

## BOLD TYPES

# MIT's startup mentoring service was supposed to last a few years. Try 25.

By [Jon Chesto](#) Globe Staff, Updated December 15, 2025, 1:56 p.m.



Former Bose president Sherwin Greenblatt speaks at an MIT event. LUCKY JUDD

Sherwin Greenblatt was the first employee at [Bose Corp.](#) He designed its most successful speaker system. And he eventually became its president, a job that lasted for 15 years.

But talk to [Greenblatt](#) today and he sounds most proud of another professional accomplishment: helping turn a mentoring service affiliated with MIT from a program that was supposed to be temporary into one with a lasting global impact.

On Tuesday, Greenblatt will reflect on his two-decade tenure as director of MIT's Venture Mentoring Service, known around campus simply as VMS, as part of a celebration of the program's 25th anniversary. Other speakers will include MIT board chair Mark Gorenberg, current VMS director Don Shobrys, engineering professor Chris Love, and several VMS mentees that run their own startups.

MIT wasn't always so entrepreneur-friendly. Professor Dave Staelin and entrepreneur Alec Dingee wanted to change that, and launched the VMS program as a result. Dingee roped in Greenblatt, a friend, to be the program's director early on, in 2003. Greenblatt was looking for a project in retirement and was so enthused by the mission, he couldn't say no.

"In those days, entrepreneurship wasn't very important," Greenblatt says. "Even at MIT, it was considered interesting, but it wasn't a major subject."

Shobrys said the early leaders thought the program might run for a few years, to satisfy the need, and then be done. But it's thriving today. More than 5,100 mentees have gone through it, and more than 200 experts in the Boston area are volunteering their time.

VMS differs from many mentoring programs in that entrepreneurs are connected to not just one mentor, but several subject matter experts, depending on their needs. These are also considered long-term commitments, not just several months of counsel and brainstorming. For many mentors, that represents a commitment of at least eight hours a month, and sometimes as many as 15 hours a week.

"We will stay with a company for as long as they need us," Greenblatt says. "It can be years and years."

Another key difference: VMS has an outreach program to other universities and institutes, providing advice about how to start and grow their own mentoring services. Nearly 140 organizations from around the world have turned to VMS for help.

The program is led by volunteers like Shobrys and Greenblatt, and funded through donations, including from mentees, and revenue from the outreach program. It's also staffed by several MIT employees.

"It's addictive working with these startups," Shobrys said. "They're really good about taking our input ... and synthesizing their own path forward. ... It gives you a great feeling."

*This is an installment of our weekly Bold Types column about the movers and shakers on Boston's business scene.*

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