic growth all of which have the potential to reduce growth and confidence in our small business sector. Separately, the increase in the National Minimum Wage to €10.10, from February 1st, will further hinder small businesses ability to Brexit proof their businesses and maintain cost competitiveness. "The best way to prepare the

economy for the challenges ahead is for the Government to follow through on the publishing of a new national SME and Entrepreneurship Strategy, introduce a comprehensive tax policy that is conducive to small firms and decrease government controlled costs."

February 1st increase in the National Minimum Wage threat to competitiveness

In conclusion, Spollen-Behrens stated "The fundamentals of the Irish economy are strong and economic growth and job creation are forecast to continue in 2020. However, Brexit poses one of the biggest challenges faced by small businesses in years and the SFA will remain focused on preparing members for the opportunities and risks to their businesses."

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What can you achieve in 2020?

As we enter 2020, now is a good time to set new goals and targets for the year ahead, but be realistic with your ambitions.

Remove the vague

To make real change it is important to be clear about what you want to do. If your resolution is too vague it will be easier to procrastinate as time goes by. Instead of saying; "Increase use of social media in 2020", try "By end of February, establish presence on Twitter and LinkedIn, posting daily on Twitter and three times a week on LinkedIn". For

a personal goal: Instead of saying; "Get fit in 2020", try "Get fit enough to complete a five km race by end of June 2020".

A lot of resolutions fail because too much work is required to achieve them. A smaller goal is easier to start. One you achieve it you will feel productive and motivated to set the next small goal and work on that.

Focus on development of new services in 2020, each week in February schedule one hour on Friday afternoon to research and

brainstorm new business service ideas. Then add, in March meet business peers or experts to get advice on how to implement new ideas.

Now you have small manageable steps to get the work on your goal started. Making changes can be hard and when motivation dips we often find reasons not to do things. When your enthusiasm is high at the start of the year, this is the time to anticipate what you need to stick to your resolution.

Make GDPR compliance your 2020 Resolution

GDPR came into effect on 25 May 2018 and it is still apparent that a lot of small to medium size businesses have done little to achieve compliance in this hugely important area. Unlike the 'Millennium Bug' GDPR is not going away and as we get closer to the second anniversary of the legislation greater fines and penalties are being imposed by Supervisory Authorities across the European Economic Area.

So what basics do you need to know about GDPR and what can your business be doing to demonstrate compliance? If your business is processing personal data, including that of employees, it needs to be taking some precaution in relation to the new data protection legislation.

As a business, you are required to demonstrate compliance in all 7 data management principles of the GDPR as well as be in a position to show pro-actively that compliance is being implemented.

1. Fair, Transparent and Lawful Processing of Personal Data

If your business is processing personal data you must give data subjects 'fair processing notice' of the acquisition of the personal data, what the personal data will be used for (the purpose) as well as the legal basis for processing the personal

data. There are six 'lawful processing conditions' for the processing of 'Ordinary' personal data and 10 'lawful processing conditions' for the processing of 'Special Categories' (previously sensitive) personal data. Think about all of the different personal data that your business is capturing, for example a CCTV camera notice; have you given data subjects fair notice in a fully

3. Minimisation of Processing

Only ask for personal data that you need, no more no less. Your business needs to challenge the personal data it is requesting from data subjects. Previously you may have requested telephone numbers and e-mail addresses for communication purposes with customers. Do you really need both?

4. Data Quality & Accuracy

An area where a lot of businesses fall down is the ability to show that the personal data being processed is of the highest quality and accuracy. How is your business ensuring that this is the case? A lot of businesses are now introducing an annual 'Data Quality' audit

where they review the quality and accuracy of personal data in a formal manner.

5. Storage Limitation & Retention

Another area where a lot of businesses fall down. As a business how long are keeping personal data for? Does your business have an agreed 'Data Retention Policy' for all the different types of personal data being processed? When was the last time your business deleted or destroyed personal data?

