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# Coaching and Mentoring

What they are and how  
to make the most of them

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## CASE STUDY

### Paddy Murphy

To say that these are challenging times for the airline industry, caught as it is in the eye of the perfect storm, is something of an understatement. Warren Buffett was right when he said that so much money had been lost by the airline industry in his lifetime that perhaps it would have been better if the Wright brothers had never taken off from Kill Devil Hills in 1903.

“The airline industry is like no other industry,” concedes Paddy Murphy, one of its veterans, who acknowledges that many of its managers never willingly move on, a tendency that may not be entirely healthy.

The former chairman of low-fare airline Ryanair has moved on, but he has returned to the industry he loves, this time as a professional mentor. Times are exceedingly difficult in the notoriously cyclical industry, which nevertheless gives rise to fierce passions. Much of Murphy’s current workload involves trying to chivvy up executives, some close to tears as they fight back the anger and fear they feel at the loss of their jobs. With that curious mixture of Irish empathy and hard-nosed boot-up-the-backside that the newly redundant sometimes need to galvanise themselves into action, Murphy says:

*I’ve had a few of those and sometimes it’s very hard for them to move on. I ask them how they’re going to set about proving what a terrible mistake their former employer made.*

Now based in Geneva, Switzerland, Murphy continues his aviation consultancy practice as well as his charitable work. But in the past few years he has changed direction since signing up to a coaching course run by The Coaches Training Institute in London, which he says completely altered his outlook:

*I found myself even at my relatively late age pulled completely outside my comfort zone. Consultants come into companies to do a study and then come up with a set of recommendations and then bully their way into doing the implementation.*

Coaching, he discovered, does not do any of that. It enables chief executives to find their own solution and stay fully in charge, “which is how it should be,” he asserts. Much of what he does as a mentor also involves many of the coaching techniques he learned on his course.

Despite his enthusiasm for the new discipline of coaching, he decided he would not re-badge himself as a coach. Instead he opted to become a professional mentor, which involved very different skills from the ones he previously deployed as an industry consultant.

The one thing the aviation industry does not do is what he describes as the “lovey-dovey stuff”, or rather the personal issues that many coaches say you cannot divorce from work. Airline executives generally respect only those who speak the same language, so coming in with detailed aviation knowledge and senior managerial expertise is an essential requirement.

Murphy spent 25 years working for Aer Lingus, Ireland’s national airline, where he ended up as head of strategic development, before leaving in 1987 to run a ferry company, Irish Continental Group, trading as Irish Ferries, which floated on the Irish stock exchange a year later and in London in 1993.

As a result of the money he made, he no longer needed to work as a full-time executive, opting instead for a series of non-executive directorships. During this period, Murphy also became involved in a number of charitable schemes in Zimbabwe and South Africa, which after two years he abandoned. “I just couldn’t face the corruption that I saw all around me in those countries,” he says.

It was during this period that he was approached by a former Aer Lingus colleague, Tony Ryan, who had founded GPA, an aircraft leasing operation. Ryan persuaded Murphy to become non-executive chairman of Ryanair, a heavily loss-making regional airline he co-founded in 1985.

Murphy’s tenure coincided with the moment in aviation history when Ryanair was about to finally enjoy its “David” moment against Aer Lingus, which the Irish government was doing its

utmost to protect. Deregulation of the skies was finally under way, thanks to the Thatcher government's pro-competition instincts, which opened up the lucrative Dublin-London market to Ryanair from its new base at Stansted Airport. There were 2m passengers a year travelling by ferry between the UK and Ireland who could be expected to switch if air fares came down.

However, it is evident that Ryanair's decision to go for what he describes as "Aer Lingus's jugular" – a battle that is still unresolved – was not one Murphy felt comfortable with. The policy was to get rid of the regional commuter aircraft, not launch an all-out war with Aer Lingus. Murphy says:

*With deregulation opening up Europe in 1993, I felt that we should be concentrating more on Rotterdam and other European operations.*

These differences led to his departure from Ryanair. He became an adviser to IATA, an aviation trade organisation, which wanted to become more commercial. His advisory work was given renewed impetus by his decision to learn about coaching techniques in 2005. He says:

*Mentoring is my way of giving something back while being involved in an industry that I love.*