

Mentoring for success

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Mentoring has long been a staple in the business world - where a helping hand goes a long way in getting the right contacts and developing business savvy. And mentoring to drive business success is what Venture Accelerate 2003 is bullish about.

netv@lue2.0 spoke to mentors and mentees who have undergone the competition's mentorship programme in the past two years to find out what they learnt.

Lester Neil Francis, general manager of AKN Messaging Technologies Bhd, says being mentored turned out to be different from his initial expectations: "Based on my previous experience with venture capitalists [VCs], I did not have high expectations of AKN Capital Sdn Bhd's mentoring role. Typically, the investor would contribute significantly in financial terms and be passively involved in developing the business."

Francis was mentored by Datuk Ahmad Kabeer Nagoor, executive chairman of AKN Technology Bhd, which is a subsidiary of AKN Capital Sdn Bhd.

"However, I found it refreshing and encouraging that AKN [Capital] wanted to fully support us in growing our business. We were given the autonomy as an independent company to operate and chart the company's directions," Francis says.

AKN Capital helped him and AKN Messaging Technologies explore new business opportunities as well, he adds.

Ahmad Kabeer was, in turn, inspired by his mentees. "The younger breed of entrepreneurs have bright ideas and passion for what they do, which gives me confidence as a mentor," he says of Francis and his other mentee, Vyasa Kandasamy, the chief executive officer of integrated chip design firm Sires Labs Sdn Bhd.

What does he think makes a good mentor? "Having an open mind, especially when things don't happen as quickly as you want them to. Mentoring is not about parking funds and waiting for exit plans. The mentor needs to see the mentee through the whole process," he says.

Vyasa, meanwhile, says that while mentors need to be open and proactive, mentees need to have the right attitude too: "You need to seek good mentors who are willing to share their time and experience with you. Be open to your mentors about your business"

Singapore-based Steven Chan Wing Kong, who is CEO of novaMSC Sdn Bhd, feels that he couldn't have taken his company as far if not for the guidance of his mentor, Eddie Yap, who is general manager of OSK Technology Ventures.

"We were technically well-versed, but we needed guidance in the financial aspects of our business, one of the areas Eddie helped us in," says Chan, adding that through the mentorship

programme, he also learnt the finer points of investor and media relations.

Yap, meanwhile, found mentoring Chan personally rewarding. "Helping a company groom its business is very fulfilling; it's like watching a boy grow into a man," he says.

He believes managing expectations is critical. "Over-expectation, whether on the part of the mentor or mentee, can be detrimental to a good mentor-mentee relationship. The key element is trust, so both parties should be truthful and transparent towards each other."