6. Security & Confidentiality

How secure is your business infrastructure from a security and



transparent way of what you are doing with their personal data

2. Purpose Limitation

Simply put, only use personal data that you acquire for the purpose of what was communicated in the 'fair processing notice'. If you are using email addresses for the purpose of service messages to your customers you cannot use the same e-mail address for marketing or promotional purposes, unless of course you have the consent from the data subject to do so. 'Consent' being the 'lawful processing condition' or 'legal basis' for the processing of the email addresses.

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confidentiality perspective? Not only should IT security be considered but also physical security such as access to areas where personal data is being stored e.g. your employee personnel files.

7. Accountability & Liability

How is your business demonstrating compliance across all of the seven data management principles. In the event of a spot check, data breach or data subject complaint investigation by the Data Protection Commissioner can your business confidently display full GDPR compliance?

Where to start with GDPR compliance...

There are a number of key areas where your business can demonstrate practical GDPR compliance.

Risk Assessment – conduct a risk assessment across your entire business on the processing of personal data; implement a plan to address risks identified, particularly

those that score ‘high’ and ‘medium’.

Data Protection Impact

Assessment (DPIA) – be aware of this new requirement under GDPR; particularly when implementing new systems or projects where personal data is being processed for the first time or a significant change in processing is being proposed.

Maintain a ‘Data Processing Activity Log’ – a global inventory of all personal data being processed by your business, to include key information such as the purpose of processing, the legal basis for same and how long you will keep the personal data for.

Maintain a ‘Data Breach Log’ – in the event of a data breach for your business; key information must be captured such as what caused the breach, the data subjects impacted and the measures being implemented to avoid a similar situation in the future. Remember the 72-hour period by which you must notify the Data Protection Commissioner of a data breach.

Policies & Procedures – ensure all key policies and procedures are in place such as ‘Data Breach’ and ‘Subject Access Request’ policies

Training & Awareness – your business cannot underestimate the importance and impact of having all of your team members briefed and refreshed on GDPR and what it means for your business.

Data Processor Landscape – a Data Processor is an external organisation or system processing personal data on your behalf and on your instruction; maintain a full view of these organisations and systems and ensure to have the relevant ‘Data Processor Agreements’ in place.

Check out Dave Farrelly a seasoned GDPR consultant offering businesses practical guidance, training and solutions to GDPR compliance - www.dfconsulting.ie

Phrases not to use at meetings

What everyday business phrases irritate you most? Here are ten that we’ve probably all heard too often.

Oxford University Press recently compiled a list of the top ten irritating phrases often found in emails and in business writing. While there are plenty of other phrases you need to avoid using, these represent a good start.

- **At the end of the day**
- **Fairly unique**
- **I personally**
- **At this moment in time**
- **With all due respect**
- **Absolutely**
- **It’s a nightmare**
- **Shouldn’t of**
- **24/7**
- **Reach out**

In meetings, one-time ‘fashionable’ phrases such as ‘thinking outside the box’, ‘low-hanging fruit’ and ‘it’s on my radar’ are now almost guaranteed to produce a shudder.

More recently, phrases like ‘let’s throw a thought grenade at that problem’ or ‘can we build a carpark at the bottom of the page for that idea’ have been rearing their heads.

New business angels appear in Ireland

The Halo Business Angel Network (HBAN) has reported that it recruited more than 100 business angel investors last year, more than it expected. HBAN, which had originally projected 75 angels, now plans to sign up a further 100 angels in 2020.

Business angels are investors who bring knowledge and experience as well as funds to businesses they back.

“The average angel investment on the island of Ireland is €25,000, so many people are discovering that angel investment isn’t just an activity reserved for high-net-worth individuals”

Business angel investment is continuing to grow across the island of Ireland and in December last year, HBAN announced that its members have now invested more than €100m in start-ups since 2007. This represents a doubling of the €50m figure reached in 2015 thanks to increasing angel numbers and activity.

“The business angel community is continuing to grow year-on-year and the success of last year shows that interest in angel investment is accelerating at a terrific rate,” said John Phelan, all-island director of HBAN.

