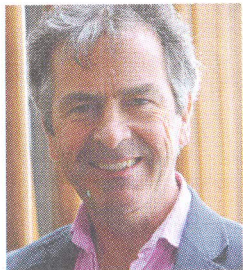


THE concept of mentoring might well date back to antiquity (the word is derived from the character Mentor in Homer's *Odyssey*) but the reality of business mentoring is much more recent. If anything, the latest evidence would suggest that, as the much-heralded green shoots of economic recovery start to make their presence felt, business mentoring's season in the sun is only just beginning.

The idea of introducing a business-to-business engagement programme in Scotland originated at Renfrewshire Chamber of Commerce, when Liz Cameron was its chief executive.

"It evolved from expanding the concept of 'networking' and the central role of what a chamber of commerce does: connecting businesspeople who are willing and able to support one another," said Cameron, now chief executive of



Kevin Dorrian suggested a cost effective platform.

Scottish Chambers of Commerce.

"We tested the model in Renfrewshire and it worked. We then presented this to Scottish Enterprise, which clearly identified the benefits of the private sector leading and developing a Scottish model.

"It has now been operating for over 10 years with remarkable results: with businesses expanding, developing new product ranges, getting into new markets and ultimately getting access to new knowledge, new connections and resources. New models have developed, but the key success factors have been flexibility, informality and delivered by busi-

ness for business."

Indeed, Business Mentoring Scotland is led and delivered by volunteer businesspeople with the sole objective to support peers, enabling individuals and companies to grow with an emphasis on the transfer of learning and leadership development.

It claims that mentored companies turn over more, produce more and employ more people than their counterparts, without costing the business anything – mentors volunteer their time, motivated chiefly by a desire to 'give something back' by sharing their skills, knowledge, experiences and contacts.

Experienced business people with a wealth of experience which they are ready and willing to share, mentors can provide invaluable advice across the entire spectrum of business issues; from how to boost profitability and productivity, enter new markets, launch products or improve customer service.

And mentoring has been recognised at government level in Scotland as a highly effective and business-focused way to nurture leadership, business growth and economic development.

"For companies seeking to grow and become more sustainable, having access to an experienced business mentor can make all the difference in the world," said Cabinet Secretary for Finance John Swinney.

"With no fewer than 900 such mentors available across the country, Business Mentoring Scotland is a tremendous asset for Scotland's business community; 8000 businesses have already been helped to fulfil their ambitions and I would encourage yet more of our entrepreneurs to avail themselves of this free service."

One of Scotland's best-known mentors is renowned hospitality sector entrepreneur Maurice Taylor, who has been awarded a certificate of recognition for his work on the Business Mentoring Scotland programme.



Liz Cameron, of Scottish Chambers of Commerce, is one of Scotland's B2B mentoring pioneers.

In addition to mentoring a number of businesses in the hotel and leisure sector over recent years, Taylor has advised an entrepreneur with a new concept for nurseries and children's care on a range of business issues, including franchising and brand management and, most recently, has been advising a farmer who

land programme is that, rather than business consultants offering advice, it is the fact that it is business leaders mentoring other business leaders that makes it so effective.

"A crucial aspect of the programme is that it is individuals who are mentored – not their businesses," she said. "And while mentors encourage mentees to

marketing and business plan together and his input proved very helpful and effective."

Having met the company directors to familiarise himself with its target markets, Dorrian developed a strategy aimed at maximising its potential within the niche market within which it operates.

"I listened to Paul's plans for the business and suggested that he use various social media platforms, which can be a very cost-effective way to target potential business," he said. "Both Paul and Andrew soon understood how to maximise their media opportunities and make informed decisions."

An independent economic impact assessment undertaken last year confirmed that the Business Mentoring Scotland programme generates significant additional effects both for individual businesses and the Scottish economy.

Its calculations were based on survey evidence from businesses showing a net additional gross value added per annum of almost £30m from the programme, with some 960 jobs generated, meaning business mentoring's future in Scotland looks to be assured. ■

'MENTORED COMPANIES TURN OVER MORE, EMPLOY MORE AND PRODUCE MORE THAN THEIR COUNTERPARTS'

turned part of his farm into a small hotel and restaurant.

"I've always believed in the importance of knowledge transfer and know from my own experience in this programme that mentoring can be an effective way to help businesses grow," said Taylor. "It's been a privilege to work with some bright young entrepreneurs and to play a part in helping them achieve their business goals."

According to Fiona McCann, operations director at Scottish Chambers of Commerce, one of the most powerful aspects of the Business Mentoring Scot-

consider various aspects of their business, crucially, they are not there to advise them how to run their business."

PR and marketing specialist Kevin Dorrian offered his services to the business mentoring team at Edinburgh Chamber of Commerce, which duly matched him with Paul Hayes, who runs quality control standards and accreditation firm Kingsway Management Services with his son Andrew.

"I was specifically looking for help with marketing and Kevin was an excellent match," said Hayes. "He helped us pull a