

ORGANISATIONS BROCHURE 2010



Motivating, energising and developing your best people are at the top of your agenda. Our short business assignments in Africa offer a refreshingly different approach to talent management.

Skills Venture helps organisations to reward, motivate and develop their top performers through short assignments in Kenya, where employees provide business support to local entrepreneurs. They bring their experience and skills to bear by providing practical one-to-one advice, working through problems with entrepreneurs and helping them find solutions.

Assignments can last for anything from one week to six months and are open to both individuals and groups. There is no better way to reward, motivate and develop your future leaders.

This brochure tells you about:

- **The benefits for organisations of setting up an overseas skilled volunteering programme**
- **The types of programme that we can offer to suit your individual requirements**
- **The service that we provide to organisations as part of our programme**
- **The needs of entrepreneurs in Kenya, and how they benefit from our programmes**
- **The experiences of previous Skills Venture business volunteers in Kenya**
- **Who we are, and how to contact us to find out more**

THE RANGE OF BENEFITS

Repeated surveys show that managers believe that volunteering is good for personal development, helps to motivate staff, brings new ideas into the organisation and enhances its corporate reputation.

Few organisations measure the business benefits of the flexible working options that can make volunteering possible. Yet these benefits are significant:

- **Motivation and inspiration:** Working with dynamic young entrepreneurs in Africa and helping them to build their businesses from scratch is inspirational, and rewards and motivates in equal measure.
- **Talent development:** Facing completely new challenges in a very different business environment helps to build confidence, communication and leadership skills, diversity awareness and team-working abilities, and provides exposure to developing world entrepreneurs and consumers.
- **CSR and innovation:** A progressive and respected programme acts as a key corporate social responsibility activity and reinforces your credentials as a cutting-edge, people-focused organisation.

"This excellent initiative has real potential to make a difference to entrepreneurs in Kenya and thus to poverty reduction, while appealing to UK employers who stand to gain huge benefits in terms of training, recruitment and retention."

Michael Hay, Professor of Entrepreneurship, London Business School

The rest of this section examines each of these areas of benefit in more detail.

MOTIVATION AND INSPIRATION

The tough business conditions of the past two years have left many top employees tired, stressed and de-motivated. The warning signs of employee burnout, including lower productivity and higher levels of absenteeism, are increasingly common.

Skills Venture gives your employees a chance to rediscover their passion for the job, and to get back some energy and some motivation, so that they will come back to work refreshed, reinvigorated, and full of new ideas. We match each employee with one or more African entrepreneurs, whose needs match their skills and experience. They provide practical mentoring support and advice to the entrepreneurs, and help to grow a business, create more jobs, and so to lift people out of poverty.

This is an excellent way to inspire and develop future leaders while recognising and rewarding their achievements to date, whether these have been attained individually or as a team.

The chance to give something back through time out can dramatically boost commitment and loyalty. In a 2007 Norwich Union survey, 72% of respondents believed that employers would not be able to attract and retain good workers in the future without the offer of time out for volunteering.

The motivational aspects of this programme have significant benefits for increasing retention rates. The first five years of an individual's employment represent a tremendous investment by a company. The most common time to leave a company is three to eight years after joining. A lost employee is a lost investment, especially those rated as top talent, on whom future growth depends.

Equally, organisations that find themselves over-staffed for the current economic conditions may decide that they are better off putting a group of staff onto reduced wages for a set period of time and setting them up to do volunteering projects overseas, rather than bearing the expense of making them redundant and then having to devote considerable money, time and effort to rehiring inexperienced new staff when conditions have improved.

The cost of replacing a member of staff is between 50% and 150% of their annual salary (including recruiting and training a replacement, and loss of productivity).

“If we don’t accommodate what people want, they’ll go elsewhere and we’d be in the recruitment market. So it makes good business sense to offer time out. Our people come back invigorated. It’s a win-win scenario.”

Sasha Hardman, PriceWaterhouseCoopers

TALENT DEVELOPMENT

The most successful companies invest in both the professional and generic skills of their employees. The cost of traditional training courses is significant: a week’s leadership training can cost £8,000 per person. Such courses rarely offer the chance to gain skills and experience from developing countries.