“One of the drivers behind this is that we are seeing a lot of younger people who are coming up through the ranks of the larger tech companies, and who then want to invest in start-ups themselves.

“At HBAN, we are doing a lot of public education on what is involved in angel investment, which is having a significant impact on our numbers. The average angel investment on



the island of Ireland is €25,000, so many people are discovering that angel investment isn’t just an activity reserved for high-net-worth individuals.”

Through its 2020 recruitment drive, HBAN aims to sign up 100 angels with €20m available to invest in Irish start-ups.

This will begin at the All-Island Conference in Powerscourt Hotel, Wicklow, on Thursday 6 February 2020. Under the theme of ‘driving value with exits and data’, a series of talks, panel discussions and masterclasses will provide attendees with the skills and knowledge they need to build a lucrative portfolio.

“The All-Island Conference is all about giving prospective investors the confidence and knowledge to become successful angel investors,” said Phelan. “Of course, everyone wants to achieve as many exits as possible, so this year’s conference will show how the clever use of data can yield better returns for investors and the companies in which they invest.”

John Harbison, chair emeritus of Tech Coast Angels, will provide insights from his work with one of the largest and most active angel investment organisations in the US.

Having achieved exits ranging from 100x to 1,110x in companies including Microsoft, Apple, Abbott Labs, Nucor and McGraw-Hill, he will discuss how new and existing angel investors can make better investment decisions and achieve more exits through data analysis.

Dr Jim Mountjoy, who has 20 years of investment, mentorship and leadership experience in the technology sector, will also speak at the event. Mountjoy founded telecoms software company, Euristix, which was sold for over \$80m in 1999, and has also had a number of successful exits in recent years.

Meanwhile, Áine Denn, co-founder of Altify, will tell the story of how the company’s leadership team built value in their company resulting in a sale to US tech firm, Upland Software, for \$84m. Denn volunteers as a mentor to female and returning emigrant entrepreneurs as part of the Irish government-sponsored programmes Going for Growth and Back For Business.

For more information on the event and to register, visit <https://www.hban.org/conference>

Understanding PCP plans

PCP is a form of hire purchase that become popular in the car finance market in recent years

Many car dealers now relay on PCP as their primary method of finance. A study examined the level of consumer understanding of PCP contracts, while also assessing the information given at the point of sale along with the overall experience of consumers.

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PCP balloon payments of thousands of Euro can come as a big shock to a lot of people. Some may not have the means of making those payments.

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As can be the case with many financial products, the level of detailed understanding of how PCPs really operated was a big mystery to many of the people that used them... until they came to the end of the PCP.

How PCPs actually work

What most people are surprised to find out is there are 3 parts to a standard PCP, those are:

- **The deposit**
- **The monthly repayments**
- **The final lump-sum payment which is called the Guaranteed Minimum Future Value (GMFV)**

The deposit: This can typically vary between 10pc and 30pc of the value of the car. The deposit can be paid in cash or, if one already owns a car, they can trade it in as a deposit ... provided the car is worth that much!

Monthly repayments: PCPs generally last for three or more years and they can have low monthly repayments. This can make them seem more affordable compared to other forms of finance. The reason

the monthly repayments are low is because a large portion of the cost of the car is not paid until the end of the agreement.

GMFV (lump-sum or balloon payment): This large, final payment is how much it will cost the user to own the car at the end of the agreement. This figure is set at the beginning of the agreement by the finance company. This balloon payment can be vary from €2,000, €3,000, €5,000 or more.

Comparing a PCP with a loan

The main difference between a PCP and a personal loan is that with a personal loan you borrow the money, pay for your car, and own it immediately. With a PCP you don't own the car: basically, the person is hiring the car for an agreed period of time. They only own the car AFTER they pay the GMFV. This is important because if you run into financial difficulty during your agreement you wouldn't be able to sell the car unless you had permission from the finance company – who is still the legal owner of the car.

In this respect, PCPs can be a really inflexible form of car finance. One can't usually increase their monthly repayments and if they want to extend the term, they may be charged a rescheduling fee. There are often other limitations, such as not going over a certain mileage limit, and commitments around wear and tear and servicing the car that you must agree to.

