The Mentor and The Entrepreneur – A Study In Relationships

Marian Tye,
Team Works Australasia Pty Ltd

Murray Gillin,
AGSE, Swinburne University of Technology

CONTACT: Marian Tye; Team Works Australasia Pty Ltd., PO Box 237 Nth Fremantle WA 6159 Australia. (T) +61 8 9335 9637; (F) +61 9335 9637; (E) tye@teamworks.com.au

ABSTRACT
Extensive literature exists pertaining to the topic of mentors and mentoring. To date by far the bulk of mentoring literature reflects activity in intra-organizational and corporate settings. The largest proportion of this literature and the resultant application of the term mentor in the workplace context has its origins in the US. The limited empirical research reflects this aforementioned agenda, however, the principles and concepts applied to the term “mentor” within such settings are increasingly being transposed to the environment of the developing entrepreneur. A process of discovery has commenced, to explore the concepts of mentors and mentoring, and to better understand the role of such significant others in the start up and growth phases of new venture formation.

INTRODUCTION
Context:
The Australian Bureau of Statistics (ABS) defines private sector, non-agricultural small businesses as those employing less than 100 employees in the manufacturing industry and less than 20 employees in other industries (i.e. in the services sector). At the time of writing, these businesses comprise around 97 percent of Australian businesses (ABS, 2002) and are therefore as critical a component of the Australian economy as they are elsewhere in the world.

In most instances, the key to the survival and growth of these enterprises is the owner manager. In 1994, the National Board of Employment, Education and Training Employment and Skills Formation Council (hereafter referred to as the Council) report "The Shape of Things To Come: Small Business Employment and Skills" (1994), concludes the reputedly high failure rates of small businesses are attributed to management skill deficiencies as well as reported difficulties in accessing finance. Australian small business owner-managers have traditionally been described as having low education levels, poor management skills in general and little expertise in financial management.

The Council notes that in addition to formal training, mentoring arrangements, whereby experienced business people provide advice to those starting a small business or owner-managers...
of existing businesses, are being widely regarded as a fast, effective way to assist entrepreneurs and small business operators to quickly build up their business and management skills.

Subsequent to the Council publication (but not necessarily as a consequence of its recommendations) the last decade has increasingly seen the emergence of mentoring concepts applied to entrepreneurial support activity, particularly for the start-up and growth phases of new venture formation, although the role of mentoring in this context has received scant empirical investigation (Waters et al., 2002).

Experiences have indicated that prior to continuing investment in the notion of mentoring and business mentor programs, there is a need to better understand how successful entrepreneurs, who are small businesses owner-managers, have accessed help, particularly during the start-up and growth phases of their business, including the use (if any) of mentors.

The Mentor and the Entrepreneur:

To date, by far the bulk of mentoring literature reflects activity in intra-organisational and corporate environments. In 2000 it was estimated that over a third of the major U.S. corporations had established formal mentor programs (Nemanick, 2000). The rise of the mentor is often seen as coinciding with the rise of the human resource development movement and achieved prominence in the period 1975 – 1990 (Monaghan and Lunt, 1992) and interest in mentoring was significantly boosted with the introduction of equal employment opportunity legislation, when mentor programs were identified as a means of addressing opportunities for women and individuals in minority groups. The available literature is largely organisation-centric and portrays mentoring as the best (and sometimes worst) thing to happen in career development. The majority of references relate to formal mentoring programs.

However, entrepreneurial research has, over time, identified a number of particular factors which are believed to contribute to entrepreneurial success. Of particular interest to this research is the reference to mentors. Gartner et al. (1992) identified one of the factors contributing to the likelihood of success of the entrepreneur was the amount of time and the intensity devoted to specific activities including finding mentors. Authors such as Hisrich (1989) and Timmons and Spinelli (2004) recommend entrepreneurs use mentors, advisors or form quasi-boards to gain valuable counsel and advice from outsiders.

The point at which entrepreneurs receive benefit from mentors is however open for further investigation as Beattie (1999) found few of the 50 entrepreneurs interviewed indicated receiving benefit from mentors or role models in the early stages of their entrepreneurial development. The result of a survey of U.S. women business owners released in 2001 by the Centre for Women’s Business Research, Washington, DC, indicates that women business owners are less likely than their male counterparts to have a mentor before opening their business. Women are however more likely to consult outside sources on business management and growth issues (Carsrud et al.,1987).