Developing countries represent a major future source of consumers for many companies, and a very different commercial environment with innovative practices and growth rates that are well ahead of Western Europe. Generic skills such as leadership, collaboration, appreciation of diversity and strategic thinking can all be improved by being placed in a new and unusual environment.

Skills Venture mentoring assignments develop skills in a range of areas:

- **Professional skills:** Employees are using their own professional skills to help others, which helps them to develop those skills further and to apply them in new situations
- **Cross-cultural skills:** Employees are working on a one-to-one basis with individual entrepreneurs or NGO leaders, which is the ideal basis for fostering mutual understanding
- **Inter-personal skills:** Employees gain confidence and improve their communication and presentation skills by proving themselves in an unfamiliar environment
- **Diversity:** Employees improve their ability to deal with different perspectives and approaches
- **Leadership skills:** Employees are exposed to challenging, unfamiliar situations that test and develop leadership skills, which can be applied to good effect for the rest of their careers
- **Team-working skills:** Employees can work in teams to provide mentoring support to single or multiple entrepreneurs, gaining valuable experience of group working in the process
- **Sharing best practice:** Working with and being exposed to mentors from other parts of the business, and from other top companies, is an unparalleled opportunity to share best practice and skills
- **Exposure to emerging markets:** Africa has one of the fastest-growing consumer bases in the world, and is host to a dynamic and inspiring business culture that provides valuable lessons for UK employees in how to run a business in an extremely tough economic and competitive climate
- **Confidence:** Previous mentors have reported that Skills Venture has reminded them how strong their existing skills are, especially when they have not been used for a long time

Research commissioned by Accenture in 2003 found that 90 per cent of employees felt that volunteering overseas would give them skills that would benefit them in their job, including adaptability, interpersonal communications, problem solving, innovation, and tolerance.

"Our staff often return to work with a fresh perspective and new found confidence, which can generate career progression or even changes in direction for those already well-established within the business."

Paul Backhouse, John Lewis Partnership

CORPORATE SOCIAL RESPONSIBILITY AND INNOVATION

Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) is about leveraging an organisation's core strengths – in almost every case, its people – to make a meaningful contribution to social development. It is also about publicising this work internally to build morale, and externally to benefit the company's image. The benefit may be felt at 'home' or 'abroad', but as more companies operate globally, this is an ever more blurred line.

A frequent complaint is that CSR can be 'window dressing'. This is often because companies do not have access to activities that leverage their core competencies, and so they opt for activities that fulfil the PR criteria, but miss out on the real benefits for the organisation (and for the community).

Companies are looking to use their competencies directly and with sustainable benefits, ideally through a long-term partnership with a trusted and reliable intermediary that delivers a professional commercial standard of service while ensuring that employee impact with host communities is maximised.

Investing in a well-run CSR programme, especially one with a truly impactful volunteering component, demonstrates to both internal and external stakeholders that your organisation is focused on people. The leadership and talent development benefits of such programmes can also make a real contribution to an organisation's bid to acquire (or retain) accreditation through the Investors in People standard.

"Corporate social responsibility is a hard-edged business decision. Not because it is a nice thing to do or because people are forcing us to do it... because it is good for our business."

Niall Fitzgerald, Former CEO, Unilever

"The beauty of employee community involvement is that it gives members of staff a risk-free environment away from their peers and colleagues where they can try out new experiences, new behaviours, new ways of doing things and also add value, often in a more immediate way than is possible in their working environment." Martin Spencer, Associate HR Director, Zurich Financial Services

OUR PROGRAMMES

We offer a range of options for your mentoring programme. We will develop a bespoke programme to cater to the individual needs of your organisation, but the descriptions overleaf will give you an idea of the kinds of programme that we can provide. The nature of the programme varies according to the number of people involved (from one to dozens, normally in between), their seniority, the time that they have available, and the precise focus of your objectives for the programme (such as developing leaders or team players, or a reward scheme for top performers).

