

twenty/twenty

DBA Business Mentoring

dbamentoring.org.uk

→ { **Guide** }

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Background

Imagine having a highly experienced confidant within the design industry - someone you can discuss issues with, who can improve your decision-making ability, who'll help you come to your own conclusions.

The DBA's business mentoring programme Twenty/Twenty pairs rising industry leaders with established design pioneers for a 12 month, 1-2-1 mentoring relationship. Since its launch in 2011, the programme has seen a raft of mentees and mentors benefit, with great results.

Our mentors are key individuals drawn from DBA member agencies like Landor, Elmwood, Lippincott, Dragon Rouge, Smith & Milton and The Brand Union and many more, all of whom bring a huge amount of experience to the table.

Find out where it can take you and your business.

What's involved?

November

Application deadline.

December

Mentor/mentee matches are made in December, and you can arrange an informal meeting before the initial training session in January.

January

This programme runs from January to December each year. A full day of training for both mentors and mentees in January, will show you how you can work best together over the 12 months. We show you the skills and techniques you'll need for the first 6 months of the mentoring, and outline the different ways you can work together. A key part of the day gives you guidance on how to decide exactly what your relationship will look like – how often you'll talk, what you'll discuss, and so on.

February to December

From here, the 1 to 1 mentoring kicks in. We recommend that you have around nine hour-long face-to-face meetings across the year, and that you decide between you whether you'll email or call in between.

Throughout the 12 months, you'll have access to a dedicated password-protected website full of resources, templates, guidance and support; a programme manager who can work through any day-to-day issues with you; and a mentoring expert who can offer any extra guidance as needed.

Every three months

You'll have opportunities to share experience, guidance and skills with other mentors and mentees.

Six month review

There's chance to review goals and objectives after six months, re-focusing your mentoring sessions.

December

At the end of the process we ask you to feedback to us, so we can continue to develop and improve the programme.

“I simply cannot speak *highly* enough of the programme.”

DBA MENTEE

How does the mentoring relationship work?

-> **You complete a profile form outlining your reasons for participating in the programme. We then match you with the best mentor according to your needs, your experience, your personality and your role.**
-> **You and your mentor are then guided in structuring meetings, including content, but you develop your conversations together, with the mentee setting the agenda and driving the 12 month process.**
-> **You work together on your objectives with your highly experienced industry mentor, as they share wisdom, expertise and advice via developmental conversations.**

How much does the Twenty/Twenty programme cost?

The fee for the programme is £1500+vat for DBA members and £2750+vat for non members. For this you'll receive twelve months of 1-2-1 mentoring, training for mentor and mentee (two group training sessions, two group support calls), consultancy support, support from the DBA office and website resources to support you throughout the relationship.

The experience for *mentees*

men-tee | *men-tee* |

Mentees report a variety of outcomes. Many state that **confidence** is the key outcome for them and that they are looking for affirmation of their plans and goals. With many mentees heading up businesses, there is a shared feeling that there is often little resource for them, that it can be a lonely place, and that this inhibits decision-making. To be able to seek **support and guidance from someone more experienced** than them is incredibly helpful.

A number of mentees tell us how **energised** they feel after every meeting, and better prepared to take on their challenges or deal with issues. They feel it offers them **greater clarity and focus**.

One mentee says that mentoring has helped them to articulate what they need to do. They reviewed their business, feeling that it had a very generalist offering. Subsequently, they decided to take a strong position on the type of work they do, therefore ensuring they are now working as experts in one area rather than covering a multitude of sectors.

One mentee reflected that it had been a very difficult financial year, but that their mentor helped by keeping them motivated and focusing on winning new clients. They feel this really helped the bottom line, encouraging them to look at different approaches to getting work. Having a mentor provided them with reassurance and boosted their confidence.

Two mentees found new office space with mentors, and two more are exploring the potential of some joint business opportunities.

Some mentees do not always have specific goals, but use the sessions to catch up on the design industry as a whole alongside someone with a broader view.

Another mentee felt they were ingrained in the day to day, spending "too much time at the coal face". Mentoring gave them more of a **bird's eye view of the business**. It also delivered some "nuggets of information".

Many mentees reflect that having regular meetings with their mentors provides them with the **time and space to focus** on the business and move away from working in it for a while. Others build on this, saying that the regular meetings with their mentor give them the forum to commit to actions that then lead to things happening. For example, one mentee has subsequently gone through a re-branding exercise and created a new website.

