



# Best Practice Mentoring: The Private Equity CEO

## What makes a great mentor-mentee relationship?


**At Criticaleye, we believe that true and effective executive mentoring can only be delivered by someone who has been at the coalface of leadership themselves. Someone who has dealt with the same types of issues as their mentee and who can inspire them to succeed from a position of experience as well as understanding.**

It may seem as though CEOs and senior executives are constantly surrounded by people who can advise and support them, and that an effective relationship between the chairman and the CEO is tantamount to mentoring, but these interactions are almost always tainted by company politics, peer ambitions and hidden agendas. Conflicting interests can be even more prevalent in the private equity environment where chairs are often appointed by investors and fast growth supersedes all other considerations.

While it can be difficult to articulate the value of a successful mentoring relationship, those who achieve it report significant benefits, both personally and for their organisations. Within the Criticaleye Community, one such relationship between a CEO of a private equity backed business and Criticaleye Member, and his mentor, a former FTSE 100 CEO and current PLC and PE Chairman and Criticaleye Board Mentor, epitomises mentoring within the PE environment at its best.



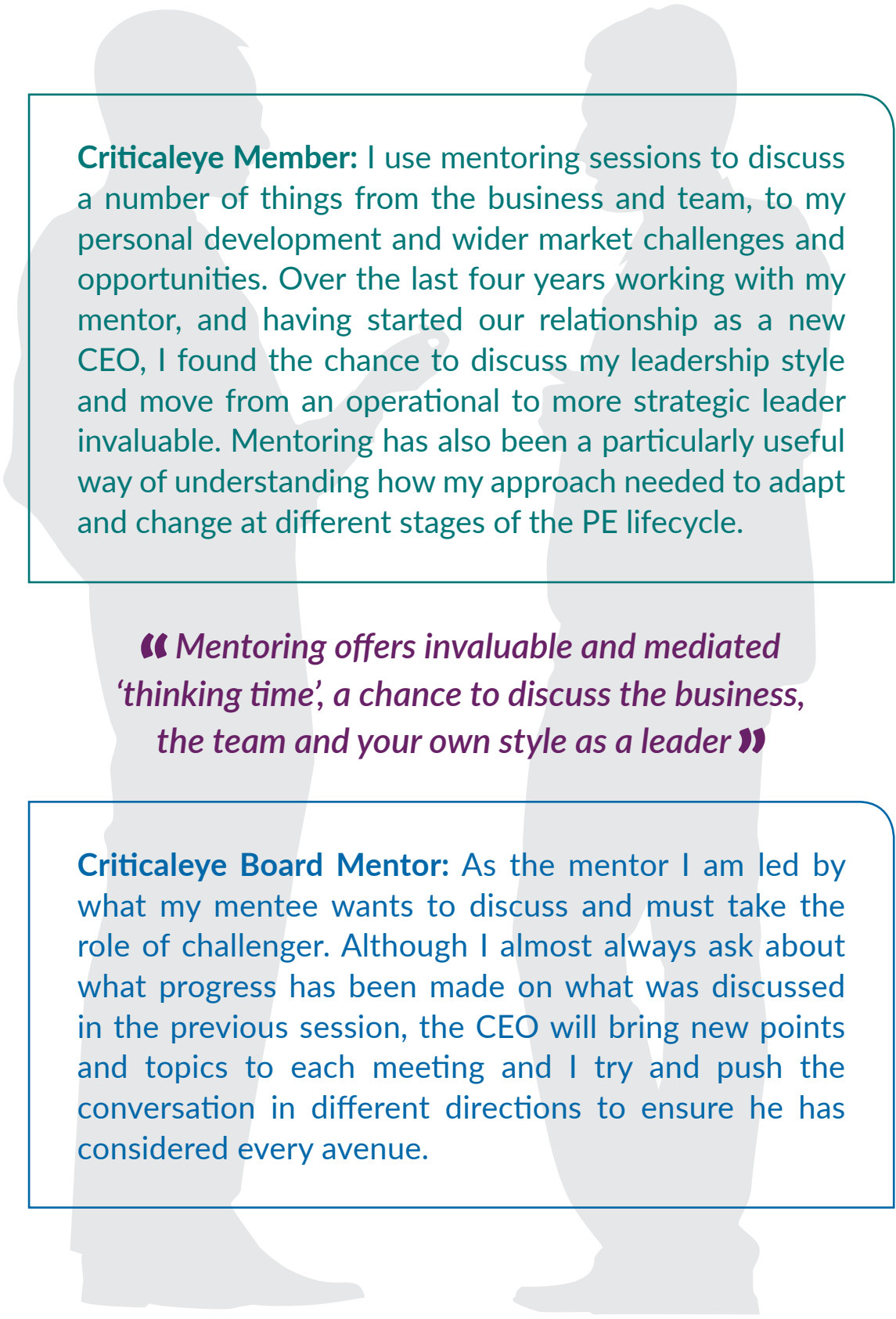
***“Mentoring has been a particularly useful way of understanding how my approach needed to adapt and change at different stages of the PE lifecycle”***



**Criticleye Member:** Mentoring offers invaluable and mediated ‘thinking time’, a chance to discuss the business, the team and your own style as a leader. I also think it is important to choose a mentor with relevant and useful experience, especially if this addresses any gaps the chairman might have. In my own situation, my mentor is one of the few sources of truly independent counsel. He offers me a fresh and challenging perspective, and is interested in my personal development and leadership style, something which is rarely a priority in a PE environment.