We will design a bespoke programme to meet the needs of your intended participants. You may be looking to build up the leadership skills of employees on a high potential programme, to help prepare technical staff for management positions, induct and develop new board members, or to provide senior managers with a new challenge.

The diagram below illustrates the types of project that can be organised, depending on whether UK employees come to Kenya to work individually or as a group, and whether they work with one or several Kenyan entrepreneurs. Please note that 'groups' of UK employees could refer to a team that normally works together in the UK, or a group of people from different parts of the same organisation, or a group of people from completely different organisations.

Each of these project types is described in more detail overleaf.

GROUP MENTORING	<p>Board Mentoring</p> <p>Senior executives spend 1-2 weeks in Kenya acting as a virtual 'board' for a Kenyan company (or mentoring their counterparts on the Kenyan board)</p>	<p>Workshop Mentoring</p> <p>A group of employees spend 1-2 weeks providing a series of workshops and drop-in mentoring sessions for large numbers of Kenyan entrepreneurs</p>
ONE:ONE MENTORING	<p>Turnaround Mentoring</p> <p>A single employee spends 2-8 weeks working with a Kenyan entrepreneur who needs a concentrated period of input to help rescue the business</p>	<p>Informal Mentoring</p> <p>Employees spend 1-8 weeks providing 1:1 mentoring support to a number of Kenyan entrepreneurs, depending on time available (can be done as a group)</p>
	ONE KENYAN COMPANY	MULTIPLE KENYAN COMPANIES

BOARD MENTORING

Skills Development Areas

- Ability to work as part of a team, alongside people from different cultures and backgrounds
- Ability to overcome organisational and cultural barriers and to identify universally acceptable goals
- Ability to tolerate ambiguity and to adapt to unfamiliar challenges and surroundings
- Ability to identify clear strategic requirements and to develop a workable plan to achieve them

Audience

This programme is aimed at small groups of senior executives who are looking to experience new leadership challenges while working together as a team. They could be a newly formed board, cross-functional team, or a group of senior people from across an organisation who do not normally work together. We can also arrange team programmes for senior executives from a range of different organisations across the private and public sectors.

(Note: for senior executives wishing to undertake a solo placement, please see the section below on 'informal mentoring'.)

Activities

The group will be matched with a company in Kenya that has grown to a point where it either has, or needs, a formal management board. The company in question will have identified a specific need to be addressed during the course of the programme. This need may focus on a particular discipline, such as competitor analysis and marketing. It may be wider-ranging, such as a total review of corporate strategy and activities. Or it may be that the board of the Kenyan company is newly formed and requires help and advice to get going, in terms of both the group as a whole and the individuals within it.

If there is already a board in place in Kenya, the UK volunteers will work with this board over a period of 1-2 weeks to help them to address the issue(s) that they have identified. The programme will start with a series of ice-breaking activities, followed by in-depth discussions of the needs of the Kenyan company and of the scope of what can be achieved within the timeframes of the programme itself. It is likely that the individual UK volunteers will then split out to provide 1:1 mentoring to their counterparts on the Kenyan board, to discuss particular issues in more detail, before rejoining the wider group for plenary discussions and agreeing a way forward. The initial assignment in Kenya can be followed by longer-term dialogue between the two boards using email and other forms of virtual mentoring, with the possibility of a repeat visit after 6-12 months.

If there is not a board in place in Kenya, the UK volunteers are likely to act as a virtual board for the Kenyan company. The process will roughly follow that laid out above, but with the UK team working with other employees of the Kenyan company to identify the main strategic issues, discuss particular problems in depth with individuals, and then make recommendations as to next steps. It may be that the UK team can help to develop existing Kenyan employees to 'step up' to join a new Kenyan board.

WORKSHOP MENTORING

Skills Development Areas

- Ability to work as part of a team, alongside people from different cultures and backgrounds
- Ability to clarify the exact nature of problems and identify clear and practicable solutions
- Ability to tolerate ambiguity and to adapt to unfamiliar challenges and surroundings
- Ability to divide up work among members of a team according to skillsets and availability

Audience

This programme is aimed at groups of middle managers, including those who are on high potential development programmes or similar, who are looking to build up their leadership and management skills, with a strong focus on team-working. As with our board mentoring programmes, the group that goes out to Kenya may be drawn from one or several parts of an organisation, or from a variety of different organisations.