Some other impacts and learning for mentees were:

-> **Starting to let go of the day-to-day stuff and focus on the business more broadly.**
-> **The opportunity to talk to someone professionally about issues, and being able to download.**
-> **Gaining insights into different processes.**

Many mentees also share that not only do they see impact on the business, but that they feel the impact on themselves personally, as it helps them feel confident enough to make decisions. They feel it offers lots of **introspection and thinking time** and, although it can be hard to gauge the impact of this in tangible terms, clearly this time is crucial.



What are the *specific* benefits of being matched with a design industry *pioneer*?

“Having a role model is *fantastic* – I’m impressed by the *demeanour* and behaviours of my mentor and how they tackle issues. This has *helped* me to change my approach.”

“I enjoy working with an agency that has *similarities* to mine.”

“Inspiring to hear the *experiences* of a larger agency.”

“It’s a big *mental shift* from working on clients to working on the business – it really has *focused* their creativity on the business rather than the design work. This hasn’t happened overnight and they’ve had to work at it, but I’m really impressed with the *impact* and they see a future for the business now.”

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

“It helps to have *dedicated* time to *think* about me and the business.”

How has the *mentoring* affected your confidence/skills within the *business*?

Mentees feel that their confidence has improved – in some cases just in a general sense, and in other cases, around more **specific issues**, such as dealing with change, difficult situations or difficult conversations. One mentee worked on improving their networking skills, through understanding the skill better, and focusing on going to the right events. There is a general sense that people feel their level of professionalism has improved.

“I definitely feel this objective has been *achieved*, just through sharing and talking and that’s probably the key *benefit* of being with a design industry *pioneer*.”

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

“It *focused* me on finding my *voice*.”

“It *sharpened* my thought processes.”

“The business was in a much *better* place than I thought it was.”

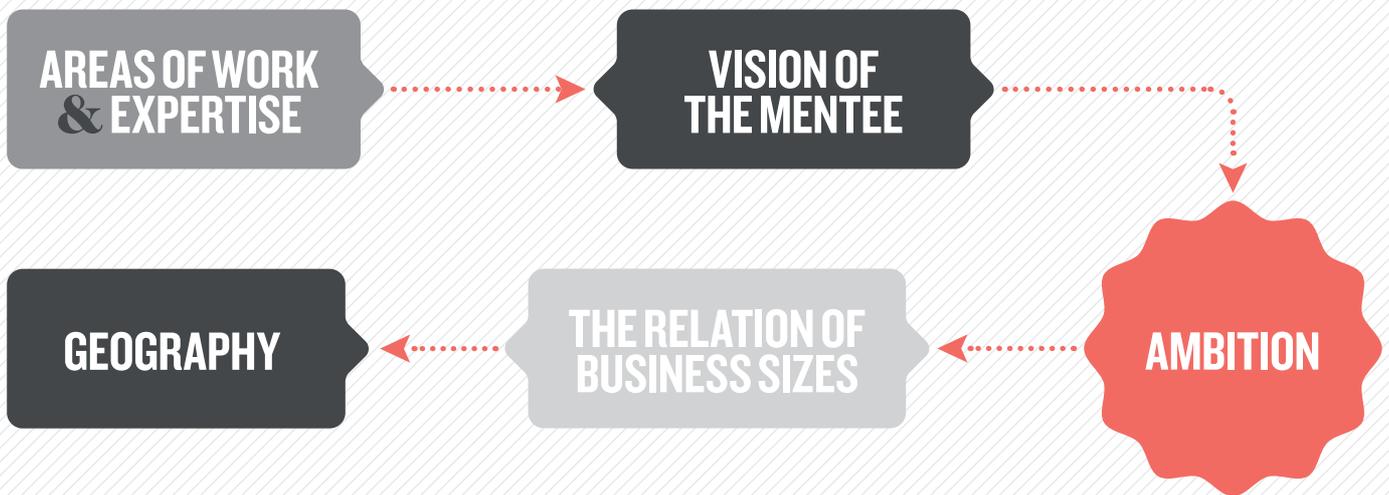
“The most *important* project you’ll ever work on is your own company. It takes time, but it’s *built* in lots of small wins along the way.”

