

What's the new approach to mentoring?

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Captain of industry and ANZ Bank chairman David Gonski reportedly has one.

So does Michael Sherlock, the former Brumby's Bakeries' CEO turned franchising consultant and commercial property investment spruiker.

Could a reverse mentor – a bright young thing who has grown up LOLing, tweeting and posting pix on Instagram – be the helpmate you need to start mixing it with confidence in the digital business milieu?

Yes, if you're an old dinosaur like me, says Sherlock, who's become *au fait* with the ins and outs of search engine optimisation and social media sales campaigns courtesy of 35-year-old digital marketing specialist Tim Bambrick.

The pair started to meet regularly after Bambrick approached him for advice on a start-up venture. When Sherlock later took on the role of chief marketing officer for Sentinel, the Queensland-based property investment fund, the tables turned.

Charged with overhauling Sentinel's website and drumming up investors without using brokers, Sherlock realised he needed to get to grips with the new media landscape he'd previously managed to avoid.

"I thought it was all hocus pocus," Sherlock says.

"I wanted to get my head around it."

Sherlock hired Bambrick's marketing consultancy and made it his mission to pick Bambrick's brains at their fortnightly catch-ups, as well as taking part in the creation of an online campaign that's raised \$250 million on a shoestring budget.

"Tim was taking an old dinosaur like me through what can be done on the internet," Sherlock says.

"An old dog can learn new tricks – and can end up looking pretty good."

As well as helping in the Sentinel gig, the knowledge upgrade has made him a better mentor and board member for the other businesses he works with, some of which Sherlock says are as clueless as he once was about all things digital.

"It gives me the capacity as a grey-haired franchising guy who's comfortable with what new systems can do," he says.

Over at ANZ Bank, chairman Gonski has hooked up with social media strategist Sarah Anderson for a similar skills transfer, but he's not the only one.

For the past 18 months, the bank has run a formal reverse-mentoring scheme which has linked 70 senior executives across Australia and New Zealand with 'social media ambassadors' for one-to-one coaching.

The program was the brainchild of ANZ CEO Mike Smith, who had a 'lightbulb moment' on a trip to Silicon Valley two years ago, according to ANZ's general manager for Small Business Banking Kate Gibson, who is an alumnus.

While senior staff appreciate that going social is essential in the modern banking era, "it's one thing to say, 'Get on board', and another to get all up to speed," Gibson says.

The formal program has allowed mentors to "tease out what executives are trying to achieve", while having a digital native on speed dial has helped ensure mentees put their newfound knowledge into practice.

"The rubber hits the road when you actually start doing it," Gibson says.

"The idea is to have people [as reverse mentors] who are tech savvy and passionate about the social media landscape and are already using it."

The bank has no shortage of reverse mentors keen to pass on the digital smarts most under-35s takes for granted.

"It's an opportunity to contribute and share expertise and build a relationship with a senior person at the bank," Gibson says.

"The notion that life is linear, you build experience and hand it down, is turned on its head."



Michael Sherlock has one - do you need one too?

Programs such as ANZ's are less about traditional 'mentoring' than a transfer of specific skills, according to executive coach Virginia Mansell.

"There are so many structural changes around IT and social media – the younger ones have all these technical skills that older senior executives don't," she says.

Knowledge sharing is already insidious in the best organisations, says careers expert Edwin Trevor-Roberts.

"The best mentoring I've seen take place is the informal mentoring that emerges out of a strong relationship between two people," he says.

"In such a relationship, founded on mutual respect, a genuine like of each other, a shared moral compass and common goal then the relationship becomes a natural two-way mentoring where ideas and knowledge are freely given and freely received."

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