

By Jason Joseph, Energy and Water Manager at CBRE, and Andrew Creamer, Group Energy Optimisation Manager at Greencore Group plc

Shaping Futures: The Role of Mentorship in Energy Management

Mentorship plays a crucial role in shaping futures by providing individuals with guidance, support and valuable insights necessary for personal and professional growth. The following interviews provide a glimpse into a recent mentorship experience, and offer useful tips for current and prospective candidates.

Jason Joseph
Energy and Water Manager
CBRE



How did you start your career in energy management and sustainability?

I studied Electrical Engineering in Trinidad and Tobago and began my professional journey in the oil and gas sector in the Caribbean back in 2003. In 2017, I relocated to the UK where I shifted my focus to the waste-to-power industry and manufacturing. When I was presented with a job opportunity within the Energy Department, I eagerly accepted the challenge, despite some uncertainty about what to expect. With two decades of experience as an electrical controls and instrument engineer, I hoped that my skills and knowledge would be valuable assets in the role of a sustainability engineer.

What is your experience with mentorship?

I experienced mentorship from both perspectives as a mentee as well as a mentor prior to entering the field of energy management and sustainability. In the early stages of my career, as I transitioned from an instrument fitter to an electrical engineer, I held various roles in facilities management and maintenance. During this time, I was exposed to new concepts, technologies and knowledge, and I was fortunate to have individuals who served as mentors and guides. As my career progressed into more senior managerial positions, I gained a deeper understanding of the significance of mentorship and leadership from the other side of the spectrum as well, when at one point I was a team leader for 16 people.

When the opportunity arose for me to transition into the sustainability role, I sought guidance from Andy, who was overseeing the recruitment process. I recognised in him a mentor figure whom I could once again learn from, which ultimately influenced my decision to make the career shift.

Andrew Creamer
Group Energy Optimisation
Manager
Greencore Group plc



How did you start your career in energy management and sustainability?

After completing my education, I began my career at BT as an engineer. Over the course of nearly three decades, I held various technical, commercial and support roles, each contributing to a diverse skill set.

My interest in the field of energy management was sparked by a project management role that I accepted with a company involved in sub-metering projects. When my line manager departed, it became apparent that no one within the company was overseeing energy management. I advocated for myself to take on the role of the energy manager and I have now been in energy management, or subsections of it, on and off for about 15 years.

Reflecting on my journey, it is remarkable to see how the landscape of energy management evolved. What was once a niche area is now a vital component of business operations.

How and why did you become a mentor?

Interestingly, in many ways, I have always been that way inclined. During my time at BT, I held the role of technical lead for various groups, where I was tasked with overseeing the apprentice scheme within my team. Each year, I would have 3 apprentices for a month with me and I very quickly learned the best way to teach for the given person. Mentorship, to me, is more than just sharing knowledge - it is about presenting information in a way that is easily digestible and engaging for the learner. Unfortunately, I often encountered disillusioned apprentices who had previously been under the guidance of leads who simply had them perform menial tasks for a month. In contrast, I made it a point to involve my apprentices in more technical

How did having a mentor help you in your everyday role?

When I started the role, Andy provided invaluable practical guidance and strategic insight that facilitated a smooth transition. His assistance was instrumental in clarifying my goals and objectives, ensuring they were both realistic and achievable. To enable me to transition effectively, Andy offered lots of guidance about the day-to-day job, but we also discussed other aspects, such as training and networking, which was a new concept for me.

Reflecting on the past, I now realise that he established a sustainable environment for me to work in, while also giving me the autonomy to manage my own time. He would check in periodically, recognising what motivated me and pushing me to excel. This style of mentoring was new to me, and Andy has proven to be the most exceptional manager I have ever had the privilege of working with.