What is perhaps most confusing in the entrepreneurship literature is the seeming interchangeability of terms such as mentor, counsellor and advisor, and an examination of mentoring literature does little to alleviate the ambiguity of the term. The early work of Levinson et al. (1978), which is generally attributed as the source of modern day interest in mentors, hinted at the definitional problems surrounding mentoring suggesting “no word currently in use is
adequate to convey the nature of the relationship” and “mentoring is defined not in terms of formal roles, but in the character of the relationship and the function it serves” (Levinson et al., 1978, p.98).

Mentoring has traditionally been understood as a one-on-one relationship in which a less experienced individual (most usually referred to as the protégé) learns and obtains help and support from an older, more experienced person (the mentor). However, time has seen variations to this classical interpretation. In his 1988 review of the mentoring literature to that date Fagan (1988) concludes that mentoring is hard to define but easy to recognise and suggests that one of the problems of defining mentoring has to do with the intensity (chemistry) of the relationship. It is Fagan’s (1988) opinion that mentoring is not a common experience. This is reflected in more recent research (Tye, 1999).

In an attempt to determine how people responded to the word "mentor" the opportunity was taken during attendance at a small business management workshop to ask participants (n = 60) to define the term.

The following is the final summary of terms agreed upon by the group:

A mentor is a person who shares, provides advice, listens, pushes, encourages, supports, inspires, takes an interest, shares their time, gives attention, clarifies a direction, gives suggestions for action, questions, pushes you past the point of procrastination, provides you with alternatives, can be trusted, provides constructive criticism, opens doors, guides, encourages, supports, builds self confidence, inspires, has attained a level of maturity, can empathize, is likened to a tribal elder.

Using the group definition as the guideline, only 25% considered they could name a (past or present) personal mentor. All agreed that there had to be "chemistry" for a relationship to be categorised as that of mentor and protégé. When the chemistry element was removed, 90% could relate to having had what they then described as “a mentoring experience” but did not classify the person who helped them as a mentor.

This outcome echoes Fagan’s (1988) findings of 30% of respondents reporting "true mentoring" experiences whilst two thirds considered they had had mentors, when not required to consider if it was a "close one-to-one relationship”.

Much of the contemporary literature and descriptive references characterise a mentor in terms of attributes (wisdom, experience, knowledge), roles (coach, guide, patron) and functions (teaching, assisting, counselling) and generally perpetuates the assumption that the mentor is a single individual.

By far the most rigorous and detailed examination of mentoring, in the organisational context, is the work of Kathy Kram. In her early work Kram (1988) distinguishes between personal help mentoring functions (psychosocial) that enhance an individual’s personal growth and identity, and those that enhance career advancement. Personal help functions include role modelling, acceptance and confirmation, counselling and friendship. Career functions include sponsorship, facilitating exposure and visibility, coaching, protecting and providing challenging assignments. In a one-on-one relationship, the closer the mentor is to providing all of the functions, the closer they are to Levinson’s (1978) prototype mentor. She also suggests that the range of functions
served by a mentoring relationship may be influenced by the capacities and interpersonal skills of the participants.

Caruso (1992) notes that much of the literature assumes mentoring is the one-on-one relationship between two individuals and that this is an unduly narrow view. Caruso (1992, p.5) suggests a more realistic view would acknowledge that the essential functions of mentoring are often provided through a dispersed system of social activities driven by the protégé.

Caruso’s (1992) concept allows for the possibility of the protégé seeking and receiving help from more than one individual source. It also insinuates the protégé has the opportunity to become an active seeker of assistance versus a passive recipient of someone’s gift of mentorship.

This category of mentoring through an ever-changing series of dyadic relationships embraces what has been referred to as networking-mentoring (Khan, 1992). Characterised by information sharing and mutuality, the participants each assume, to different degrees, the roles of both mentor and protégé.