Activities

The group will work with a large number of Kenyan entrepreneurs, each running small organisations. Unlike the 1:1 'informal mentoring' programme (below), this programme focuses on large group activities with the aim of providing skills training and support to a large number of entrepreneurs.

The precise nature of the support provided is flexible, and can be designed around the numbers of UK mentors and their backgrounds and skillsets. The programme is likely to include a combination of the following elements:

- Workshops on particular areas (such as how to write a business plan, create a cashflow forecast, or develop a marketing strategy) that are delivered by a small group of UK mentors to a large audience of Kenyan entrepreneurs over one or more days
- 'Drop-in' sessions where UK mentors spend one or more days in an advertised location, and Kenyan entrepreneurs are invited to visit them for 1-2 hours each to discuss a particular issue that they have encountered, and possible ways to resolve it

There is an element of overlap between the 'drop-in' sessions and the 'informal mentoring' programme, and it is entirely possible to develop a programme that incorporated both of these for an individual or a group. The 'drop-in' sessions would in most cases focus on discussing an issue that was facing the individual entrepreneur at that time, but there is no reason why these sessions could not cover more generic training. We would expect to run a number of 'drop-in' sessions in parallel at the same location, so that entrepreneurs could choose for example to visit a UK mentor who specialised in marketing, or one with a background in financial planning, having signed up for a timeslot with the appropriate person within 24-28 hours of the session itself.

The target businesses in Kenya for this programme will be 'micro' to small businesses: start-ups and existing businesses that have less than five staff, including the business owner and entrepreneur. These are companies that are too small to afford standard consulting services. They are often businesses that have not been operating for a long time, or else have reached a point where they are ready to expand – for example a small shop owner who may be looking to open up another shop in a nearby town.

TURNAROUND MENTORING

Skills Development Areas

- Ability to work closely with people from different cultures and backgrounds
- Ability to clarify the exact nature of problems and identify clear and practicable solutions
- Ability to exercise individual initiative and project confidence without support networks
- Ability to tolerate ambiguity and to adapt to unfamiliar challenges and surroundings
- Exposure to emerging markets and very different cultural and working practices

Audience

This programme is aimed at individual employees, including those who are on high potential development programmes or similar, who are looking to build up their leadership and management skills over a longer period of time. The UK mentor will be working in detail with a single Kenyan entrepreneur to understand the problems that they are facing in considerable detail, and to suggest and implement solutions. As a result the time commitment is longer than our other programmes. We suggest an absolute minimum of two weeks, but in many cases 4-8 weeks will be more appropriate. We can also work with those who are looking to take full 'sabbaticals' of 3-6 months or more.

Activities

As with the 'informal mentoring' programme, this is all about providing one to one practical support to an individual entrepreneur, based on their specific needs. However, whereas 'informal mentoring' involves spending between one and several days with an individual (and 'workshop mentoring' drop-in sessions involve a couple of hours), this programme is much more in-depth and matches the UK mentor with a single entrepreneur for several weeks.

This is in some ways more of a 'traditional' skilled volunteering assignment; the chance to get right under the skin of a person and of their organisation, to help them to identify the real causes of the problems that are holding them back, and to recommend detailed steps to overcome those problems and move forward. The assignment is also likely to include a significant element of training and skills transfer. There may be a chance for the UK mentor to get involved with the implementation of his or her recommendations during the assignment itself; if not, there will be scope to remain involved after returning to the UK through virtual (online) mentoring, and to make a follow-up visit to Kenya if needed.

As with most of our mentoring programmes, the focus here is on small businesses that are still at an early enough stage to be run primarily by one person. The business itself may have a large number of employees, but we would generally seek to work with owner-managers rather than with senior employees of larger organisations.

