

# WHAT YOU NEED TO KNOW!

*Mowgli Foundation defines mentoring as “having someone who tells you what you need to know, not necessarily what you want to hear.” On the basis of the Mowgli Foundation’s vast initiatives in the MENA region, Kathleen Bury, Business Manager for GCC and North Africa, Mowgli Foundation, provides us with an insight into the power of mentorship.*



**Kathleen Bury** is the Business Manager, GCC and North Africa, and Marketing & Communications Manager at Mowgli Foundation. She holds a BA Hons degree in Business and Quality Management from the Nottingham Trent Business School. She has a robust understanding of the challenges that entrepreneurs and SMEs face today when setting up and growing their businesses. Kathleen can be contacted at [kathleen.bury@mowgli.org.uk](mailto:kathleen.bury@mowgli.org.uk)

The youth unemployment rate within the Middle East and North Africa (MENA) region currently stands at 27% (18-35 years old) and is the highest globally. Unfortunately, this situation is worsening. Between 50-80 million jobs are required over the next ten years to maintain the current levels of unemployment, signifying the requirement for a 40% expansion in available jobs (*Arabia Monitor, World Bank 2012*). This is a highly daunting goal.

A key way to address this huge unemployment challenge is the incubation, development and support of sustainable entrepreneurship and small and medium enterprises (SMEs). To foster an environment conducive to private enterprise development, a number of factors are required:

- Strengthening of regulatory frameworks
- Access to infrastructure
- Access to capital
- Access to appropriate business skills training and mentoring

It was with the latter in mind that the Mowgli Foundation was founded in 2008.

The Mowgli Foundation is an award winning, UK headquartered mentorship organisation, which

seeks to place mentorship at the heart of supporting entrepreneurship and leadership development. With primary operational focus on the MENA region, Mowgli provides trained mentors to inspire, support and empower entrepreneurs in achieving their business and personal potential. This is achieved through the recruitment, training and matching of mentors with entrepreneurs in relational and business mentoring relationships through their unique and unparalleled yearlong *Mowgli Mentoring Experience (MME)* programmes. Through these yearlong facilitated mentoring relationships, Mowgli aims to encourage sustainable business growth as well as social and economic development.

Since its launch, Mowgli has conducted 30 *Mowgli Mentoring Experience (MME)* programmes in Jordan, Lebanon, Syria, Palestine, Algeria, and the UK. In November 2012, Mowgli launched their first programme in Qatar, together with their local partner Enterprise Qatar. This programme, sponsored by Norman Broadbent and Social Development Centre (SDC), saw the partnering of eight predominantly Qatari entrepreneurs with eight high caliber mentors from Qatar, Jordan, Egypt, India, England and Ireland who all have MENA experience.

In an effort to increase the growth and success rate of micro-entrepreneurs into small and medium

sized businesses, Mowgli has also run three micro-entrepreneur focused mentoring programmes in Egypt, in collaboration with Silatech and Alexandria Business Association, and in Jordan, with Ahli Microfinance Company, a subsidiary of Jordan Ahli Bank. Through all 33 programmes, Mowgli has matched over 250 mentors with 220 startup and growth-phase entrepreneurs and 30 micro-entrepreneurs. In 2012 they doubled the size of the Mowgli Alumni, which now exceeds 540.

As a result of this progress, Mowgli was recognised with the *Mohammed bin Rashid Award for Young Business Leaders for the Best Mentor Network in the Arab World*, in December 2012.

### So, what is mentoring?

“A mentor is someone who stands beside you in a shoulder-to-shoulder relationship and works with you to empower you to develop your own leadership, thought process and decision-making capabilities. They do this by acting as a listener, friend, mirror and sounding board and, therefore, they don’t tell you what to do, but provide you with hope, aspiration and motivation,” explained Kathleen Bury, Mowgli Business Manager for GCC and North Africa.