Irrespective of the intensity, some form of relationship must be formed between two (or more) individuals before a mentoring experience can be said to have occurred. Since mentoring is described primarily as a relationship and not a process, one would assume that the help received by a protégé and the nature of the relationship activity depend on the relationship of the participants. It may well be the responsibility of the protégé who needs mentoring help to seek the mentor’s characteristics and stimulate them into action. This assumes an individual has the capability to seek out and communicate with a (potential) mentor in such a way as to stimulate them to respond with appropriate action.

 Whilst the literature relating specifically to research into the relationship of mentors with entrepreneurs is negligible, there exists a body of work relating to entrepreneurs and networks. Networks link individuals to broader social structures such as occupations, markets and economic sectors. The properties of these network connections are similar to those of a social network, that is, the strength of the ties between the entrepreneur and any one individual in the network is determined by the frequency level and reciprocity of the relationship (Aldrich & Zimmer, 1986; Hisrich, 1989; Birley 1985).

Birley (1985) was one of the early researchers to identify the importance of networks. Her work entitled “The Role of Networks in the Entrepreneurial Process” and subsequent extensive research (Birley et al., 1991), describes informal and formal contacts. The informal contacts occur early in the process and include family, business and personal contacts with family and personal contacts assisting with employees, location and sales, and the business contacts are seen generally to be the most helpful in structuring the business processes. The formal contacts comprise lawyers, accountants, bankers, government officials, realtors and chambers of commerce.

Hisrich (1989) recommends the formation of both a professional-support network drawn from a number of sources including a mentor, business associates (including clients and suppliers), trade associations, or personal affiliations, and a moral-support network of family and friends. It is within these networks that Hisrich (1989) names specific contacts as mentors. The mentor, as a specific form of network contact, is earlier identified by Carsrud et al. (1986). In this study the authors were surprised to find that of the 246 women entrepreneurs studied, the use of a mentor was negatively correlated with success.
The main differences between networking and mentoring have been described as the intensity of the relationship, the hierarchical position of the mentor and the unequal nature of the exchange (Limerick et al., 1994) and it has been questioned whether, given their own devices, women would actually choose to form a hierarchical relationship such as mentoring (McKeen and Burke, 1989). Swoboda and Miller (1986) went as far as to urge women to consider networking over mentoring.

Increasingly used, the word mentoring would appear to have become a generic term used to describe a source of assistance given to an entrepreneur by a more experienced practitioner (the mentor). However, do entrepreneurs perceive this assistance as mentoring; who (if any) are acknowledged as mentors and what differentiates them from other sources of assistance? This research in progress focuses on the collection of rich data to gain greater insight into the mentoring relationships of entrepreneurs.

METHODOLOGY

This study, whilst fitting into the interpretive paradigm, has combined both inductive and deductive processes. The methodology selected is an iterative sequence of activities resulting in a multiple case study, the objective being to gather rich data to gain greater insight and themes for more intensive investigation. The methodological processes were selected to move from the intuitive and inductive to the acquisition of qualitative data for analysis and deduction.

The resulting strategic framework is outlined below (Figure 1.). The “spinning top” configuration illustrates three aspects of the design of the study:

- The accumulation and refinement of information and concepts – illustrated by the profile.
- The acknowledgement that the collection of data will both benefit from and be influenced by preceding experiences, including those of the researcher – represented by the overall shape.
- The capacity for the study to remain dynamic in order to be flexible in its progress and focus – captured by the potential to turn.

Phase 1 comprised participant observation of mentor programs in action. These observations stimulated additional exploration of the literature and discussion and unstructured interviews with two entrepreneurs. Phase 2 captured generic global themes emerging from Phase 1 to consolidate the selection of the sample group and provide a framework for the case study interviews. Phase 3 is in progress and constitutes an analysis of the interview data to identify emerging themes.
The case studies comprised 32 entrepreneurs who were practicing owner managers of small companies and identified by their local business associations as having successfully started and achieved growth of their organisations.

Resulting from the findings in Phase 1, the case studies comprised entrepreneurs from the United States, Canada, UK and Australia; 16 female and 16 male; from service and manufacturing sectors. The following matrix (Figure 2.) demonstrates the mix.

