

TWENTY / TWENTY



MENTORING

Emily Cosgrove sets her sights on one company's mentoring journey

Mentoring is a hot topic at the moment and many organisations are choosing to invest time and resources in setting up more formal programmes for success. According to the Association for Talent Development (ATD), 71 per cent of Fortune 500 companies have a mentoring programme. And in a global CEO survey conducted by PWC, 98 per cent of millennials believe that working with a mentor is a necessary part of their career development.¹

So the power of mentoring is undisputed and, when carried out with

care, planning and experience, it is undoubtedly a win-win. For internal organisational mentoring programmes, there is the added value of using your own people to grow and develop your key asset – your people. Some of the many reasons organisations choose to introduce a mentoring programme include:

- ▶ Diversity.
- ▶ Enhancing talent programmes.
- ▶ Knowledge transfer.
- ▶ Cross-company learning.
- ▶ Leadership development.
- ▶ As a vehicle for growing Conversational Wisdom.™

Support and infrastructure

While many organisations choose to set up formal mentoring programmes, not all of them choose to provide the necessary support and infrastructure to make them truly successful and sustainable. One that has is the Design Business Association (DBA) – the trade association for design in the UK.

For the past 30 years it has been championing effective design and building a bridge between designers and business. Supporting a community of more than 500 design agencies and design-led businesses as members, the DBA promotes professional excellence through productive partnerships between commerce and the design industry.

In 2011, Sally Lukins, strategy and development director, launched the DBA's Twenty/Twenty mentoring programme. Having a clear purpose for any mentoring programme always provides the best opportunity for success and Lukins' clarity for the aim of the scheme shone through from the start with her desire to "to tap into the wisdom and vision of the current leaders in the design industry, to inspire the next generation to make more informed decisions about their businesses, their people and themselves".

Now approaching its seventh year, the mentoring has gone from strength to strength. In January 2017, the seventh and largest cohort of the DBA's Twenty/Twenty mentoring programme was launched with support from mentoring experts. It's a great opportunity to reflect on what has made this membership association mentoring scheme such a huge success, and what plans the DBA might have to keep it on course to celebrate the tenth Twenty/Twenty mentoring cohort in 2020.

The programme was originally set up with the support of the Arts Council England Cultural Leadership Programme and continues to be funded through a one-off fee which mentees pay to join the scheme. The DBA has been highly successful in its recruitment of mentors who are drawn from member agencies such as Landor, Elmwood, Lippincott, Dragon Rouge, Smith & Milton and Brand Union.

These mentors include many of the leading lights of the design industry and all of them bring a huge amount

of experience to the table, great dollops of goodwill and a desire to give something back to the industry that many of them have helped to shape.

Mentors speak of recognising the same challenges in their mentees that they themselves face, and acknowledge that mentoring offers a way to help both their mentee and themselves be better at what they do:

"There is value in what I know and I really enjoy sharing, and supporting someone else with, that knowledge." Mentor

"I now work differently and work much more with the people in the business and try and understand their motivation, values and aspirations as much as what the business needs. It's become apparent to me that these things are intrinsically linked." Mentor



Mentors include many of the leading lights of the design industry and all of them bring a huge amount of experience to the table

When the programme launched back in 2011, a great deal of time and effort was given, using detailed profiles, to match each mentee with the most appropriate and best-fitting mentor available.

Continued great matching for the mentoring pairs

This process has been very successful with nearly all participants agreeing how well they think they have been matched. And, as the programme has grown and matured, the DBA has continued to invest the same level of time and attention to matching, using a human approach.

Head of programmes, Natasha Papa, recently spent three days carefully selecting and matching next year's mentoring pairs.

The areas that participants have recognised they feel are particularly well matched include:

- ▶ Area of work and expertise.
- ▶ Vision of the mentee.
- ▶ Ambition.
- ▶ The relation of business size.
- ▶ Geography.

Improved ongoing support for all participants

The programme began with a launch and one midpoint face-to-face review, offered to all participants. Based on feedback from initial mentors and mentees, the DBA now offers all participants a full and ongoing support framework.

This includes an initial interactive skills workshop attended by mentees and mentors together, on-hand support with their first session, 'booster calls' at the quarter and three-quarter point and a face-to-face midpoint review six months into the programme.

This increased support offering, along with a LinkedIn DBA mentoring group, is helping to build an ever-increasing community of mentors and mentees.

Growing number of participants

Over the six years of the programme, the DBA has now trained and supported more than 250 of its members to be either a mentor or mentee, and the scheme is growing.

A significant number of mentors continue in their role from one year to the next, not only taking on a new mentee in the new formal cohort, but often staying well connected to previous mentoring relationships.

There are also previous DBA mentees who, having experienced the benefits of having a mentor on this scheme, have now taken on the role of mentor.

High value leads to continued relationships

Although the formal DBA mentoring programme runs for 12 months, many of the mentoring pairs choose to continue their relationship in an informal manner once the year is up.

Asked why they have made this choice, both mentees and mentors describe the benefit and value they gain from the experience.

Mentors comments include:

"I have definitely added skills to my own CV through the process. The group training sessions are so valuable, as they enable you to meet other mentors and address what is often, ironically, your own sense of isolation. I have also been using what I have learnt in



existing relationships with clients, which has been another valuable bonus.”

“It really made me think about all I’d achieved. It helped me consolidate my experience and it was great to have time out of the frantic day-to-day to think from a different perspective.”

Mentee comments include:

“The creative industry has very specific challenges. We have non-executive directors, but having a mentor from the industry and having huge respect for that person is key to this relationship.”

“Feeling the change within myself and on the business and seeing the impact and successes from this is fantastic.”

Making a positive commercial impact

Many of the mentees have described the positive impact that having a mentor has had on their business. One mentee describes: *“In practical terms, we have seen massive growth in the past 12 months: doubled our staff, implanted amazing new systems to control the growth, moved to a new office, and are managing turnover in a much more controlled way. Part of that was*

made possible via the tools I picked up from mentoring, and part from the sounding board of experience.”

Evaluation each year to improve the offering

As the first cohort of this programme was supported through Arts Council funding, evaluation and regular reporting were essential. Key findings from the evaluations were shared and also offered to the



There is a deeply held belief that mentoring conversations create significant shifts in thinking

DBA board and have informed improvements for future cohorts.

This continues to be a fundamental aspect of the Twenty/Twenty programme with midpoint and final evaluation reports collated and provided each year.

Natasha Papa now heads up the DBA mentoring programme and is keen to build on the

success achieved so far.

“This is a really fantastic programme to manage,” she says. “It’s great to see relationships blossom and business transformed as a direct impact of DBA Twenty/Twenty mentoring.

“Getting applications in is always an exciting time of year as well as welcoming the next cohort of DBA members to our brilliant alumni and kicking off the new year on a high.”

Across the DBA there appears to be a genuine desire from mentees and mentors alike that the programme is continued and shared more widely as there is a deeply held belief that mentoring conversations create significant shifts in thinking.

If you are a member of a trade or professional association and are interested in finding out more about the opportunities offered by mentoring, please contact the DBA via dbamentoring.org.uk. **TJ**

Emily Cosgrove is a founder and partner in The Conversation Space and can be contacted via info@theconversationspace.com

Reference

1. <http://bit.ly/2ih6A7a>

