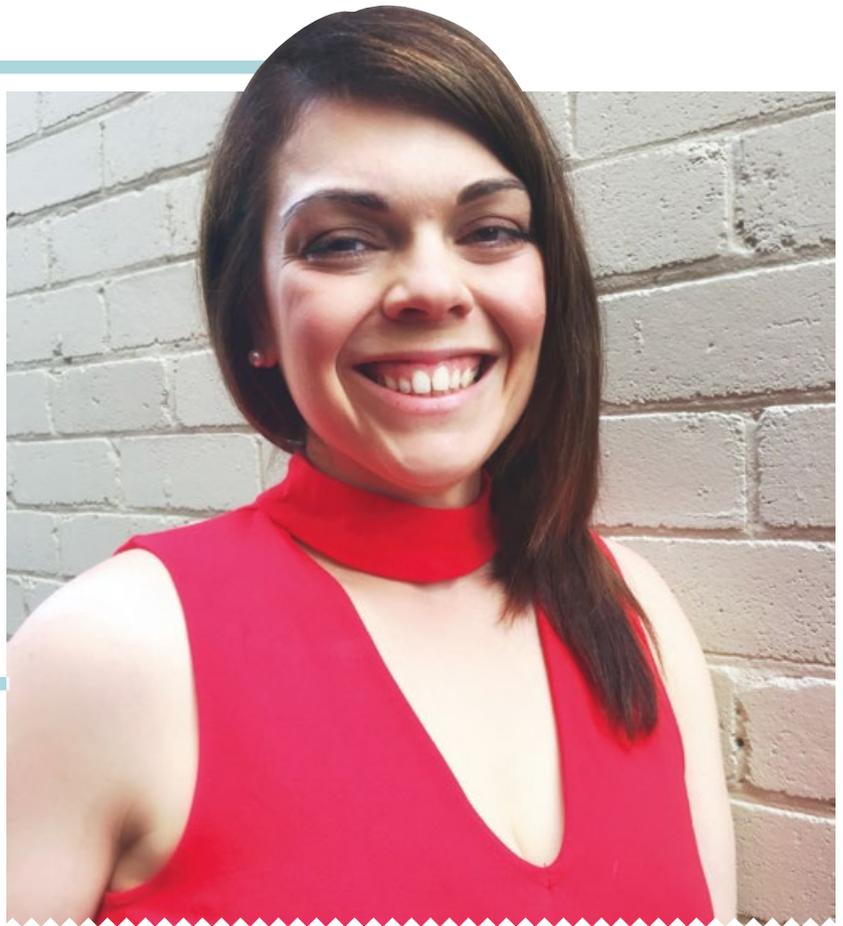


GIOVANNA LEVER

Founder
and Director,
Sparrows
United



Lever, who runs a professional mentoring program as part of the consulting arm of her business, says that even though she is a mentor, she still has mentors.

"There are coaches and there are mentors. Coaches guide you towards a specific goal, like winning a race or getting a promotion. Mentors look at your situation holistically – the professional and the personal – and provide advice and feedback to help you keep in balance and moving forward. Everyone should have a mentor," says Lever.

Plenty of leaders wind up in their positions because of their hard technical skills but have never learnt about the intricacies of what it means to be a leader. According to Lever, soft skills should not be underestimated and are as important as technical skills.

Lever says, "Many leaders don't want to show weakness but good leaders should be working 360 degrees with their people. One-on-one meetings with team members need to be an open dialogue where employees feel comfortable airing their grievances or concerns. I have been hammered by my team at times but then I go away and reflect on the conversation. In most cases, they have a point and I have adjusted my approach accordingly."

In addition to her regular mentoring clients, Lever and her business partner have plans to launch E4, a professional mentor matching program that will roll-out nationally to support mentees from a high school level right up to an entry level management stage. This will launch later this year.

In terms of the method, Lever says that it doesn't matter so long as it works for both parties.

"I have some clients who I meet with face-to-face, others who I 'walk and talk' with, either in real life or on the phone, and others that I Facetime with. I have clients around the country so it needs to be a flexible process," she said.

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When it comes to the rules of engagement for mentees and mentors, Lever says the following six things are the key to a successful relationship:

1. Listen to your mentee. Ask them, 'What is your biggest challenge right now?'
2. Check commitment levels. Do you have time? Do they have time? You need to respect each other's time.
3. Frame the process and build structure around it.
4. Set homework for your mentees. This is so that they can put the discussions and learnings into practice.
5. Hold them accountable.
6. Give constructive feedback. Be the 'critical friend' everyone needs. ■