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Figure 2. Matrix of Case Study Composition

RESULTS, ANALYSIS and DISCUSSION

The following observations present the initial generic themes emerging from Phase 1 of the strategic framework.

**Observation 1**

The word mentor has many different connotations and appears to be used more freely in the North American context than either the UK or Australian environments.
Observation 2
There are at least four types of mentoring.

a) Informal mentoring – characterised by being mentor driven (mentor chooses protégé) and is often long-term.

b) Self-selected-mentoring – occurs when an individual identifies a need for a mentor and consciously and systematically seeks the mentor(s) and controls the duration of the relationship.

c) Network mentoring – characterised by information sharing and mutuality, with each participant assuming, to different degrees, the roles of both mentor and protégé.

d) Planned mentoring is generally systemised and short term - the terms “mentor program” and “mentor scheme” are vicariously applied to activities related to matching an experienced individual with a less experienced individual (or group) in order for the latter to benefit from the experience of the former.

Observation 3
There is an expectation by entrepreneurs that “having a mentor” implies some sort of chemistry or personal relationship needs to develop – this is often in contrast to the expectations of the mentor in a planned mentoring program.

Observation 4
Participants who describe having a successful mentoring relationship imply the mentor not only gives them guidance and advice but also takes an interest and challenges them in all aspects of their development as a person. In most instances, the mentoring relationship has not been established through a mentor program but had been the result of a gradually developing interest and respect between two individuals.

Observation 5
Good mentors are a scarce resource - the stereotypical mentor for business programs being a retired (male) executive with large organisation or government experience does not generally appear to sit well with entrepreneurs for the following reasons:

- Entrepreneurs are sceptical of the relevance of large organisation experience to small business
- Women in particular often express the relationship as patronising
- Many women express the belief they have qualitatively different interactions with providers of business support than their male counterparts.

The above six observations framed the decisions relating to the selection of case studies, namely:

1. There may be cultural differences in the use of the term “mentor” – a decision was made to select case studies from the USA, Canada, UK and Australia to further explore the use (or otherwise) of the term by entrepreneurs.
2. A balance of female and male entrepreneurs was considered desirable – the mentoring literature highlights the potential for differences in mentoring experiences for men and women. The emergence of women specific business mentor programs would confirm this as a factor for consideration.

3. The entrepreneur is the current owner-manager of a business – the literature has indicated mentors might play a greater or lesser role at different stages in the start-up and growth phases of new venture creation. It was felt that, given the retrospective view point required from the entrepreneur, following the history of the current venture would act as the time and context framework to aid memory.

4. The venture must have survived start-up and successful achieved growth – the literature, observations and unstructured interviews indicate mentors are used at different stages of the business cycle.

5. The entrepreneur to be located in a region which operates business mentor-type programs – to gauge the entrepreneurs’ knowledge, use and opinions of planned mentoring experiences.

The work in progress, analysing the interview material, is producing some noteworthy themes. The following observations are indicative of the themes emerging and will frame additional exploration of the data.

**Theme 1**

The term “mentor” is used fluently and without prompting in North America but does not sit naturally in either the UK or Australian business conversations.

Emerging from the interview transcripts is an unprompted spontaneity in the use of the term “mentor” by both the US and Canadian entrepreneurs.

Examples of context include the use of the term in each of the four previously observed forms of mentoring include:

1. Informal mentoring

   *I had a mentor at college* (the entrepreneur returned to college as mature age student to study for an MBA)...*this woman who was a second year (mature age) student in my business law class took me under her wing.*

2. Self-selected mentoring

   *I said, I would love to have you as a client but I would really rather you as a friend or mentor right now.* (Conversation with a CEO recalled by the entrepreneur.)

3. Network mentoring

   *Do you know I am mentoring anyway. I spent 20 minutes in the parking lot with the husband of a friend. I was giving him a pep talk.* (Talking about sharing experiences at start-up.)

4. Planned mentoring
I was teamed up with this woman who became my mentor and that was a turning point for me – a real turning point.

A fifth category has also begun to emerge. It has elements of the self-selected category which includes conscious and systematic searching, but does not involve actual engagement with an individual(s). It is a deliberate strategy adopted by the entrepreneur involving selecting, analysing and then regularly observing and evaluating the performances of other companies. It is unlikely that the companies are aware of their influence.