INFORMAL MENTORING

Skills Development Areas

- Ability to work closely with people from different cultures and backgrounds
- Ability to clarify the exact nature of problems and identify clear and practicable solutions
- Ability to work effectively and build relationships with a number of different people
- Ability to tolerate ambiguity and to adapt to unfamiliar challenges and surroundings
- Exposure to emerging markets and very different cultural and working practices

Audience

This programme is aimed at individual employees, including those who are on high potential development programmes or similar, who are looking to build up their leadership and management skills over a shorter period of time. Each UK mentor will be working with a number of Kenyan entrepreneurs to understand the problems that each of them are facing and to suggest solutions. This programme can be undertaken in as little as a week, but we recommend 2-4 weeks where possible. We can also arrange for groups of UK employees to undertake this programme at the same time.

Activities

This is our 'core' mentoring programme, which closely follows the format that we set up for our first ever UK mentors, who were self-funded individuals. Our informal mentoring programme sits somewhere between what would traditionally be called 'consulting' and 'mentoring'. UK mentors are not expected to deliver detailed technical recommendations, or to spend a lot of time talking about management theory, but neither will they be providing a traditional mentoring role in the sense of generalised advice and support.

Instead, they will work with a number of Kenyan entrepreneurs to help them to overcome a specific problem or barrier or to evaluate a potential opportunity, and to transfer some of their skills and knowledge in the process. UK mentors are there as a sounding board, someone with experience that is relevant to a person's situation who can offer views and ideas.

Each UK mentor will work with between one and four entrepreneurs, depending on the length of their stay in Kenya. They will see each entrepreneur for a full day at a time, and will typically alternate between entrepreneurs, to give both parties time to reflect and implement recommendations from the previous session. Therefore, a mentor who is in Kenya for three weeks might work with four entrepreneurs, and see each one for a full day each week, with a day off at the end of the week to reflect on the previous four sessions and to prepare for the next week.

As with the 'turnaround mentoring' programme, there will be scope to remain involved with one or all of the entrepreneurs after returning to the UK through virtual (online) mentoring.

This programme can also work for groups of UK employees. In this scenario, the UK group would be based at the same campus, and would part during the day to run their own 1:1 mentoring sessions, but would then re-convene in the evening to debrief, share experiences and tips, and socialise. There is the option to run group sessions or seminars with all of the UK mentors and Kenyan entrepreneurs at the start and/or end of the programme, and to include competitive and team-building components such as business plan development competitions as part of the programme.

OUR SERVICES

A Skills Venture employee programme includes the following services:

- Expert matching of each individual's skills to several entrepreneurs
- Comprehensive induction both before and after arrival
- Logistical support before and during the assignment
- Access to support and advice from our Kenyan facilitators

SKILLS MATCHING

The key to a successful mentoring assignment is a good match between the skills and experience of the mentor and the needs of the entrepreneur. We therefore put a lot of emphasis on this stage of the process. Once you have signed up we will spend several weeks going back and forth with our partner organisations in Kenya to ensure that the entrepreneur(s) your staff are working with will benefit from their input (and vice versa).

This isn't just about functional expertise, although that will generally play a part. It is also about ensuring that your employees are happy with the size and type of company that they will be working with, that any cultural or practical considerations are taken into account, and that the length of time that they have available is appropriate to the complexity of the issues that they will be looking at.

We ensure that both mentors and their mentee(s) are happy with the match, and with the proposed goal of each mentoring assignment, before they leave for Kenya. For this reason we recommend signing up for Skills Venture at least two months before employees intend to come to Kenya.

INDUCTION TRAINING

No one can expect your employees to be productive during a relatively short stay in a different continent without being properly inducted. We ensure that they receive a thorough induction and orientation so that they can work with their Kenyan mentees in full confidence, and can derive the maximum possible benefits from the experience.

