

THE POWER OF TWO

Want to increase your personal and business success? HOT 50 leaders hire a mentor.

By **Laura Pratt**

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Robert Gervais realized he could use some formal business guidance after a six-week stint with a personal coach last spring. His Montreal-based IT and security services firm, Pre2Post Inc. (then #30 on Profit's Hot 50), was growing fast, and the 37-year-old president was looking to hone his business skills and move the company to the next level.

He turned to Mark Halloran, a headhunter and life coach he'd met at a party four years earlier. Halloran, who currently presides over Cobblestone Human Capital, a Montreal-based career resource firm, has a background in sales, recruiting, HR, organizational structuring and business strategy. "I immediately identified with his energy, like-mindedness, business knowledge and cross-functional expertise," says Gervais. "I found that I could hit him with any business problem and get valuable input. More importantly, I was comfortable talking with him."

Today, the two meet once a month in Gervais' office, then typically continue their session over dinner and drinks. While Gervais pays Halloran \$115 an hour for his expertise, he says it's a solid investment that produces exceptional ROI. Halloran's contributions are twofold. First, there is the mentorship and coaching side. Second, Pre2Post can tap Cobblestone as a provider when it comes to implementing the new plan. "Mark is able to keep these two roles separate, and that means more resources for me to draw upon," says Gervais. "We talk about issues formally and informally. Sometimes discussions that start out as casual result in the identification of specific issues that demand a formal analytical process."



Pre2Post's Robert Gervais

Cut through the clutter

A typical session starts with "a wind-down period" of simply chatting. Next, Halloran debriefs Gervais on the major events of his life and business, including Pre2Post's overall health and ongoing strategic decisions. Then the conversation might delve into Gervais' long-term personal goals. The pair set quarterly objectives — some more tangible than others — for both the company and Gervais. For instance, they might define human resources initiatives by clarifying expectations and job roles. Finally, they decide on the homework. "We lay out the work that I must put to paper and deliver to Mark," says Gervais. "The discussions have a way of unblocking much of what I know, but unless we follow this up with concrete actions, much of what is decided will not be done."

Perhaps Halloran's biggest offering is identifying shortcomings and pressure points in the company, and offering advice on overcoming them. When Pre2Post mounted its rapid growth curve a couple of years ago, Gervais gave in to his instinct to "become an octopus" and keep a hand in every aspect of the business. Stretched too thin, Gervais asked Halloran for help. "He showed me how to overcome this by hiring effectively," says Gervais, "by defining a successful applicant and then going out and finding one."

While some people think that asking for help is a show of weakness, Gervais believes it's more a show of strength. "Do you think Andre Agassi's tennis coach is a better tennis player than Agassi? No. The coach's role is not to be better than you are," says Gervais. "It's just to help you stay focused on being your absolute best."

