

NEW STUDY HELPS DEFINE EFFECTIVE FOUNDERS' MENTORING

ENTREPRENEUR FUTURES NETWORK (EFN)

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Mentoring is all over the news these days especially with regards to helping young people navigate their careers. There are dozens of startups and even tech giants like LinkedIn trying to connect mentoring and volunteer advisors to professional and career development.

But what is a mentor versus a coach or advisor, and what are the true benefits of mentoring? Our new report "[Mentoring in Startup Ecosystems](#)" written by researchers from the [University of Michigan](#) and [Entrepreneur Futures Network](#) with funding from the Ewing Marion [Kauffman Foundation](#) provides insight from perhaps the most intense professional mentoring experience young people have - starting a company.

This two-year study of over 800 respondents at 41 private and university entrepreneurial programs including most of the top business schools and [Techstars](#), sheds new light on what makes mentorship successful. Researchers found that while training, tools, and matching could be improved, a key element to success is when mentors and mentees have a learning mindset. That means they believe relevant skills can be developed, as opposed to someone being a "born entrepreneur."

“This is an important finding because people who have a learning mindset — who believe that skills can be learned vs. being born with an inherent ability — appear more satisfied with the entire mentoring process,” says Jeffrey Sanchez-Burks, study co-author and professor of management and organizations at the University of Michigan.

“There’s a lot of goodwill out there from people who have enjoyed success and want to give back,” says Sanchez-Burks. “It’s really remarkable to see strangers helping strangers for no economic gain. It doesn’t happen in many places in the world. Universities and entrepreneurial hubs are where the goodwill happens, and what we’re trying to do is help better organize and structure this gem.

“We’re finding that keeping mentors and startup founders engaged takes a lot of TLC and hands-on attention,” says David Brophy, co-author and professor of finance and director of Michigan’s Center for Venture Capital & Private Equity Finance. “There’s a lot of inconsistency in how that’s done and it’s because these programs all kind of sprung up organically across the country. They’ve done some good things and not-good things, so this is an effort to break across those silos and learn from each other.”

The study resonates with entrepreneurs and venture capitalists. According to JB Duler, Founder of [Esurance](#), “I did not have access to good mentors when I founded Esurance. Everybody gave me some advice and that proved to be bad advice too often. This new study shows that structured mentoring can fill this gap for young entrepreneurs.”

According to Mina Sooch, serial biotech entrepreneur and investor [[Gemphire](#), ProNAi (now [Sierra Oncology](#)), [Apjohn Ventures](#)] “a good entrepreneur learns

from her own mistakes and experiences. A great entrepreneur learns to avoid common mistakes from the collective experiences of their business and technical mentors and focuses their precious time on planning for all scenarios. Mentoring by a diverse set of individuals has been fundamental to my public and private biotech successes, and as this study highlights, it is important for me and other successful entrepreneurs to give back and share their hard-earned wisdom, and new platforms to create global and local connections are critically important.”

Bill Reichert, Co-Founder of [Garage Technology Ventures](#) says, “one of the critical factors for entrepreneurial success is good mentoring. This study defines what good and effective mentoring is and provides a cogent model for accelerators and universities to use to select, train and guide entrepreneurs and mentors alike.”

Sharing his personal experience as a [Forbes 30 under 30](#) entrepreneur, Matthew Rooda, CEO of [SwineTech](#), says that “this study helps define the significance and importance of mentoring and validates that having strong mentors is vital. From my experience, when we are moving fast and are grinding along we need mentors there to keep us in check, offer new insights, and to help put out fires.”

Dalton Shaull, President of [Health Tech Solutions](#), also a recent [Forbes 30 under 30](#) entrepreneur, says “this research shows that structured and well-organized mentoring platforms, like EFN, make finding and working with strong advisors and professionals easier and more effective than only relying on one’s personal networks.”

Richard Kramlich, Co-Founder of [New Enterprise Associates](#) “my former partner and mentor, Arthur Rock, taught me to only partner with people with character and those whom you respect and trust. The study shows that people with these qualities are what entrepreneurs seek most in mentors.”

“Mentorship is at the core of what drives [Techstars](#), where we strive to be great leaders and help others be great,” said Ted Serbinski, Managing Director for Techstars Mobility. “This study shows the importance of nurturing talent in all levels of experience. I’ve been fortunate enough to have excellent mentors throughout my life, who have made all the difference in my success and how I help others succeed.”

Thomas Jensen, Founder of [EFN](#) and co-author of the report hopes that the study “helps improve mentoring, both formal and informal, to unleash the full potential of this precious gem to benefit our Nation’s founders.”

[Download](#) the study.

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About EFN

[EFN](#) is a U.S national non-profit organization that empowers young entrepreneurs through mentoring. EFN has the privilege to work with 41 university and private mentoring and research partners providing training, software tools and managed mentoring programs. Our 500 mentors have coached over 5000 entrepreneurs, many of which have developed outstanding startups.