



Working with a Dormen mentor

Introduction

Those who have never worked with a mentor before can be a little nervous to start with about what it involves. There is no need for this, and so we have compiled this brief guidance note in order to help new clients during the initial stages of working with their mentor.

The most important thing to remember is that your mentor is a person who, in most cases, has been in your position before i.e. running a small business. They therefore know and understand the pressures, frustrations and rewards that it can bring. They have volunteered to become a Dormen mentor in order to help and support Dorset business people, such as you, by using the skills and experience they have developed over the years. They are not paid for being a mentor but Dormen does cover their travelling expenses so they are not out of pocket. All mentors attend an initial training workshop followed by regular mentor meetings, and they all sign up to a code of professional standards and ethics.

It is your responsibility to keep in touch with your mentor, arrange meetings etc.

First contact

The first contact with your mentor will probably be a phone call to arrange your first meeting together at a mutually convenient time. Clients sometimes ask where the best place to hold such meetings is. Obviously there's no single solution to this but most mentors and clients soon find somewhere that suits them both well. If possible, it should be somewhere where you can both talk relatively privately and without disturbance. Initially, your mentor may suggest meeting at your business premises as it will help them to understand your business. However, if you would prefer to meet on neutral ground, say in a café or library, please suggest that. Sometimes mentors may have to travel quite a distance to meet you – if so, please be flexible if they occasionally suggest meeting half way.

First meeting

The first meeting is the opportunity for you and your mentor to start getting to know each other and for the mentor to begin to learn about your business and what mentoring support you would like. Your mentor will also run through the Dormen Client Agreement (i.e. our terms and conditions) with you as this clarifies how our mentoring operates. You should have already received a copy of the document so you can have a look at it in advance. Your mentor will ask you to sign it at the meeting.

Meetings usually last around 1½ to 2 hours. During the meetings, you should agree an action plan with your mentor and also finish by choosing a date for your next meeting. There is no set frequency for meetings but probably most mentors and clients meet approximately every 4-6 weeks in practice.

Getting the best out of mentoring

To get the best out of mentoring, it's really important to be as open and honest with your mentor, and provide them with as much information about your business as possible. This is not always easy and it may not happen until you really get to know each other well. However, as many of our clients will testify, it's well worth the time and effort involved.

Don't be surprised if your mentor sometimes challenges you or asks you tough questions, it's all part of the process of really understanding what you are trying to achieve in your business. The video case studies on our website www.dormen.org.uk include some of our clients and mentors talking about how they work together.

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Preparation for meetings

The other important aspect is, if you've agreed to do something between meetings, then try to fulfil this to enable you and your mentor to make best use of your meeting time. If, for any reason, you cannot complete an agreed action point it may be best to contact your mentor and reschedule the meeting. Everyone understands that running your business is your main priority and so sometimes plans need to change.

Finally, if you ever find that you are unable to attend (or will be late for) one of your meetings, please let your mentor know at the earliest opportunity, so they have time to adjust their plans and don't have a wasted journey.

Changing mentors

Just occasionally, for one reason or another, a client may feel that the mentor they've been introduced to is not right for them. If this happens to you, we do suggest that you have a second meeting with the mentor as very often your initial view may change as you get to know each other better. However, if you are sure that it will not work, please contact us and we will see if it is possible to find another mentor for you. Similarly, please contact us if your mentor is not able to continue mentoring you for any reason.

Length of mentoring relationship

Clients often ask how long the mentoring will last. Again there is no simple answer to this as it depends on several factors including your business needs although the maximum period is 12 months. Whatever the case, it is probably a very good idea to hold a brief review at the end of each meeting to review what has been gained from the meeting and whether another one is required. Please take this opportunity to be frank with your mentor – they will want to hear your honest views and feedback, and will not mind if you feel that the mentoring has reached its natural conclusion.

Dormen's mentoring service

Finally, Dormen is currently able to keep its admin charge very low thanks to our volunteer mentors and generous funding from the Local Authorities in Bournemouth, Dorset & Poole and Business Link. However, although our costs are very modest, Dormen cannot operate without additional income. If your business has benefitted from the support of a Dormen mentor, we would be grateful if you kindly consider making a contribution at the end of the mentoring period, no matter how small, to help keep the service going for other small Dorset businesses like yours. Every penny counts! Please ask us for details of how to do this.

If you are unable to help in this way, there are other ways of supporting Dormen such as putting a link to our website on your website, telling your business friends about Dormen, and/or considering becoming a mentor yourself.

If you have any queries about Dormen or mentoring in general, please raise them with your mentor or contact us direct.

So, in summary

- It is up to you to keep in touch with your mentor and arrange meetings
- Try to meet your mentor somewhere relatively private and without disturbance
- If you are unable to attend one of your meetings, please let your mentor know as soon as possible
- Read and sign the Dormen Client Agreement at the first meeting
- Be open and honest with your mentor
- Hold a brief review at the end of each meeting
- Try and make sure you complete agreed actions between meetings
- If Dormen has helped your business, please consider giving something back to Dormen
- If you have any problems with mentoring, please speak to your mentor or contact us

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