*“The PE CEO role can be very lonely; there is almost always a secondary agenda behind the relationship they have with their chairman”*

**Criticleye Board Mentor:** An effective mentor should ask questions and listen carefully. I try to mirror back some of what my mentee is telling me and offer a different point of view. It’s not about telling but rather helping a CEO or senior executive to realise the answer they already know. In many ways it is much easier for me as a mentor to do this as I am not emotionally or politically involved in the strategy and planning for the business.



**Criticaleye Member:** I use mentoring sessions to discuss a number of things from the business and team, to my personal development and wider market challenges and opportunities. Over the last four years working with my mentor, and having started our relationship as a new CEO, I found the chance to discuss my leadership style and move from an operational to more strategic leader invaluable. Mentoring has also been a particularly useful way of understanding how my approach needed to adapt and change at different stages of the PE lifecycle.

*“Mentoring offers invaluable and mediated ‘thinking time’, a chance to discuss the business, the team and your own style as a leader”*

**Criticaleye Board Mentor:** As the mentor I am led by what my mentee wants to discuss and must take the role of challenger. Although I almost always ask about what progress has been made on what was discussed in the previous session, the CEO will bring new points and topics to each meeting and I try and push the conversation in different directions to ensure he has considered every avenue.

## What impact can mentoring have on the role of a senior executive in a PE environment?



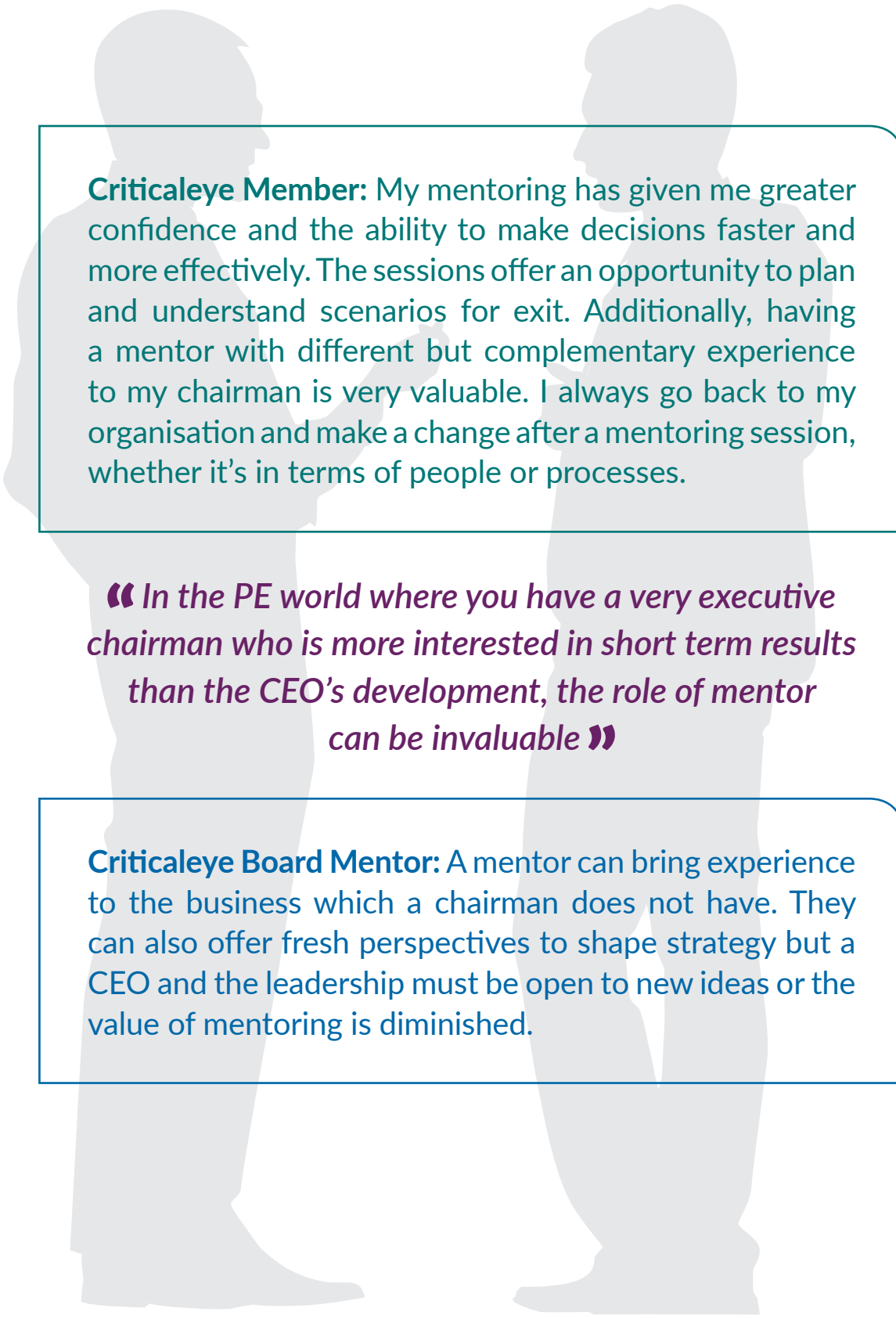
**Criticleye Member:** Having the support of a mentor who is independent and understands the PE environment is hugely impactful. From my own perspective, mentoring has helped clarify and support strategic decisions on the evolution of the organisational structure, changes to my leadership style, help with scenario planning including managing stakeholders and providing counsel on growth strategy.

