GUEST COLUMN

Find mentor with right attitude and skill sets

In the concluding part, the author talks about how mentoring can impact the growing-up process.

Opportunity spotting is only the first step in the process of creating an enterprise. Very often, the journey that involves many turbulent steps take unexpected turns. Entrepreneurs who are on a discovery-driven journey often fail if they do not know how to manage the baby steps successfully. A good mentor can help in every step of the startup process and minimise the risks of failure. Mentors are major strength for any entrepreneur. A good mentor can help the entrepreneur discover oneself and move towards stability and growth. So, the entrepreneurs should start early their search for a mentor with right attitude and skill sets.

What does mentoring involve?

Mentoring is the process of enabling and empowering the other person (mentee) to acquire the right attitudes, skills and knowledge to achieve a goal, like setting up of an entrepreneurial venture, where the mentee does not have all the necessary capabilities. It is not about giving instructions as in training, but enabling the mentee to learn to run. In that sense, the entrepreneur hugely benefits from mentoring in the initial days that is full of experimentation and trial-and-error method, all of which involve burning the scarce finance available. One of the major reasons for startup failures is cash crunch!

Some of the generic weaknesses of startup entrepreneurs include blind faith in the potential and attractiveness of their idea. They look for support to confirm their belief and discount those not doing losing objectivity in the process. With super confidence in themselves, they take risks that are not always manageable. They do not give up hope in repeated failures as they expect better things waiting around the corner.

A good mentor, shows a mirror to the mentee and helps him or her in recognising the realities around, whether good or bad. The mentor helps manage the risk better by looking at the challenges differently.

Mentors also help in opening doors, one of the toughest parts of tapping into any network of resources such as skills, space, technology and customers who would not easily take bets on unknown entrepreneurs.

Startup journey is a roller coaster ride with ups and downs and unexpected jerks all along. Those who know to keep their cool and hold on to their seats make the full ride. Entrepreneurs go through huge emotional turbulence and benefit immensely from a mentor who is compassionate and convincing, who should be able to build confidence and give emotional support to the mentee.

In the process of mentoring, one of the biggest capabilities a mentee acquires is to possess ‘detached passion’. Since passion involves blind faith, detached passion sounds like an oxymoron, which it is not. Entrepreneurs need very high level of passion for whatever they are undertaking, but the journey can be dangerous unless one can take a dispassionate look at everything from time to time. One should take two steps back to see if the speed and track are fine, and needs ‘detached passion’ to remain relevant. Good mentors build this capability when they engage the mentees in conversations sometimes involving uncomfortable questions, particularly from the angle of implementation of an idea.

Mentor as guru

Mentoring is not easy and finding a good mentor is tough. Patience and logic have to go together with intuition for a mentor to be effective.

Besides, technical and managerial capabilities, a mentor should have helping attitude without expecting any rewards. This implies sincerity and accessibility with a compassionate mind as minimum requirements to be a good mentor. The mentor should show maturity in handling turbulent situations and occasional tantrums of a passionate entrepreneur. All these qualities will enable a mentor to command respect.

A good mentor will have the qualities of a true guru who is there to help students to dispel darkness and move into light. And a mentee's gratitude will be guru dakshina for the mentor.

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