“Knowledge *shared* is a worry halved.”

The matching *process*

The matching of mentor to mentee has been very successful. Nearly all participants mention how well they think they've been matched, and it appears that our approach works very well.

Areas that people feel are particularly well matched are:



A couple of mentees say that **the matching is the key part of the programme**, and they see the most value in the fact that the programme has introduced them to a great individual.

Nearly all mentors say they would be happy to be a mentor in a future cohort. The general sense is that mentors enjoy the experience and learn things themselves that they take into and use within their own businesses.

“My mentor has been a perfect match for me both professionally and personally. Whoever is responsible for the selection clearly paid close attention to my application form.”

The experience for *mentors*

men-tor | *men-tawr* |

A number of mentors say that they enjoy the opportunity to **reflect on their own experience**, and that the process of helping someone else with goals for their business supports this. Other mentors say it is great to be reminded of the **importance of really listening**. Another common theme is around getting the balance right between advising and guiding.

Some comments are:

“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*.”

“It’s really *interesting* to see how other businesses run and it opens your eyes to maybe approaching your business differently.”

The majority of mentors highlight that the value of listening is the most important takeaway for them. Not only in realising the impact on someone else when you are truly listening, but also in **improving and developing this skill** themselves so that they use it more within their own business.

“I’m more conscious of trying to *listen*, then tell, and *not rush* to a solution.”

“Using active listening techniques helped me to not feed answers, but to *explore* options and help my mentee realise their own *possibilities*.”

A couple of mentors have sought out the more experienced mentors in the group and use them for support and guidance.

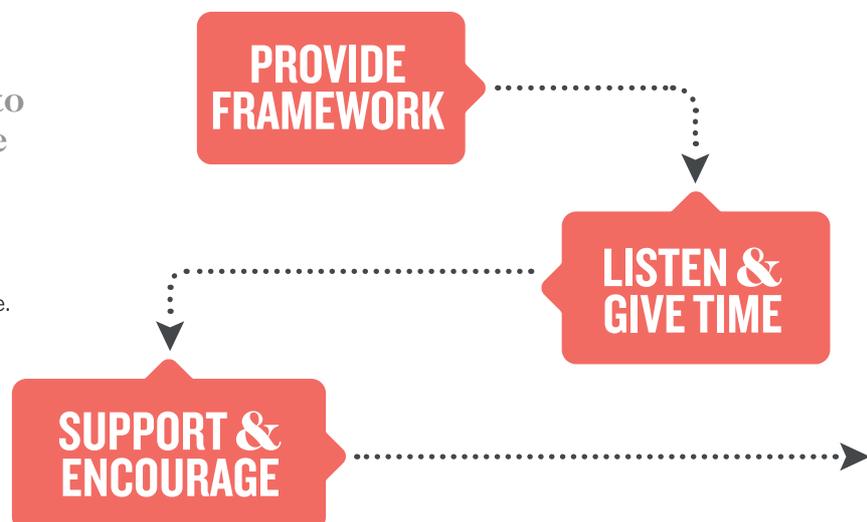
An eye-opener for one mentor has been the revelation that you can **make so much difference in such a relatively brief contact**.

Many mentors note how useful it is to step out of your own business and help someone else with theirs, as this enables them to **reflect** on what they are doing and often means that they go back to their own business to re-look at issues. One mentor has said that they are having to find new markets themselves, and can see from the mentee’s perspective that there is still work out there; this has really helped them to think positively again about the industry and the opportunities.

The majority of mentors agree that it is great to realise how much they know and to see how that knowledge can help someone else.

Other learnings mentors reported were:

-> To be more open in asking questions and how important it is to use them to find solutions.
-> Not to give negative feedback.
-> How therapeutic talking about your business is from both sides.
-> How enlightening it is working with a younger business.
-> Realising how much knowledge you have.
-> That someone else’s issues aren’t so different from your own.



The experience for *mentors*

What do you do as a mentor that works really well?

“Quickly built trust, focusing on sharing to ensure honesty and openness from the start.”

“Construct a road map that can then be constantly referred to and used as a check-in and review tool.”

Some mentors say being very structured in their approach works best, and some try to avoid process as much as possible – this reflects how personal the choice of work is to each individual pair.

One mentee has delivered a practice pitch to the mentor and their team, then accepted critical feedback so that the mentor has then been able to share how they might better approach such a delivery.