We can organise team-based induction days in the UK before departure, covering:

- Skills Venture's objectives and summary of the mentoring programme
- Short synopsis of the Kenyan SME sector and the skills they need
- Identifying mentors' own skills and preparing for the mentoring process
- Detailed mentoring case studies and what to expect from the trip
- Cultural awareness including detailed cultural briefing on Kenya
- Logistical issues pre-departure (flights, visas, insurance, health, kit)
- Logistical issues after arrival (campus, accommodation, food, holidays)

Upon arrival in Kenya, mentors undergo a comprehensive local induction course that covers:

- Campus orientation and health and safety brief
- Kenya's history, politics, geography, economy and peoples

- Kenyan culture and working practices
- Small business briefing including barriers to growth and skills shortages
- Mentoring roles and responsibilities, and effective mentoring techniques
- Adapting to local working styles and to entrepreneurial modes of thought
- How to run initial and ongoing mentoring sessions

LOGISTICAL SUPPORT

We can arrange accommodation and food at preferential rates; we offer a number of options for different budgets and situations. All of our programmes are hosted by our local partners, Malewa Bush Ventures, who have been providing award-winning eco-friendly safari accommodation in Kenya for several years.

We can also help to book flights, although we do not book them on your behalf since we are not ATOL bonded. We will help you with all of the other logistical issues as well, such as choosing the right insurance and inoculations, and will provide detailed advice on what employees should pack. Depending on your corporate support arrangements, we can get involved in this part of the process as much or as little as you like.

Throughout the assignment, in addition to having access to our Kenyan facilitators at all times, you and your employees will have access to a 24/7 UK-based emergency helpline.

MENTORING SUPPORT

Unlike almost all other volunteering organisations, we don't simply pair our mentors up with an individual or organisation, arrange their flight and then leave them to it. We believe that to be effective, volunteers need local knowledge and support to help them to adapt to a new culture, a new country, and new ways of doing businesses.

We have a team of facilitators who are on hand at all times to help mentors during their assignment. They are experienced, skilled and above all friendly young Kenyans who have an excellent knowledge of their own culture and environment - and specifically the business context - but are also internationally aware. They are not interpreters, and neither do they need to be - all Kenyan entrepreneurs speak good English. But they will help mentors to adapt quickly to their new surroundings.

In addition to matching mentors with entrepreneurs before they arrive, running our Kenya-based induction training and providing logistical support where needed, our facilitators are available whenever our mentors need them to support, advise, or simply inform. We consider them a truly unique resource.

THE NEEDS OF ENTREPRENEURS IN KENYA

Skills Venture is based on the insight that in many cases, all that an entrepreneur needs is someone to bounce their ideas off. Our assignments usually consist of short mentoring sessions with a number of different entrepreneurs. We know from experience that these are effective and needed. The focus is on coaching small businesses to help resolve specific practical issues that affect them, rather than on teaching general business theory. Transferring skills is also emphasised, so that businesses can deal with similar issues in the future on their own rather than relying on outside help.

Skills Venture is initially operating solely in Kenya, for a number of reasons:

- The economy is growing, banks are lending to small businesses and red tape is being cut back
- Despite these 'enablers', educational standards are poor and the need for business skills is great
- Kenya is almost entirely English-speaking, with a business and legal environment modelled on the UK
- The climate is healthy and there are unrivalled opportunities for tourism
- The founders have ten years of experience running an educational NGO in Kenya

The private sector in Kenya accounts for 80% of GDP and encompasses 1.7 million enterprises. Of these, 97% are classed as 'micro to small'; the remaining 35,000 companies are predominately classed as 'medium', with only 1,000 classed as 'large'. The majority of large companies are subsidiaries of multinational corporations; as a group they account for 30% of GDP. Medium enterprises account for 20%, and micro to small enterprises for a further 20%. Micro-enterprises are often sole traders, outside of the formal economy, selling items such as newspapers or snacks on the street.

Skills Venture focuses on the band of companies that sits at the top end of the 'micro to small' bracket; those companies with real potential for growth and job creation, but without access to the necessary skills and knowledge to realise this potential. It also works with entrepreneurs who are looking to set up new companies from scratch, where they can prove a specific skills need in a defined area.

