

# How Helping Other Entrepreneurs Could Be the Smartest Investment You Ever Make

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## Key Takeaways

- Mentorship can be a “rising tide lifts all boats” activity.
- Don’t engage in mentorship with personal or professional gain as the primary motivator.
- As you engage in mentorship, do it without any expectations of return.

It takes a lot more than cash to build a business. Entrepreneurs need knowledge, networks and confidence to get their ideas off the ground. Business growth occurs more quickly with a mentor, and international business growth through U.S. mentors is thriving.

Mentorship is an effective way to catalyze business success for founders worldwide who are seeking to carve out new market share. It can reduce failure rates and set the stage for scalable business growth. It can also help spark innovation and connect the dots between ideas and execution.

The U.S. has a vast number of established business leaders who can participate in the mentorship process. If you’re an investor and startup enthusiast like me, you’re probably aware

of the potential to have a positive impact here. If you're wondering how you can do that, I have you covered.

Here are three ways you can use mentorship as a mutually beneficial financial lever that fosters global economic growth and generates investment opportunities through high-potential entrepreneurs in emerging markets.

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## 1. Participate in international mentorship networks

Connection is key to mentorship. You can't help someone if you don't know who they are, where they're operating or why their business exists.

Mentorship networks facilitate the formation of those connections. Entrepreneurs Across Borders (EAB) is an example of one of these. It helps established U.S. entrepreneurs connect with startup leaders in other countries, where they can offer life-changing advice to those working in more restrictive systems or with fewer resources and support structures.

EAB Executive Director Chris Cochran discussed several cases in which such interventions led to quantitative improvement in founders' lives. One was in Jamaica, where economic reforms and a tourism boom are currently creating numerous opportunities. Cochran said that while the potential is there, he recalled a business owner with 17 employees who was struggling organizationally. An EAB mentor spent 20 minutes with them, during which they helped unlock new growth opportunities. Six months later, the company had expanded to 70 employees simply by following the mentor's advice.

Mentorship starts with connection. If you are trying to get

involved as a mentor, you must begin by finding a network that serves as a communication hub. This is where you connect knowledge with needs and build lasting relationships.

## **2. Co-develop business models with long-term monetization in mind**

Mentorship is unique in the sense that it focuses not on your bottom line or the next step for your enterprise. At its core, it is a selfless act that helps support the mentee. If you want it to work, you can't engage in mentorship with personal or professional gain as the primary motivator.

That said, mentorship can often be mutually beneficial. This is especially true if you're willing to invest in others with confidence and play the long game with patience.

One way to do this is by identifying entrepreneurs who require assistance in developing their business models. The EAB reference above is a great example of this. Cochran shared another story about a group of mentors who came alongside an ambitious business owner with plans to expand beyond her own country. They cautioned her to dominate her current market before taking on a higher-risk expansion project.

Such advice can help inexperienced business leaders avoid costly mistakes. It leads to sustainable short-term growth and better long-term viability. Mentors can then naturally position themselves to tangentially benefit from that growth over time without taking advantage of or destabilizing it.

As you engage in mentorship, do it without any expectations of return. This does not mean that you will not receive a return, but if you are mentoring as a means to gain leverage, equity, or a board seat, you will miss the point. It will come back around to you, but if that's your primary motivation, you have missed the point of mentorship.

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### 3. Help scalable ventures achieve sustainable future growth

Along with improving business models in the present, mentorship can pave the way for sustainable growth in the future. A mentor who has already been through scaling a business can provide early and ongoing guidance in various areas, including:

- **Capital readiness:** Setting up a growing startup to be attractive to investors
- **Creating external ecosystems:** Building and bolstering supply chains and strategic partnerships
- **Connecting with investors:** Providing critical advice, from how to access investors to how to pitch them, and then managing funding

This is where you can draw inspiration from examples like the entrepreneurship-supporting nonprofit Endeavor Global's work with Mercado Libre. The Latin American e-commerce and fintech marketplace was an early selection for Endeavor. Since receiving its support in 1999, Mercado Libre has been able to connect with investors and grow, culminating in a U.S. IPO in 2007. Ten years later, it reached a market value of \$10 billion.

If a group like Endeavor had not come alongside Mercado Libre, the startup likely would have struggled to grow so quickly and effectively. As you seek mentorship opportunities, consider looking beyond current operations. Look for ways to set each company up to fully leverage its growth potential.

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# International mentoring with purpose

Mentorship can be a “rising tide lifts all boats” activity. U.S. business leaders can create real financial impact, operational efficiency, and business growth through mentorship opportunities. When that happens, they benefit both the founders they work with and their own position as leaders and investors.

Another powerful and sometimes overlooked benefit of international mentorship is the network of genuine relationships it fosters. Mentors often find themselves building connections that span all levels of society—from government leaders and policymakers to business owners and industry leaders. These relationships, forged through shared effort and mutual respect, extend far beyond professional collaboration. They form lasting friendships and global networks that can open doors, strengthen communities, and create opportunities neither side could have envisioned on their own.

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