Some suggestions from mentors:

-> To be committed and clear around expectations; what you can offer and what you can't.
-> To have some agreed structures or boundaries, but not to feel tied to the process.
-> Share your networks.
-> Give feedback.



“The power of not jumping in, rather in *encouraging* someone else to think.”

“There is value in what I know and I really enjoy *sharing* and *supporting* someone else with that *knowledge*.”

“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.”

“Whatever the size or scale of your business, we are facing similar *challenges* – this has been a surprise learning, but a very *interesting* one.”

“Never *assume* you know it all! I've been given lots of food for thought – just through *conversation*.”

“How important it is to *understand* that someone's personal values and private life have a direct *impact* on their business life and you need to work with that.”

“An overall *acknowledgement* that there is a way to make us all better at what we do.”

What are your *reflections* on a *mentoring* programme specifically for the design industry?

Previous participants of Twenty/Twenty agree that the programme is a great thing for the design industry. They agree that the opportunity to share knowledge and experience adds a greater level of professionalism to the industry and that the best way to facilitate this is by connecting with people who have direct experience.

“There are lots of small design businesses out there with less experienced business people in them – so there should definitely be a need, if not demand, for a service like this.”

“A great networking opportunity, particularly at the group events – liked the sense of community.”

“Can really see the benefits of what a mature business can offer a much newer one.”

“Great to be able to learn from people in the industry – people often don’t have frank conversations at a senior level and to let your guard down and be honest and open is very powerful.”

“It’s important to *share* why we’ve been *successful* to enable others to *achieve* this.”

For mentees, this is often the main draw to joining the programme and what attracts them to take part. Others say that they previously had a coach, an external advisor, a non-exec board member or a mentor with no design industry experience, and they really notice and value the difference in having someone who really understands the industry.

Mentors don’t always feel that they have to be a design industry specialist, although that knowledge has been helpful. They feel that it definitely helps the **credibility of the programme** in terms of what’s been achieved.

One mentee also says that their mentor does not need to know what they do, who their client base is, or any of the detail of the business – they bring a different perspective and can respond to the challenges without having to know everything.

One mentor explains that the design industry can be poor at developing and encouraging people; where there are lots of start-ups out there it should be a high priority for the industry to offer support and guidance.

Participants say that it is great to offer some **comradeship within an industry** where winning work can be a very competitive process, so it is good to be able to support and share with someone else. One mentor is very clear in seeing the many changes that are coming in the future, and suggests that businesses will have to have relationships with other businesses and be plugged into all the current thinking within the industry to be able to move forward. Mentoring is a great way to support and facilitate this development.

Advice for future *participants*

We asked previous participants for any advice they would give to people joining the programme. There were some great tips – some of which were in exact opposition – around encouraging people to set things up more formally, and others suggesting that the best approach is to keep it informal. What this displays is that each experience is unique and each pair has had to make this work for them. This is backed up by the experiences of mentors, some of whom have been involved in the first cohorts, and who reflect that their experiences each time with a mentee have been very different.

-> **You need some structure to get a point of action.**
-> **Not too fixed agenda.**
-> **It needs to be a disciplined process – the mentee has to prepare, and has to act on agreed actions and agreed meeting times.**

Other advice focuses on being aware of the difference between consulting and non-executive roles, being very clear as a mentee on what you want to get from the relationship, and, as a mentor, what you are able to offer.

-> **It is very different to consulting and non-executive roles – it's a change in style, as mentoring is more passive and responsive to the mentee's needs.**
-> **Put your energy into the start and establish a good working relationship.**
-> **Be patient, help mentees to establish a clear goal and work with them to develop and define it.**
-> **Don't be disheartened if there are no immediate results – small things can make a difference to small organisations.**

Mentees say that it is important to be realistic about what you want from this process, and that your levels of self-awareness are quite high. It needs to be the right approach at the right time.

Various participants mention the importance of getting the relationship off on a good footing. This centres around putting each other at ease, perhaps by not talking about the business first, but to start with the person, and what they personally want to achieve. One mentee shared a great question that their mentor asked:

“If someone told you that you could be anything you want to be, what would you do?”

-> **Listen**
-> **Make time – protect the time out to work on this**
-> **Don't be nervous – it's a great experience**



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