The companies I follow are another mentor for me because I see how they market and how they do their finances and how they staff their people and see what mistakes they make. I see a lot of what makes business successful and what makes business failures.

All of the above examples are from either American or Canadian entrepreneurs. The unprompted, spontaneous use of the term “mentor” and the naming of mentors is, at first analysis, absent in the case studies from both the UK and Australia.

I am not sure that word is really understood in this country (UK) probably best sums up the hesitancy in using the word after the introduction of the term by the interviewer to UK and Australian entrepreneurs. However, after some considerable thought, a number of the British and Australian entrepreneurs named certain individuals as mentors, resulting in a retrospective classification of significant others.

Theme 2
Mentor - a retrospective term
Worthy of further exploration is the emergence of the term “mentor” as a retrospective, captured in such comments as:

I guess with hindsight I would call her a mentor.

I guess a significant person early on was – is now, my ex husband, who was very supportive. He encouraged me to finish university and we were married afterwards and he always encouraged me to go for it (starting the business). So I guess he was one of the first mentors.

A business counsellor might not have that edge as a mentor. Looking back I would say that Jane was certainly a mentor and not just a counsellor.

The frequency of this type of comment would suggest that while entrepreneurs might either with hindsight or with foresight identify individuals as mentors or potential mentors, they do so with preconceived expectations of what distinguishes a mentor from, for example, a counsellor or advisor and require reflection to identify individuals as mentors. That “something”, on first analysis, would appear to be the presence of the “chemistry” or psychosocial element, referred to previously.

Theme 3
To be identified as a mentor, the psychosocial element generally must be present.

The description of the functions performed by a mentor (as distinct from an advisor or counsellor) most frequently contain words relating to the “personal” mentoring functions described in the literature and in particular relate to the support and understanding shown to the entrepreneur.
She is very pragmatic, very tough but very supportive. We still meet. We still keep in touch to talk business issues. It was very honest and open stuff.

Have somebody you can report to. I think that is a real value of a mentor. It can be one of the major values of a mentor...having a mentor supports you, helps you keep your grades.

Because of her encouragement I ended up being a lot happier and making a success of myself. It wasn’t that she pushed me towards entrepreneurship but towards the skills that I was later going to need.

My mentor is really good. If I have a problem I call her up (I use her) just as a sounding board. I tend to down play it (the entrepreneur referring to her own business skills) some times – but as my mentor says 'go for it' – she is so successful.

(In contrast to previously naming a number of individuals as mentors). We also have an advisory board. I wouldn’t call them mentors because that is how I see them to be. I hope it becomes more of a bouncing ideas off relationship.

(Entrepreneur describing the relationship with the business counsellor, who he has previously classified as a mentor, allocated to him as part of a business program). I think it would have been an enormous help if someone like Jane had been around early in the process because then I would have felt there was somebody who was going to confront me on things but not undermine my confidence which was pretty bloody fragile in the early stages – and that, I think, is the key issue. That is the problem with accountants or management consultants – all they do is rip you apart. Whereas you actually need at that early stage somebody who is very supportive but build a relationship where you are willing to listen to the nasty things they want to tell you, to the things you are doing wrong. I’m not sure how you crack that as it takes a great act of faith and personality to be able to listen to people – because the very nature of being an owner-manager means you are incredibly pig-headed and dictatorial some of the time – or you are an exceptional personality type. Probably a woman actually!

This psychosocial element, that is the support, interest and encouragement shown for the entrepreneur as an individual, is perhaps central to the general lack of enthusiasm for government support programs involving business counsellors, advisors or mentors.

(Speaking of a mentor allocated as part of a business program). It didn’t work as we were unable to find anything in common. We enjoyed each other’s company but . . .

It was absolute crap. The advisor looked like a retired business person who clearly was just doing his stint for his hour and the level of commitment and interest in me and the business was minimal and I felt it was absolutely useless and didn’t go back there even though it was free.

I have yet to find any government agencies of any use. The ones organised to use retired executives (as counsellors) – I’ve been to them before – useless - just terrible. I would just get terribly annoyed. I would try one thing and then go to another perhaps. People would often say have you tried the senior retired blah blah – I’ve yet to find them any use.

