Christchurch NZ: Business mentorship a game changer for first time owners

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Discover how business mentorship for first-time business owners helped a Christchurch salon grow faster. Learn why mentoring is a game changer.

Business mentorship for first-time business owners

When Tri Phung and his business partner Nghi Dinh launched 1999 House of Nails in 2022, they were stepping into unfamiliar territory.

“We didn’t know a lot about setting up a business,” Tri says.

“Running a team, having a plan, understanding finance – all of that was new to us.”

Like many first-time business owners, they quickly realised that learning on the job without guidance could be costly.

Why is business mentorship important for first-time owners?

Starting a business involves far more than delivering a great product or service. For Tri, mentorship became the missing piece.

A few months after opening, they joined the Business Mentors New Zealand programme through ChristchurchNZ and were matched with mentor Hannah Doney.

“We were really lucky to be matched with Hannah. She was extremely helpful and gave insightful advice. We met monthly, and she guided us through that start-up phase – operations, finance, hiring, marketing, everything.” - Tri Phung - 1999 House of Nails

How can mentors support business structure and partnerships?

Hannah helped them set up the right business structure.

“My partner and I started the business together, and she recommended clear partnership agreements and getting professional advice where needed.”

This helped establish clarity, reduce risk, and set solid foundations for future growth – something many first-time business owners overlook.

How does business mentoring improve financial confidence?

Financial systems were another key area.

“We didn’t know much about bookkeeping or tracking expenses. She guided us through setting that up properly. That was huge for us.”

With mentoring support, the business established stronger financial tracking and budgeting processes, improving visibility and decision-making.

Can mentorship help with operations and hiring?

Operationally, Hannah encouraged them to document processes.

“She suggested writing an operations manual, which helped a lot with hiring and training our team.”

This simple but powerful step created consistency, saved time, and supported smoother onboarding as the team expanded.

How does business mentorship evolve as a business grows?

By 2024, the business had moved into a new growth phase.

Tri rejoined the Business Mentoring programme and was paired with a second mentor whose accounting background aligned with their next challenges.

This shift ensured the mentoring support remained relevant and targeted to their stage of business.

What impact does business mentorship have long-term?

Reflecting on the programme, Tri says mentorship made a measurable difference.

“Without it, it would have taken us longer and we would have made more mistakes. We probably would have figured it out eventually, but it would have been slower.”

For first-time business owners, Tri says mentorship is invaluable.

“In that first year, it was the most valuable thing we did. It was a game changer. For anyone without a business background – definitely do it. It’s like having a guide to help you run and operate your business properly.”