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FOR WOMEN**

Supporting your mentee through the ups and downs of her business

Introduction


Leading a business is a journey filled with both highs and lows. As a mentor, you play a significant role in guiding your mentee through these inevitable challenges. While it may sometimes feel like there's little you can do when your mentee faces difficulties, your support can make a significant difference. Below are strategies to help you effectively support your mentee through the ups and downs of her business.

Before challenges arise:

Building a strong mentoring relationship

The foundation of effective mentorship begins with building a strong, trusting relationship. The initial phase of the Mentoring Women in Business programme is dedicated to establishing this rapport. A solid relationship creates a safe environment where your mentee feels comfortable sharing her experiences, including challenges. Here's how you can foster this environment:

- Show genuine interest: Engage with your mentee's business and personal growth by showing sincere curiosity.
- Ask, don't assume: Use questions to understand her perspective rather than making assumptions.
- Practice active listening: Listen attentively, acknowledging her feelings and thoughts without immediately jumping to solutions.
- Be transparent: Share relevant examples from your own experiences, both successes and failures, to build trust.
- Timing is key: Sometimes, the best support you can offer is simply listening and asking the right questions rather than advising.
- Build trust: Trust is earned over time; be consistent and reliable in your interactions.



When your mentee feels seen, valued, and heard, she is more likely to turn to you during tough times, increasing her resilience and commitment to the mentoring process. Creating an environment where she feels safe to discuss mistakes and challenges can significantly impact her ability to recover and grow.


When challenges arise:

Providing support during difficult times

When your mentee encounters a low point, it's a positive sign if she feels comfortable sharing her struggles with you. Here's how you can support her effectively:

- Offer a fresh perspective: As a mentor, you can provide a broader view of the situation, helping her see beyond the immediate issues. Avoid allowing her to fall into the trap of unhealthy comparisons; instead, focus on her unique situation, strengths, resources and progress.
- Share your vulnerabilities: Open up about times in your career when things didn't go as planned. This can be encouraging and foster deeper, more meaningful conversations.
- Explore solutions together: Instead of providing all the answers, guide your mentee in finding resources and solutions. This approach empowers her to take ownership of her growth and equips her with the tools to handle future challenges.
- Draw attention to strengths: Your mentee has a wealth of knowledge, experience, qualities and skills that she may need to be reminded of in tough moments.
- Highlight leadership opportunities: Frame business challenges as opportunities for your mentee to develop and demonstrate leadership skills, which can help prevent similar issues in the future.

Remind your mentee that setbacks are part of the journey; challenges are teachers and nothing is wasted, even when making pivots.



Moving forward:

Cultivating accountability and wellbeing

As your mentee navigates the highs and lows of her business, maintaining accountability and prioritising wellbeing are key:

- Foster a culture of accountability: Encourage your mentee to share her goals and plans with you. Accountability can enhance productivity and provide a sense of security. This isn't just about holding her responsible when things go wrong; it's about helping her stay focused and on track, especially during difficult times. Remember, accountability works both ways—your mentee can also hold you accountable to your commitments.
- Prioritise wellbeing over goals: Sometimes, it's essential to shift the focus from achieving specific business goals to ensuring your mentee's overall wellbeing. Life's unpredictability, as highlighted by the pandemic, underscores the importance of being a whole, healthy individual. Without good health, a person cannot function well or overcome challenges easily. Help your mentee recognise when it's time to prioritise self-care and personal health over business targets.

Avoiding the saviour complex:

Empowering rather than rescuing

It's important to remember that as a mentor, your role is not to solve all of your mentee's problems. Your focus should be on empowering her to make decisions and think critically. Encourage her to take ownership of her journey, and be cautious of overstepping by trying to "save" her from every challenge.

Celebrating Success:

Recognising and encouraging wins

Successes, no matter how small, should be celebrated. Taking time to acknowledge and celebrate your mentee's achievements can boost her confidence and motivation, and foster a stronger connection between you and her. This positive reinforcement can empower her to take risks and pursue further growth.



Reflection exercise:

Consider these questions and write your answers wherever you prefer to take notes, so that you can come back to them whenever you like.

- What unique challenges might your mentee face, as a woman entrepreneur in a low or middle income country?
- What strengths do you have to support your mentee when challenges arise?
- What areas do you find more challenging in supporting someone?
- How can you build your skills in these areas?
- Reflect on a time when you've been supported in a challenging situation. What did you find was most useful? What wasn't useful?

Conclusion

Your role as a mentor is to create a safe, supportive environment where your mentee feels valued and empowered. Prioritise her wellbeing, recognise that you don't need to have all the answers, and celebrate her successes along the way. By doing so, you can help her navigate the complexities of her business journey with confidence and resilience.