Andy's leadership style created an environment where I thrived and was motivated to achieve more than I set out to do. This was not only recognised in my daily responsibilities, but also by him nominating me for the



Young Energy Management Professional award, which I won last year. I was truly inspired by his approach to leadership and mentorship. As my knowledge grew through training and experience, I required less day-to-day support, so the support transitioned to a more ad hoc basis.

Having been mentored in-house, how would you compare internal and external mentorship?

Understanding the company's culture, values and operations is a key advantage of internal mentorship. This knowledge allows for a deeper insight into what is required for success within the organisation. Additionally, the ease of organising regular meetings

and stimulating projects, sparking their interest and fostering a passion for learning.

What is involved on a regular basis?

That largely depends on the quality of the mentee and the subject being mentored. For instance, when I first started mentoring Jason, there was understandably a significant disparity in our knowledge levels. Initially, it required a substantial amount of my time to keep him informed and guide him through the subject matter. However, as time progressed, the need for intensive guidance lessened. It is important to note that mentoring cannot be approached with a one-size-fits-all mentality. Each individual and each subject may require varying amounts of time and attention. For example, one of the individuals I am currently mentoring in a non-technical field only requires a monthly hour and a half conference call to discuss and implement necessary strategies. On the other hand, another mentee who is training to be a food bakery technician requires approximately 2 hours of mentoring per week to focus on managerial skills, as technical training is covered by the school curriculum.

In conclusion, effective mentoring involves adapting to the needs of the mentee and the specific subject matter being addressed. It is essential to invest the appropriate amount of time and effort to ensure the mentee's success and growth. Whenever I am asked how long do I spend mentoring people? I always say: "As long as it is needed".

What is your mentoring style?

I would describe my mentoring style as collaborative. I prefer to show empathy, rather than sympathy, which implies they have done something wrong, but empathy shows that you understand their position. I like to use the old training epithet of: "**Tell them what you are going to tell them, tell them, and then tell them what you told them**", because telling it in threes reinforces it. This principle not only facilitates comprehension but also fosters a two-way dialogue. My goal is not to simply instruct, but to engage in meaningful conversations that result in a valuable expansion of knowledge for the individual I am mentoring.

How did you become Jason's mentor?

I recognised Jason's talents and transferable skills long before a position for a sustainability engineer opened up through a commercial need within the business. However, it was at that point that I took the initiative to actively recruit him for the role, and the mentorship



with an internal mentor can facilitate a more consistent and impactful mentorship experience.

However, internal mentorship can also have its drawbacks. In some cases, the focus may be solely on the company or client's needs, neglecting the personal development of the mentee. Furthermore, conflicts may arise within departments if both mentor and mentee have overlapping personal goals, such as aspiring for the same position. It is something that I observed but luckily not experienced myself.

On the other hand, external mentorship offers a fresh perspective from individuals with diverse backgrounds in different companies, sectors and industries. This can provide the mentee with a broader range of knowledge and best practices to draw upon.



Ultimately, there are pros and cons in both, and the choice between the two will depend on the specific needs and goals of the mentee, as well as the availability of mentors.

What advice would you give to someone considering a mentor?

Identify your objectives, so that you have an idea of what you want to achieve personally, at least on some level, before discussing it with your mentor. Additionally, **consider what leadership style** would best suit you. Your mentor may have a different perspective, so it is crucial to keep an open mind, however, having a general idea of your preferences can



naturally followed. Essentially, this was because I was taking on an untrained individual to perform the duties of a trained professional. To bridge this gap, we implemented strategic planning and external/off-the-job training to expedite his learning processes quicker than you might normally have done. I was very careful to guide Jason along the right path as I've witnessed too many times mentors leading individuals at a tangent. Therefore, I was acutely aware of the need to steer Jason in a prescribed direction that would equip him with the necessary tools and resources to excel in the role I'd taken him on to do.

