

Peer-to-Peer Mentoring is in at Startups

Turning to seniors for advice is passé, young entrepreneurs today are ready to exchange notes in areas where they share synergies

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Bengaluru: Who would you turn to for advice if things were not going according to plan at the workplace? Somebody much older and wiser who has been there, done that, and you can look up to? Well, many young entrepreneurs do not seem to be settling for this seemingly default option.

Harsh Jain, the founder of interior design and building services startup Nestopia, regularly bounces ideas on strategy off fellow entrepreneur Mayank Lhila, co-founder of travel startup Tripifini.

In the past couple of months, Lhila has helped Jain with legal resources and advice on issuing employee stock options or ESOPs. And this works both ways, with Jain giving Lhila suggestions on a viable online marketing strategy.

Jain and Lhila are part of an expanding fraternity of entrepreneurs who are increasingly relying on peers for mentorship.

“Young founders like us have

much to gain from older, experienced mentors, but a peer has a greater level of understanding,” Jain told E.T. “Lhila knows the space I’m working in by virtue of being an entrepreneur himself. We frequently talk about areas we can share resources in.”

Similar is the case with Satish Kannan, co-founder of DocsApp and Vivek Rajkumar, founder of Aibono.

Recently, when Kannan found performance issues with an employee, he was debating with himself whether to let the employee go. Under Rajkumar’s suggestion, though, Kannan tried out the employee in another role, where the employee flourished.

“We are also in touch with Tarun Mehta of Ather Energy, who gives us suggestions on scaling up and hiring the right people,” Kannan said.

Peer-to-peer mentoring is a great step in the evolution of the startup

ecosystem, said Jappreet Sethi, CEO of YoStartups, which provides consultation services to startups. Silicon Valley has become what it is today because communities of interest developed and entrepreneurs connected with each other not on common strengths but on common weaknesses, he said.

More than 40 co-founders of various early-stage startups in the portfolio of White Unicorn Ventures regularly communicate with each other on the Stack platform. Rohit Chokhani, principal founder at the Mumbai-based early stage venture capital firm said there are different threads related to hiring, technology, intern transfers and the like, where emerging entrepreneurs share synergies and feed off each other’s ideas.

“Young startups often do not have the financial resources to experiment with technology, because it’s expensive. A major trend we are seeing is that co-founders are sharing technology resources in order to be able to sustain themselves in the long run,” Chokhani said.

Pushkar Singh, founder of travel

Starting a New Trend



Young entrepreneurs are realising it’s a win-win situation if they take their peers into confidence

Early-stage startups don’t have financial resources to experiment with tech, so they learn from each other’s mistakes



logistics startup LetsTransport, said the startup ecosystem itself plays a pivotal role in helping entrepreneurs capitalise on their peers’ experience. The IIT Kharagpur-alumnus is in regular touch with other alumni through informal forums for entrepreneurs, which are focused on discussions around hiring, team-building, product creation and beta testing.

“In the startup world, things change very quickly and time is of the essence. We can’t afford to make mistakes, so we learn from the

mistakes of others,” Singh said.

Rohan and Swati Bhargava, co-founders of CashKaro, were recently part of a meeting organised by global leadership network H2, brought to India by People Group CEO Anupam Mittal and Qyuki managing director Samir Bangara.

“H2 was a great platform for us to connect with other entrepreneurs, as it’s been designed to bring together people with common interest,” said Rohan Bhargava, who is also part of a Whatsapp group of 150-200 Gurgaon and Delhi-based entre-

preneurs. “In our meetups, we have candid chats about growth hacks, the challenges within the ecosystem and navigating opportunities for expansion.”

Rashi Menda, founder of fashion startup Zapyle, credited the founder of a food startup, who declined to be identified, with validating her ideas. “Recently, this founder helped me come up with better ideas for more creative customer acquisition. He was happy to share his numbers and insights, helping me make up my mind to concentrate on the online market,” she said.

Menda said Voonik founder Sujayath Ali and Myntra CEO Ananth Narayanan have also given her valuable advice on pushing for success in fashion business.

YoStartups’s Sethi says peer-to-peer mentoring is a winner because of its informal nature. “The regular channels of mentoring are much more structured, but when young entrepreneurs connect with each other at networking events, through Whatsapp, or other mediums, they build a strong support system where people give and get back.”