Watch your personal credit history

As with other types of credit, when you take out a PCP, your finance company will send details of the repayments you make to a credit reference agency. There are two

distinct personal credit reporting firms in Ireland; the Central Credit Register (CCR) and the Irish Credit Bureau (ICB). You can receive one FREE copy of your personal credit report from the CCR annually. The ICB charges a small fee.

If you go as guarantor

If you agree to act as a guarantor for a family member or friend taking out a PCP, remember that you will be treated as a hirer. Missed payments will impact your personal credit history.

Do the maths

Thoroughly investigate what the mileage limits and what are the financial penalties if you go over them? This is often a big concern for people and in some rare occasions, MoneyWhizz has encountered people that stop driving for long periods of time before their PCP comes to and end. They do this on order to avoid hefty balloon payments.

Understand any rules concerning ongoing servicing of the car! It is important to continue to service the car as not doing so can lead to bigger repair costs later.

Enquire if there are any clauses in respect to the type of insurance cover required. For example, according to the Competition & Consumer Protection Commission (CCPC), most PCP agreements highly recommend that you take out comprehensive insurance.

Investigate if at the end of the existing PCP if you will have sufficient funds to pay the GMFV.

Grow revenues and boost sales

Running a business can be challenging, but it's possible to increase your revenue stream and grow profits with just a few simple changes to the way you work.

Learning to experiment with different strategies can help you to become more profitable. Here are five top tips to help your business grow.

1. Focus on your key customers

The 80/20 rule, also known as the Pareto principle, says that 80pc of profits are generated by 20% of customers. By doing an assessment of your existing customers you can find and focus on that 20pc. Once you've identified your most profitable customers you can expand your customer base by targeting customers who fit the same profile. When focussing on your key customers consider the following opportunities to increase revenue:

- **Upselling** Selling your customer a premium product.
- **Cross-selling** Analyse their previous purchases and offer

them complementary products.

- **Diversifying** Identifying your customers' need that isn't being fulfilled and develop a product to meet that need before they look elsewhere.

2. Expand your market

Identify areas where there is little or no competition and scale into these locations. The cost of moving into a new area might be smaller than the potential profits you're losing by standing still. It is important to thoroughly research opportunities before you begin but by researching into the buying habits of your potential customers you could discover an untapped market and watch your profits grow.

3. Review your pricing

By identifying the problem that your products are solving for your customer and how, what you offer is different to what's on offer by other companies you can make your brand more valuable and locate areas where customers are willing to pay

more for your product. However, it's always wise to test any price increase before you make them permanent.

4. Review your product and service offering

If you offer a number of different products or services it is worthwhile to do a review and determine the profit margins of each. By doing activity based costing you can work out what each product or service costs you. You may find that some products do not offer worthwhile returns. By choosing to focus on the more profitable aspects of your offering you can increase revenue.

5. Consider promotional offers

Promotions can be a good way to increase revenue as increased sales caused by the reduction in price can more than make up for the smaller profit margin. However, it's always a good idea to conduct a ratio analysis to determine whether the increased sales are worth the cost of promotion.

PR Training Tool for your business

Local Enterprise Offices are full of templates, tips and expert advice for your business. They have just launched a 'Insight:PR' a Magazine to help your business. Insight: PR will show you how to...

Tell your story in 5 steps

- How a fast-growing Irish crisp brand uses PR to tell their story - Keogh's Crisps.
- Dress the part with advice from Fashion Designer Niamh O' Neill
- Get the best from your PR pictures with Joe Keogh of Joe Keogh Photography

- Spread your message online with an easy-to-follow guide from Eileen McCabe of Content Plan
- Strike a pose in photocalls with expert insight from Mark Stedman of Stedman Photography

Developed by the Local Enterprise Offices as a free training tool for LEO clients and is funded by Enterprise Ireland. Link: <https://www.localenterprise.ie/Discover-Business-Supports/PR-Training-Tool-for-SMEs-and-Start-Ups/>