In my experience, there are various types of individuals - some can be led, some need to be pushed, and some may struggle to succeed. Jason fell into the category of individuals I could lead as I recognised his capacity to absorb knowledge and apply it effectively. Initially, I provided close supervision without being overly intrusive, making myself available to address any queries without micromanaging his work. As Jason's training progressed and his proficiency grew, I gradually stepped back, meeting with him on an ad hoc basis depending on the tasks assigned. This approach struck a balance that allowed Jason to thrive, as he was motivated and eager to excel.

What advice would you give someone considering to become a mentor?

As a mentor, your goal should be to inspire and empower the next generation of professionals, guiding them towards a successful and fulfilling career in the industry. To be a mentor, you have to have a certain outlook. You have to be patient. You have to be understanding. Mentorship is not suited for everyone and just because someone asks you to be a mentor or the organisation wants you to mentor someone, it's not a given that you have to do it. It is important to feel comfortable with the responsibility and to consider the mentee's outlook and attitude before committing to the role.

If a mentoring relationship is not working out as expected, it is important not to dwell on it. It is simply a part of life. What may not resonate with one individual may be exactly what another person needs. Understanding that each mentee is unique and may have different needs or paces of learning is crucial in the role of a mentor. It is common for some individuals to sometimes struggle to grasp certain concepts or to feel

save time and ensure that you find someone whose values and leadership style align with yours.

In your interactions with your mentor, it is essential to **be open, honest, proactive**, and I would also say **grateful**. Remember to give back and respect your mentor's time as they also have their own responsibilities to fulfill. While there may be opportunities for discussions, it is important to understand that they may not always be available when you need them.

Why is mentorship important in the energy management/sustainability industry?

I think mentorship plays a crucial role in energy management especially due to it being such a complex discipline. You require a deep understanding of the technical aspects, regulations and best practices, and for those new to the industry, this can be overwhelming. Mentorship plays a key role in helping navigate these complexities and guiding individuals towards a better understanding. A mentor can provide practical experience and insights into an industry that is constantly evolving and expanding.

Author's profile:

Following two years under Andy's mentorship, Jason moved into the role of Energy and Water Manager. He is now responsible for mentoring two individuals, a seasoned electrician and a graduate. His primary focus is to develop their skills in data analytics with heavy emphasis on data accuracy and validation within a prototype management system.



disconnected from their mentor. It is important to remain flexible and open to change in order to best support those you are mentoring. Recognising when a mentoring relationship is not progressing as desired is essential. If you find yourself struggling to connect with your mentee or feel that the relationship is not benefiting them, it may be time to reevaluate the situation. It is important to prioritise the mentee's interests and goals above all else. The last thing you want to do is discourage someone from pursuing their passions.

Why is mentorship important in the energy management/sustainability industry?

Energy management and sustainability professionals operate within a relatively young industry compared to electricians, mechanical engineers, or automobile engineers who work in well-established industries. The field of energy management may be constantly evolving but there are aspects that remain the same, and there is no need to reinvent the wheel every time which is why it's so important for experienced professionals to pass on their knowledge to the next generation to prevent them from experiencing the same issues. Consistent guidance and persistence are key in mentoring as it is essential to communicate information in a way that the mentee can understand and apply.

In a recent conversation with my boss, I mentioned an issue that needed addressing elsewhere in the company that was being overlooked by another team. When I expressed my intention to persist in mentioning the issue until it is resolved, my boss questioned whether it would become tiresome. I explained that it may become tiresome for the recipients to hear the same message repeatedly, but it appears that it is necessary for their understanding. The principle of mentoring in energy management is similar to the concept of repetition and reinforcement. It is important to communicate information clearly and consistently to ensure that it is understood and retained, which brings me again to the principle of: "Tell them what you are going to tell them, tell them, and then tell them what you told them".

Author's profile:

Andy is responsible for all facets of energy management and decarbonisation in a large food business. The portfolio consists of 16 operational production sites and 16 transport and logistics sites. Current initiatives include a wide ranging number of projects, for example heat pumps for heat and steam, solar PV, voltage optimisation and sub-metering.