

# Mentoring

## What is it and why would it help me?



*Rachael Chambers is craft&design's Contemporary Craft Editor. She has recently celebrated 10 years as owner of Ferrers Gallery and for many years has been sharing with students and small craft business entrepreneurs, her experiences in design, marketing and business, gained over the past 20 years.*

The other day I was in quandary. I had a decision to make but couldn't make it, yet when I was discussing it with a friend it became clear what I had to do. She threw in a few 'what if's' and a 'have you thought about' and my mind found a pathway through its previous fogginess and I had my answer. It is often the case that when you orally explain something you clarify your thoughts, which often doesn't happen when untamed creative ideas are racing around your head.

You see, for me, this is how I think of mentoring; an opportunity to discuss ideas and options with someone who is impartial, someone who can question and encourage thinking in new ways, so informed decisions and valuable insights are made.

Going through life without a friend is a lonely existence, and going through business without a mentor is like solitary confinement. This is especially true in the craft industry where many creative individuals work alone. And yes being a mentor myself I am sure to endorse the practice, but I have experienced the worth of being mentored too, for I am always looking for new ways of developing myself and my business as changes happen in life. I have supportive friends and family and great work colleagues, but they can't offer me the impartial sounding board I crave. You see, a mentor is not someone who helps out when things go wrong, they don't know the answers to your problems, but what they do know is how to encourage and direct your thoughts and ideas and to get you thinking about the bigger picture or different options, so you can gain clarity and drive in times of transition or complacency.

I became a mentor quite by chance, it wasn't a career pathway I had chosen. I have a degree in graphic design, a past career in marketing and communications in the arts, education and tourism, and I am owner of Ferrers Gallery, alongside my role as Contemporary Craft Editor for craft&design

magazine. In the early years of having the Ferrers Gallery I was approached by many craft individuals who wanted to 'pick my brains'. Apparently, the career path I have chosen and the knowledge I have gained en route means I have good brains to pick and, along with a listening ear and the ability to give individuals a push in the right direction, it seems I make a good mentor.

But how do you choose a good mentor and what makes a good mentor. Many of you may already have mentors and don't realise it – someone you talk things through with, someone who listens but doesn't dictate, someone who questions but doesn't expect. But for the majority of us those we talk things through with aren't impartial, or don't really understand what we are talking about.

Your chosen mentor needs to be someone who is reputable and trustworthy, but also someone who has an alternative perspective and can give frank, yet constructive advice free of sentiment. I also believe it helps to have someone with experience of the industry, although others may disagree with me;

considering that to get fresh thinking you need to have contrasting roles. But for me, speaking to someone who knows the subject area, has been 'round the block' and has managed the stresses and strains of running a creative business, means their experiences become part of your learning, the ability to foresee problems and share experiences and industry knowledge cements a well nurtured mentoring relationship.

I have over the past few years mentored many creative individuals and the outcomes of the sessions have always been different. Some have resulted in clarity over how they can develop their range and to whom, others have been about time management and priorities, while for others it's how to approach new markets, overcoming personal hurdles and managing a work/life balance. And yet all have left with renewed confidence and vigour.

So for those of you who are seeking focus, a push in the right direction and honest, unbiased

**“Mentoring is to support and encourage people to manage their own learning in order that they maximise their potential, develop their skills, improve their performance and become the person they want to be.”**

Eric Parsloe,  
The Oxford School of Coaching and Mentoring

reasoning, then perhaps mentoring is the way forward for you and your business.

There are currently many mentoring schemes being offered by creative agencies around the UK, many of which are subsidised or free. Schemes that I am aware of are; Craft Central and Walpole - Crafted. There are also schemes offered with regional agencies, such as the scheme offered by Creative Leicestershire - all of which will have their own entry criteria and assessment, so take a look at their websites for further information.

Useful websites:  
[www.craftcentral.org.uk](http://www.craftcentral.org.uk)  
[www.thewalpole.co.uk](http://www.thewalpole.co.uk)  
[www.creativeleicestershire.org.uk](http://www.creativeleicestershire.org.uk)

There are also sessions available with individuals working in the industry such as myself and Pete Mosley.

For details of Rachael's 'Creative Directions' one-to-one mentoring scheme please contact her at E: [crafted@craftanddesign.net](mailto:crafted@craftanddesign.net) or visit [www.ferrersgallery.co.uk](http://www.ferrersgallery.co.uk)



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**Creative Directions**  
Bespoke marketing advice for creative businesses  
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Creative Directions is a tailored one to one creative mentoring programme delivered by award winning businesswoman Rachael Chambers, owner of Ferrers Gallery and Contemporary Craft Editor of craft&design magazine. Programmes can be tailored to suit the individual.

2 hour session costs just £60+VAT



"That was a fantastic meeting. I genuinely enjoyed it. I came away feeling so positive and excited about my business with some firm direction at last, you're fantastic at mentoring, thank you." **Joe'd Mode**

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