### Why is it so important?

On every entrepreneurial journey, the business the entrepreneur is nurturing will have a lifetime of development, overseen, guided and indeed lived by the entrepreneur him or herself. As a result, the entrepreneurial learning often goes through several distinct phases of growth and development, along with the business. Within these phases, three of the most challenging times, where Mowgli believes an entrepreneur can benefit from a highly skilled mentor are:

#### ■ Startup

This is where the business moves from conception to when it breaks even, also known as the “hockey

stick” – a large component of success in this phase is down to intangible factors such as capability, social skills and attitude of the entrepreneur. This sums up to what business scholars call “human capital”. When applied to entrepreneurship, human capital is equated with the prime ability to assess risk accurately and take decisions based upon this assessment. Therefore, confidence, self-awareness and judgment are crucial skills. Having an experienced business owner or a professional who is trained as a mentor alongside you, facilitates the development of these capabilities and enables you to approach challenges differently.

#### ■ Growth

This is where the business moves from breaking even to sustainable growth. The growth phase of a business is a well-documented phenomenon, but it is not a precise science. With new business models and new industry trends changing the shape of traditional growth patterns, the only thing that is certain is that this phase brings entrepreneurs both rewards and challenges as their business changes. Many entrepreneurs fail to take into account, once they begin making money, that the skills required to work on a growing, established business are fundamentally different than those required at startup level. A mentor can assist an entrepreneur to recognise their own strength and weaknesses and identify any subsequent limitations that may be inflicted on the business. This self-assessment is really tough to do on one’s own. In addition, the mentor may also help the entrepreneur to see that they may not be the most appropriate person to lead the organisation.

#### ■ Success

This is a rarely discussed, and in fact rarely reached phase where the successful entrepreneur, after



**The three critical stages of an entrepreneurs journey when they need a montor**



overcoming the previous two phases, can, if not checked, reach the “hubristic” or “ego” phase. At this point, many entrepreneurs jeopardise everything they have aspired to, as they lose the ability to question the drivers of their own success. They begin to take success for granted and complacently neglect their business – refuse to innovate, ignore risks and become undisciplined in the pursuit of more. Many successful entrepreneurs who have avoided both the personal and professional downfalls of hubris and boredom, for example Richard Branson and David Packard, have chosen to surround themselves with people, continually acknowledge the efforts of others and the importance of the team rather than the lone wolf. A mentor can offer both constructive criticism and a neutral space in which the entrepreneur has no need to pretend to be invincible and can help an entrepreneur to find new learning opportunities, as well as provide an antidote for euphoria.

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Given the region’s relatively recent entrepreneurial drive, the majority of Mowgli’s entrepreneurs are operating within the startup and growth phases. Following the completion of the programme, Mowgli’s impact data highlights that:

- Each entrepreneur under Mowgli mentorship, on average, creates two to three jobs in the first year and the trend seems to continue

- 90% would recommend the *Mowgli Mentoring Experience (MME)* to other entrepreneurs
- 80% say that mentoring has helped them develop confidence in their business decision-making
- 80% say that they would like to continue with the mentoring relationship after the yearlong Mowgli facilitated relationship comes to an end
- 75% say that their mentor has helped them in addressing personal doubts about the direction of their business and has helped them to understand how to move their business onto the next growth stage
- 70% say that they would either like to become a Mowgli mentor or mentor others in their community as a result of their experience with the foundation
- 50% say that they have expanded their business product offering, increased their client list and secured more contracts under Mowgli mentorship as well as predicted higher profits at the end of the coming financial year, over the previous year

However, it is not only the entrepreneurs that benefit from the mentoring relationship and exchange, but the mentors themselves through their own personal and leadership development. The learning process is also a period of self-awareness and self-discovery for the mentors, which results in the development of new competencies that can be applied in all areas of their personal and professional lives. Following the completion of the programme:

- 90% said that they will seek further opportunities to mentor in the future
- 80% said that their mentoring experience had been valuable to them and that they would recommend the programme to other professionals
- 80% said that their participation on the programme improved their active listening skills and their empathy/understanding of others
- 55% said that the skills they have learnt have been useful in their own professional settings, in terms of the way they deal with colleagues, staff and clients

It is clear that by providing entrepreneurs with a solid mentoring relationship, the chances of sustainable growth and success are increased. However, the benefits go far beyond supporting entrepreneurship, as mentoring also enables and facilitates the development of different leadership models. Tony Bury, Mowgli’s Founder and Trustee Board Member, defines leadership simply as, “to serve is to lead.” He says, ‘if I serve you, and you follow me, then I will become a leader. The greatest gift that one human being can give to another is their time to mentor them. If someone cannot mentor, they cannot lead.’ ■