



## Developing a Community of High-Quality Coach/Mentors

There have been many business mentoring schemes initiated with the intention of supporting the development of new and young businesses. A high proportion of these are based on selecting experienced business people as coach/mentors who are willing to share this experience. This programme overachieved on its deliverables and importantly overcame the common issues of dependency and poor knowledge transfer to enhance the learning of those being mentored.

**Client Profile:** SEEDA (South East England Development Agency) recognises that mentoring is a valuable means of raising the capabilities of high-tech, knowledge-based SMEs. Development of these businesses forms a key part of the Regional Development Strategy. A new approach was needed.

**Background:** SEEDA wished to bring together a partnership with the objectives of recruiting, training and building a community of 70 high calibre mentors with successful track records of building businesses in the private sector. The aim was to provide specialist business-to-business mentoring on a pro bono basis to 250 knowledge-based SMEs over a 3 year period. LeaderShape was recognised as an organisation that could design the mentor recruitment process, develop mentor-entrepreneur frameworks and code of practice, and train and supervise the mentors. LeaderShape worked closely as partners with Finance South East Ltd, who were responsible for overall management of the project, and the Enterprise Hub Network, whose role was to identify entrepreneurs needing mentoring, assist in mentor recruitment and the matching process and integrate the project with the wider role of the Hubs. The project was co-funded by SEEDA and the European Social Fund (ESF). It was given the name Merlin.

**The Merlin Training and Supervision Programme:** was devised by LeaderShape and based on best-practice experienced and developed during coach training of senior LeaderShape personnel. Other elements were drawn from management and delivery of an Institute of Directors CEO Peergroup programme

*“Entrepreneurs in the Enterprise Hub Network across the South East of England have benefited significantly from the support provided by Merlin mentors. The high quality of the mentoring skills and the professionalism they brought to these engagements is substantially attributable to the carefully tailored mentor training and supervision programme run by LeaderShape.”*  
- Marilyn Huckerby –  
Enterprise Hub Network Director

# CASE STUDY

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based around action-learning and personal 1-2-1 coaching.

Mentors were trained in Cohorts of 9-12 run by a LeaderShape Tutor. The training programme lasted 12 months and comprised:

- ✔ An initial 2 ½ day residential induction programme with mentors split into training Cohorts of 9-12 people
- ✔ A series of 5 Cohort meetings through the 12 month training period
- ✔ 1-2-1 coach/mentoring and supervision sessions between each Cohort meeting

The induction programme focused on introducing the concepts and principles of coaching and mentoring and how these could be effectively combined with the insights and experience of the mentors to develop the entrepreneurs' capabilities and confidence. Participants were then taken through basic coaching techniques including questioning, listening and communication skills and process management. These were embedded by 2 coaching practice sessions using real-life issues. In addition, attention was drawn to the nature of the relationships and situations they were likely to form and meet and how these should be managed in a professional way.

The Cohort meetings provided an opportunity to share experiences in an action learning context and to learn new mentoring skills, processes and techniques.

The 1-2-1 coaching supervision sessions, delivered face-to-face or by telephone, stretched the competence of the Merlin mentors, building confidence, techniques and benefit to the clients.

### Results at the end of the programme

The Merlin project over-achieved its aims in and was judged to be an outstanding success both by SEEDA and ESF, providing a stock of high quality coach/mentors in the South East region. Major outcomes included:

- ✔ Rigorous selection (60% of applicants rejected) and formal training guaranteed competence.
- ✔ Formal supervision by an experienced coach ensured quality in practice and facilitated professional development
- ✔ The value of high-quality professional training that was recognised by SEEDA, ESF, the Enterprise Hubs, the entrepreneurs and the Merlin mentors themselves.
- ✔ A recognised strengthening of client businesses
- ✔ The Merlin mentor community has been used to support other initiatives and mentoring programmes in the South East.

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