*“I always go back to my organisation and make a change after a mentoring session, whether it’s in terms of people or processes”*

**Criticleye Board Mentor:** The PE CEO is under immense pressure to deliver results to investors at great speed. Having an independent sounding board can add significant value – not only in terms of supporting their individual performance but by bringing additional skills and expertise which the CEO can draw from. I think it is important to have a mentor with a full appreciation of the PE environment in order to understand the pressure on leadership, and the complex nature of the CEO-Chairman dynamic.



## Does investment in mentoring enable PE-backed businesses to deliver faster growth?



**Criticleye Member:** My mentoring has given me greater confidence and the ability to make decisions faster and more effectively. The sessions offer an opportunity to plan and understand scenarios for exit. Additionally, having a mentor with different but complementary experience to my chairman is very valuable. I always go back to my organisation and make a change after a mentoring session, whether it's in terms of people or processes.

*“ In the PE world where you have a very executive chairman who is more interested in short term results than the CEO's development, the role of mentor can be invaluable ”*

**Criticleye Board Mentor:** A mentor can bring experience to the business which a chairman does not have. They can also offer fresh perspectives to shape strategy but a CEO and the leadership must be open to new ideas or the value of mentoring is diminished.

## What additional value does mentoring offer in addition to the relationship with your chairman?



**Criticleye Member:** Mentoring has played a key role in my evolution as a leader. It offers an independent and unbiased viewpoint which I couldn't get in a PE environment from my chairman. I regularly take points discussed during meetings with my mentor back to the business and leadership team. Having an independent and unbiased point of view offers a unique opportunity test and flex different approaches.

*“The inevitable conflict of interest a PE chairman has means the CEO can't always have the type of open and honest conversation a mentoring relationship can offer”*

**Criticleye Board Mentor:** Any executive making a transition, be that stepping into a CEO role or a leader adapting to a PE environment, can get significant benefits from mentoring. There is an acute need in a high growth environment to deliver fast results and having someone who is interested in the progression of the individual as well as the business can speed up the process of upping performance.

Collectively our  
**Mentors** have held  
more than **100**  
**CEO** roles

## About Criticaleye Board Mentors

Having led organisations throughout their operational careers and now executing purely at Board level, our Board Mentors are perfectly positioned to offer the credible challenge and hard-edged conversations needed to be a successful leader. As a trusted reference point and impartial sounding board, Criticaleye Board Mentors help navigate the many challenges of leadership, so executives know what questions to ask.

They have held in  
excess of **300** **Chair** and  
**Non-executive** positions





## Inspiring Leaders to Succeed

### Our Values

**Respect:** an appreciation for diverse and varied views and experiences is crucial to high-performance leadership

**Collaboration:** working together to share knowledge and expertise is a defining characteristic of effective executive teams

**Challenge:** strategies and ideas need to be constructively challenged to reach the best outcome

**Trust:** leaders need to trust their colleagues and peers in order to work effectively and drive results

**Integrity:** we inspire leaders to succeed by providing a closed and confidential environment where Members can share openly

To discuss in more detail, please contact:

#### Criticaleye UK

88 Kingsway  
London WC2B 6AA  
United Kingdom

T: +44 (0)20 7726 7832

#### Criticaleye Asia

Level 27, World Wide House  
19 Des Voeux Road Central  
Hong Kong

T: +852 3158 2999

[www.criticaleye.com](http://www.criticaleye.com)

