



Mentoring Distributors



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Art Waskey is a speaker who truly delivers. In addition to a 45 year career in sales and marketing, Art is the author of multiple books on selling and a monthly column The Art of Sales. He shares these insights as an in demand event and conference speaker as well as leadership coach.

The objective of a mentoring program is to pass on the skills and knowledge of senior professionals to those rising through the ranks. A mentor's job is to help a business leader answer the question, "What do I need to do to move my company forward?"

Choosing a mentor

If your company could benefit from some advice, look for a mentor with deep experience and success in a business like yours. Serving as a mentor to emerging leaders in the atmospheric gas and welding supply distribution channel has been one of my most rewarding professional opportunities. My biographic sketch, which follows, is an example of the caliber of senior mentors available to coach the next generation. As a gas and welding distributor channel professional, I began with a degree in Mechanical Engineering. I spent the first 13 years of my career climbing the corporate

ladder at an international distributor supplier. When required travel became too extensive for me, I decided to take a more regional job. I joined a family held, independent distributor and for the next 34 years served as its Vice President of Sales. As VP, I helped grow the business from \$5M to \$65M. After retiring from that company, I became a consultant to owners of distribution companies under \$10M.

An affordable choice

If you feel your business has grown past your in-house leadership capabilities, take advantage of the knowledge a mentor has to offer.

The objective of a mentoring program is to pass on skills and knowledge. I have found that most small or medium size distributors (SMB) will grow rapidly with support from senior professionals. These executives have established networks, leadership skills, and a knowledge base of proven solutions. Tapping into that



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kind of expertise usually involves hiring a highly paid consultant. By enlisting a mentor, you benefit from the expertise of a seasoned professional and one specific to your industry. For the smaller, privately-held independent distributor mentoring is an affordable and smart choice.

Steps to take

Executive mentors can help guide your business to growth. Here are some steps you can take with a coach.

Step 1: Understand the issues – All current growth issues should be summarized in a mind map. A mind map focuses on recording key ideas and looking for connections between them as projects. Too often I see projects that are never brought into focus because they have gone unrecorded. When understanding the issues by writing them down, most SMBs have 15 to 20 unrecorded projects. Frustration related to a feeling of lack of control occurs when successful businesses grow beyond their current capabilities. Problems can seem never ending. A mentor can help lead you through the mapping process so this does not occur. In “The Seven Habits of Highly Effective People,” Stephen Covey suggests you start the mapping process by putting first things first — his Habit #3 (franklincovey.com/habit-3). He recommends listing projects under two categories — Important and Urgent, and, Important but not Urgent.

Step 2: Prioritize the Projects – A mentor can be invaluable with project prioritization and evaluation based on his experience. Each week he can ask your team to list, in order of urgency, the Top 5 Projects that need to be moved forward with specific actions.

Step 3: Create Next Steps – Each Top 5 Project will likely require many actions. Use a mentor to help you plan each incremental step. Having seen/solved many issues before, your mentor can help you with the chronology of actionable steps.

Step 4: Implement Solutions – A mentor comes with a network of suppliers, equipment, and software providers he has engaged with in the past. Tapping into that network can help a distributor move more efficiently through project steps. For example, a distributor in the gas and welding industry may already have bulk CO2, and now wants to produce dry ice. If your mentor was once a manufacturer of dry ice, he will know several suppliers who can provide the best equipment, installation, and cost. This expedites your start-up.

Step 5: Track Completed Projects – There is no better motivation than visualization of past accomplishments. When a project is completed it should be dated and listed on a mind map. I suggest recording them under the corporate divisions: Executive, Operations, Sales, and Administration.

Creative Solutions

In today’s distribution business there are a growing number of seniors with backgrounds and leadership skill sets who can mentor SMBs to tremendous heights. The objective of a mentor is to find creative solutions for your business by understanding your specific needs. Find one to help you.



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5 KEY TAKEAWAYS

- The objective of a mentor is to find creative solutions for your business.
- Look for a mentor with deep experience and success in a business like yours.
- Executive mentors can help guide your business to growth.
- A mentor can help you understand the issues and prioritize projects.
- Highly qualified mentors are available and are an affordable choice for SMBs.