Within this group there are four main barriers to growth:

- Lack of appropriate business skills
- Lack of access to finance for start-up or expansion
- Lack of contacts within supplier and client markets
- A regulatory and economic environment that hinders entrepreneurialism

Skills Venture focuses on the first of these, and works in close co-operation with partner organisations such as the UN and the World Bank who are also addressing the remaining three barriers. The skills that are most in demand in Kenya vary between sectors, but generally fall into three camps:

- Management (of people, organisations, logistics and projects, and also strategic planning)
- Finance (book-keeping, financial planning, cashflow management, raising finance)
- Marketing and sales (product development, marketing and PR, and selling to overseas markets)

These generic skills requirements are complemented by sector-specific needs that will normally fall outside the scope of Skills Venture. In general, Skills Venture works with companies whose needs are sufficiently generic that they can be helped by a mentor with broad experience in the type of support that they need, but without necessarily having specific sectoral expertise.

CASE STUDIES OF PREVIOUS SKILLS VENTURE MENTORS

MARC JONES

Marc has 23 years' experience with a major international investment bank. He has worked in Asia for nine years within this period. His work has covered all aspects of corporate finance, including business strategy, marketing, managing clients and raising capital. Marc spent one week mentoring three entrepreneurs in Nairobi, Gilgil and Naivasha in June 2009.

THURSDAY: Orientation and meeting with Alex at his premises

After breakfast I have the orientation with Peter, the facilitator, at my hotel. Then lunch with a mentee who wants to develop a business based on Aloe Vera. His passion for the opportunity is inspiring. Finally a meeting with Alex, who runs a small web design agency in Nairobi. In the evening we drive to Malewa.

FRIDAY: Mentoring session with Kamau in Gilgil

Wake up at the Skills Venture campus at Malewa. It's a beautiful setting and the cottage is perfect. A morning run with Charles, once a top 10 runner in Kenya! Then to Gilgil to see Kamau, who runs a family hotel/restaurant business. It has strong assets, but needs to find new ways to increase cash generation.

SATURDAY: Mentoring session with Francis at Malewa

Preliminary discussions with Francis, who is the financial director of a family-owned flower farm near Naivasha. Most mentors take the weekend off, but I decide to waive this right since I only have a week here! We talk about all areas of the business, trying to identify the best ways to improve his margins.

SUNDAY: A day off with a morning run and a visit to church

A morning run with Charles. Then I ask to be taken to a local church service to see how the community comes together on a Sunday to worship and what role it plays in the community. A fascinating chance to experience real local life. Finally, some local sightseeing in the afternoon, then a glass of wine at sunset.

MONDAY: Mentoring session with Alex at Malewa

Alex and his business partner come up from Nairobi to spend a day taking our discussions further. The day ends with a greater appreciation of where value is being created in the business and what issues could cause major problems. They need better division of labour and controls on invoice receivables.

TUESDAY: Mentoring session with Mwangi in Gilgil

A session with a small retailer looking to diversify his product offering. I am impressed with his commercial acumen and drive. We sit in the shop while business continues. He seeks capital for growth; I propose an alternative way to think about capital needs. In 45 minutes he 'gets it'; very satisfying.

WEDNESDAY: Final goodbyes, back to Nairobi, and a look around town

My last day in Kenya. A morning run, some phone calls to mentees, then I pack up and am driven back to Nairobi by taxi. We call by Francis as a follow-up en route. My flight isn't until evening, so I have a few hours to explore the town, and meet up with an SV facilitator for a coffee. Then the airport and home.

MIRANDA LONSDALE

Miranda has 18 years' experience as a nurse, spent ten years working in pharmaceutical sales, and has spent six years managing a GP practice near Leeds. She has delivered many aspects of small business management, including marketing, managing finances and building teams. She spent two weeks mentoring three entrepreneurs in Nairobi, Malewa and Kericho in July 2009.

SUNDAY: Arrival and orientation

I arrive at Nairobi airport in the morning, on the night flight from London. Some sleep on the flight! Am whisked off to the Kivi Milimani hotel in Nairobi. After a few hours' sleep and a swim, I spend a couple of hours with Peter, the Skills Venture facilitator. We run the orientation over a beer and grilled tuna.

