

# Small Business: Finding the right mentor

March 9, 2014 2:56 PM By JAMIE HERZLICH [jherzlich@aol.com](mailto:jherzlich@aol.com)



A good mentor can be invaluable to an entrepreneur, but find the right one, experts advise. (Credit: iStock)

## Jamie Herzlich



Jamie Herzlich

Herzlich writes the Small Business column in Newsday.

[bio](#)

A good mentor can be invaluable to an entrepreneur, providing new insights and serving as a sounding board for ideas.

But not all mentors are created equal, and finding the right one can take time and effort, say experts.

"There's a little bit of art instead of science to this," says Samantha Albery, director of Portland, Ore.-based MicroMentor, an online mentoring platform that connects small business owners with volunteer mentors at no cost.

There's no secret formula to finding a good match, but it begins with the relationship.

"You have to get along with your mentor," Albery says; either it's a fit or it's not.

**1. PARE DOWN YOUR CHOICES.** First identify your biggest challenge, she advises. This will make the mentor search easier.

Be clear on what you're looking for, says Steve Davies, president of Huntington-based Edge Initiatives, a small-business consultancy, and chief executive of The Alternative Board in Nassau County, a membership organization that provides mentoring to its small business members. For instance, do you lack specific skills, or do you need someone to help you find a strategic partner?

**2. USE YOUR RESOURCES.** Tap into your local business community, networking groups and peers for possible matches. Businesses can search for mentors on MicroMentor.org, and this spring state officials plan to launch a website as part of the Business Mentor NY program.

**3. DO SOME HOMEWORK.** If you find a potential match, ask for references and investigate the person's past experience, says Davies. "You want to know who they are and what they've done."

Experience specific to your industry might be helpful but isn't necessary.

**4. MORE THAN ONE MENTOR.** Your challenge may be marketing or improving cash flow, which can be addressed by mentors from various fields, notes Albery. And sometimes the necessary skill sets may be found in more than one mentor.

For Tonia Torrellas, founder of Hicksville-based It's My B Inc., which created a patented reusable dry cleaning bag called It's My Bag, it's been difficult to find mentor matches.

Because she has a "green" company, much of the conventional wisdom doled out by mentors based on the traditional business model of lower price points doesn't apply, she said. In the green industry there's a greater investment up front on the part of the consumer, with the value being reaped over time, she notes.

Torrellas hasn't found one mentor to serve all her needs. Rather, she's garnered advice from a range of sources including groups such as the Hicksville Chamber of Commerce, and a mentorship program through the U.S. Hispanic Chamber of Commerce.

"That mentor's still a resource for me," says Torrellas, who's trying to foster mentor connections for other green businesses through a program she created called It's My B Gives Back. She also hopes it will help small companies band together to distribute their products through gift packages at fundraisers and other events. "I want to be a resource for connecting people," she says.

**5. DO YOU CLICK?** If you're lucky enough to identify a mentor, have a conversation or two to gauge chemistry.

"It really is a highly interpersonal thing," says Barry Klein, chairman of Hauppauge-based SCORE Long Island, which provides free mentoring to businesses.

And plan for more than one interaction. More than 40 percent of SCORE's clients meet more than once with their mentor, says Klein. But if it's not a match, don't force it, he says. "Call and ask for someone different."

Ideally, you and your mentor should meet face-to-face and set guidelines for how often you'll meet and what goals and benchmarks you'll target.

"I want to see they're making progress," says Davies.