The concept of the business support network is admirable and is very similar to the really tangible benefits I experienced (with a mentor allocated in a private program). My problems and issues with what is set up as state sector stuff in this country is that it is such poor quality people who are involved in doing it. I am not sure how you get successful people or experts involved in the very process of supporting small growth business.
In terms of finding like minds – it will help you develop the business and is an issue which somehow has to be cracked by anybody trying to start a (government initiated) network up.

Theme 4
Gender differences emerge in respect to the way female and male entrepreneurs refer to assistance given by family.

Whilst women name husbands/partners as mentors, men tend not to apply wives/partners. Female descriptions include:

I guess a significant person early on was – is now, my ex husband who was very supportive. He encouraged me to finish university and we were married afterwards and he always encouraged me to go for it. So I guess he was one of the first mentors when I started on a career path…. He was extremely instrumental and encouraging. In whatever I wanted to do. I wade back and forth – do I trust these people – can I go forward, and I always held back, I never trusted anybody. If I hadn’t been with someone who allowed me to blossom and take it (the risk to start the business), I would have done it differently…. Yes he has always supported me. And he still does in business. As a matter of fact he has tried to throw me business, give me business, sent business my way.

I’m always taking stuff home…..luckily the fellow I live with (previously named as a mentor) is wonderful. I knew him from the very beginning. You know he would work with us and I had no money to pay him. No problem…..and any time I need him, he teaches, he comes in after school and works. He’s great, just wonderful. And I bounce ideas off him and he is really good. I am very impulsive and he is slow and methodical so he drives me crazy at times but it is a really good balance.

Whilst appreciating the support of their spouse/partner, the men, despite having previously named individuals as mentors, do not use this term in relation to their spouse.

(Talking about his wife, who until very recently had worked in the business and has left to have their second child). We get on very well working together – extremely well…. Unfortunately can’t just leave it (work problems) here so it is important to have someone to sound off to, not to look necessarily to solve your problems but to understand what your level of stress is when you get home and what your level of stress is when you leave in the morning. Having the ability to do that at home, I rank very high.

She (ex wife) and I are really good friends and she is a very senior person in banking and understands a lot about what I do and is helpful.

There is also reinforcement of the general belief that women are more open about their experiences in contrast to men.

Females are more open to say ‘jeez I had a shitty year’ whereas men would say ‘oh, things are just fine – it was a wonderful year’. Women aren’t afraid to bare their souls. Men don’t do that (female entrepreneur).

My brother was an accountant and I could have used him but there was a loss of face stuff there (male entrepreneur)
My wife (now ex) was working in an equally stressful job... she used to come back with terrible stories about this client and that client and I used to think – I can’t really discuss some of the issues that I face because they seem in a sense almost ridiculous compared to some of the issues that are being confronted out there.

**Theme 5**  
Mentors may become friends – but friends are friends

Contrary to the belief that business is done on the golf course with friends, friendship and business are separated. Whilst friends may provide a personal support function, they are not named as mentors.

Interestingly, it is the male entrepreneurs who refer to the role of friends. No specific reference was made to leisure friends (as distinct from business friends) by women.

When I go sailing, most of them are friends, great old friends, some of whom are in business for themselves and they are easy to talk to because they do similar things, similar size companies and they have been doing it longer than me. So I help them around issues and they help me, but not mentors. Others who have worked for someone else sometimes can’t really relate to what I am trying to do, or have never done anything in the field... They get paid a good salary and are happy to be there. When I am with my friends I really want to talk about friends’ things. Male bonding things. . . . The interesting thing about family – and to some extent close friends – I hate talking business, a lot of people fall into that trap. It’s all you ever talk about and after a while you get sick of listening to that. As a result I don’t spend a lot of time talking about it to friends.

I believe that when in your leisure time that is what it is for. At some point you have to leave your work behind, also if you meet people in that context I feel it is an imposition. What I have found is if I find someone in my leisure activities that I feel has a professional advantage I will make an appointment to meet them in their place of business. It is like meeting a doctor at a picnic and saying ‘oh, my arm hurts will you look at it’. You would be amazed at how many people would do that – it doesn’t make it right.