MONDAY: Initial meetings with mentees at their premises

I spend a day meeting my two Nairobi-based mentees. Edwin provides writing services for corporate and individual clients. He wants help with a marketing strategy and managing his finances. Timothy manufactures cosmetics and is looking for help with staff management and product pricing. Long talks.

TUESDAY: Mentoring session with Edwin in Nairobi

The first full day of mentoring, also in Nairobi. We discuss Edwin's priorities in more detail. We devise a staff training strategy, complete a product pricing analysis, decide how to set up a website, and create a marketing strategy. Edwin now has a short, medium and long term plan for discussion next week.

WEDNESDAY: Mentoring session with Timothy in Nairobi

Timothy has business plans running around in his head to the extent that he can hardly sleep at night. He feels that the mentoring has given his business a new lease of life, and a positive view of the future which he did not have before. We will stay in touch by email, but first we have another day next week.

THURSDAY: Mentoring session with Sylvia in Kericho

Sylvia manages Kericho Academy and needs to set out clear roles for all staff, collect fees, attract more students, motivate teachers, and manage accounts. No small list. Sylvia says: "Miranda was of great help to me and I will continue to be in touch with her when I feel stuck or unable to handle any challenges."

FRIDAY: Time to reflect and prepare for next week

Nice to have some time to relax a bit after a tiring but immensely fulfilling four days! I use Friday to reflect thoroughly on the meetings I have had so far this week, and to decide what to focus on when I see each of the mentors for a day each next week. Lots of plans and ideas to discuss with each one.

SATURDAY: Trip to the nearby wildlife reserve and Nairobi museum

I use Saturday to do some proper tourist activity, and spend the day at Nairobi National Park, which is only 45 minutes away by car. A great chance to see giraffe, zebra, gazelle, rhino, ostrich, warthog, flamingo... Followed by a quick wander round the fascinating museum, a filling meal, then bed.

ABOUT SKILLS VENTURE

Skills Venture was created to bring together two complementary demands. The first, in developed countries, is the demand among business professionals for a chance to take some time away from work to do something completely different, and in the process to achieve three things:

- Regain perspective, energy and enthusiasm
- Develop existing commercial and interpersonal skills and gain new ones
- Make a genuine difference to their 'host' community

The second, in developing countries around the world, is the demand among entrepreneurs to develop further the core business skills that will enable them to succeed and grow despite the many obstacles in their path, and in the process to create jobs and prosperity for others.

WILL SNELL, Director

Will has spent much of his career in the voluntary sector in the UK, often with an international focus. He co-founded Harambee Schools Kenya, a UK charity, with Rob in 1999. He has run international youth conferences, and residential courses in India. He has worked for DFID and the Department of Health, leading on the development of a number of major strategies with a particular focus on counter-terrorism. He has worked for a number of entrepreneurial start-ups in the UK, and founded a marketing agency and a website design company.

ROB BREARE, Director

Rob co-founded Harambee Schools Kenya with Will while at university. He has spent much of his career with Procter & Gamble, where his work has taken him around the world, with long stints in Switzerland and Greece. He has worked on major household brands and has been responsible for turnovers of more than \$1bn across Western Europe and beyond. He has also spent a number of years with WPP as a strategy consultant, working with some of the largest global FMCG organisations.

MARTINA ERCOLINI, Corporate Marketing Manager

Martina has a degree in International Studies from Bologna University (Italy), with a specialisation in International Development Cooperation. After working in the human resources sector in Italy, she moved to Brussels, where she worked in the European Parliament on international co-operation.

PETER GITHAKA, Head Facilitator (Kenya)

Peter is a seasoned finance professional who holds an MBA from the United States International University in Nairobi, alongside a Higher Diploma in Management Information Systems. He has spent much of his professional life working for Barclays Bank in Kenya.

To find out more about how Skills Venture can help your organisation to reward, motivate and develop your best staff, please browse our website at www.skillsventure.com. You can also contact us on 020 7871 4485 or by email on enquiries@skillsventure.com. We look forward to hearing from you.

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