**Theme 6**  
Communication is the key.

Perhaps the most dominant theme emerging at this stage is the awareness of the need to articulate objectives clearly. Almost without exception the entrepreneurs interviewed highlighted they needed to develop effective communication skills as a business fundamental. This communication capability is not the ability to “network”, but rather the ability to plan personal and business direction, set goals and systematically develop channels of communication to form the relationships needed to gain assistance.

In some instances it has been easy:

I liken myself to a terrier who hangs on to the towel and won’t let go and kind of backs up....I have always been able to ask for help – it is one of my most valuable assets. I have always taught my own children to ask for help.
I am never afraid to ask for help or advice. I always make sure they know the door is open here too.

I called people and said ‘do you know anybody that…’. I wouldn’t do it very often. But yes, never be afraid to ask. The worst they can say is no.

For others, more difficult:

I was pathologically afraid. . . . I was a numbers person, left brain, none of this interpersonal. It is not that I didn’t have the communication skills, I just didn’t want to speak. It was this sort of latent ability – I would know how to speak if spoken to…. I took a course in business presentations and writing and have been to Toastmasters. It is a continual thing. I still go and just get better and better all the time... I knew I was going to have to speak to people so I thought I had better go and learn how to do it. I knew I was going to have to have those skills so I thought I may as well be as good as I can be and then maybe I won’t be so worried about it. That’s how I addressed it.

I remember early on when I was first starting (the business) and I went to one of those luncheons sponsored by the Lions Club or a bunch of business men and I walked out of there saying I am never going again, never. So I had a bad attitude about this. And I have been never one to network that way. I am best one to one. So I put together a really good consulting group (his business partners, mentors and an advisory group) who are my network.

The need to be clear in both business goals and the objectives set in order to maximise the opportunity of assistance becomes central to this theme. It reflects the proposition in the literature (Caruso, 1992; Kram, 1995) which suggests that the range of functions received in a mentoring relationship may be influenced by the capacities and interpersonal skills of the entrepreneur.

You have to concentrate on what you want to do. A lot of failings I have seen entrepreneurs go through is that they are working on something and it is a struggle, because it is always a struggle. And then they see another opportunity and they jump around to quickly and it is a matter of looking at your goals and saying this is what I am going to do and that would probably be great, sort of thing, but I am going to finish one before starting another. Or looking backwards and saying this is the direction I am going to take and I want to identify every minute that I take away from my direction. .I was also lucky to run into some fairly smart businessmen who were successful due to the fact that they had a lot of money in their hand, they owned this company or whatever. They were reasonably smart in that respect. What I would do was, I would have some different ideas and I would go and search these people out. I would sit down and say ‘hi’ and they were good that way. If you had problems like asking financial questions and for the most part people were very good about that. They were somewhat flattered and I guess some people had maybe helped them along the way.

There were successful businessmen and I talked to them and asked for advice. I didn’t impose on them too much but yeh, I did run into some very successful businessmen that I went to talk to. Just ideas. I had some ideas about renting our equipment and whatever, or a new product. I would ask them if they would buy it, what did they think of it. So when I did find people who were successful and smart, if they would talk to me I would say ‘I would love to have half an hour of your time to sit down and talk’. It also gave them the opportunity to see that this person they thought was just a technician has done something a lot different.
I will call professional people to basically backstop what my gut decision is... you present them with a scenario to analyse. Anything other than that I think would be an irresponsible way for you to gain advice. If you yourself don’t have the answer already there is something wrong.

**CONCLUSION**

Although a work in progress, the themes emerging to date would indicate the value of continuing more in-depth exploration and analysis of the data. Whilst current recommendations to nascent entrepreneurs include “find a mentor”, it may well be as important to encourage the entrepreneur to reflect on their expectations of a mentoring relationship. Similarly, the (perhaps sub-conscious) expectation of the entrepreneur that business assistance program mentors/counsellors/advisors will show interest and empathy in them as individuals, along with business advice, may well have inferences for the selection and training for such service providers.
REFERENCES


Swoboda and Miller
