

Drawing Down the Curtain

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Recognise the Transition

Programmes inevitably run their course, and signal that time is right to pivot the relationship. As Churchill might possibly have asserted, transition can be framed as the beginning of an end, or, the end to another beginning.

Yes, good things eventually do come to a new beginning, don't they? Yet, it's constructive to position closure as an anticipated step in the Mentoring process, one to knowingly plan for. The wasteful alternate, would be to let it slip by insignificantly, an event of little consequence to Mentor or Mentee. Transition is a great time to congratulate, evaluate, and contemplate.

Setting time aside to reflect on accomplishments and review future relationships can be exceptionally productive. It is corollary to that "First Meeting", the one that jump-started the relationship right back at the beginning. Rather than let this closing coda just fade away, it's better to capture and codify thinking within a targeted, formal, and, final Mentoring session.

This "Last Meeting" is significant within the Mentoring relationship, so preparation is vital. It recognises the Transformations that may have taken place. Reflection is aided by both Mentor & Mentee tapping into their own thoughts and feelings, and drawing from Journals compiled along the way. The meeting can be structured to broadly cover three areas, as follows ...

- Recognition of Competences and Growth
- Consideration of the Quality of the Relationship
- Celebration and Gratitude for what has been Accomplished

Reflect at Two levels: The Past, and, The Future

Reflection is a thoughtful process, that looks back on events, elicits felt experiences, and makes sense of them. It's a process of discovery, that constructs new insights and learning, as it moves from recollection and attachment, through to synthesis and detachment.

At a fundamental level, reflection is historical; evidence considered is from the past. Better comprehension of past actions is important, which is why reflection asks questions such as ...

- What decisions did I make?
- What actions did I then take?
- What outcomes did I eventually get?

Yet, reflection can reach an even more powerful level, once it embraces the above learning, and re-purposes it to look ahead and question **“What could be different ... the next time”**. To achieve this meta level conversation requires dissociation from the details, plus, an objective third-person contemplation of future possibilities. This next level requires questions such as ...

- If I now set different, more challenging, goals, how else might I change?
- If I choose to value different beliefs, how better could our relationship become?
- If I become unafraid of those things that I currently fear, how more would I develop?

It can be all too easy to stop at the recent past, take the learning, and move on. Remembering though that Mentoring is for lifetime growth, that journey will continue; new destinations, new headings, new directions will eventuate. Multi-level reflection maximises the insight & wisdom.

1: Recognition of Competences and Growth

Mentoring is part transactional; there's a desire to improve personal Competences and skills. An effective Programme therefore creates potential to build on personal strengths, to achieve Transformational change. The final session provides a means to determine distance travelled.

Powerful reflection links the journey travelled, to the progress made. It forms views on Growth achieved. Questions examine changes in personal knowledge, skills, expertise & attitude. They explore the new capabilities built. They also probe into personal perceptions, such as ability to act in more independent ways, and, the ability to project greater confidence to others.

Reflection also drills down into feelings, to consider the highlights and lowlights experienced. They gauge the nice surprises that may have presented themselves, and, how they contributed to that journey. There may also have been disappointments, so it's important to ponder over obstacles and challenges that may have arisen, and how they threatened progress.

Effective reflection looks at motivations too, as these tend to fluctuate over the relationship. Questions provide insights to the motivations held over the different programme phases. Which aspects were easier or more difficult; the early goal setting? Selection of the final destination? Choice of projects to work on? Conducting deliberate practice, even, Regularising meetings?

These are some of the core aspects that can lead to real, authentic insight into strategies and actions pursued. Remember, the intention is to evolve insights into usable learning resources, rather than as “weapons” for personal judgement. This perhaps, is often easier said than done!

At a “Meta” level, it is important to step right back, to objectively, and dispassionately, revisit the “Goals”. It's insightful to wonder how things might have been different, with different starting assumptions, and even greater ambitions. Could you have achieved more, and if so, what different actions would you take next time in order to achieve better results?

2: Consideration of the Quality of the Relationship

Mentoring is part relational; there's a desire to improve interpersonal Competences and skills. It is a dialogical process enacted between Mentor and Mentee. The final session provides the means to reflect on the relationship and two key determinants of its quality; Trust, and Safety.

Trust builds slowly, is earned over time, and yet, it can quickly be destroyed. Good reflection looks at how both have contributed to the creation and deepening of Trust. For instance, ability to keep commitments made, respect for confidentiality, and, holding open, honest dialogue.

Safety enables that dialogue, danger closes it down. Skills can be examined that evidence commitment to and accountability for dialogue. For instance, propensity to speak up, probe sensitively, hold space whilst listening, manage conflict, and provide feedback are all valuable. The ability to "Suspend Judgement" whilst in dialogue is also crucial for others to feel "Safe".

Trust and Safety sit at the core of the Mentoring "Contract" that's drawn up at the start of the relationship. The contractual emphasis is to establish good communication channels, bring clarity to the Mentoring Process, and make sense of the Purpose of Mentoring. Effective reflection provides insight, by contrasting the earlier intentions with actual realities.

Stepping back to the "Meta" level, it is important consider how the relationship "Feels". Be curious, consider in what ways the Contract could be changed, how regular meet up sessions could be varied, or indeed, how the status between Mentor & Mentee could be changed (increased or reduced). The greater the objectivity, the more powerful and enriching the reflection will become.

3: Celebration and Gratitude for what has been Accomplished

Mentoring is also part recognition; there's a need to acknowledge and appreciate the quality of the personal investments made. Counterintuitively, this is often part of the formal closure that's overlooked. For a rounded, effective review, it is vital to appreciate fully, your joint efforts.

Celebration is a source of fuel for motivation, and accomplishment provides a launch pad for all sorts of celebrations. So as part of the "Final Meeting", find accomplishments, and look for ways to celebrate. Be intentional, find things that went well, and express gratitude for them. This is not empty "new age thinking"; Positive psychology is research based, benefits are real.

Searching for success however, can be more difficult than it appears. There are a few challenges that often get in the way; psychological, cultural, and, habitual.

Firstly, analysis is part of the reflective process, so there is a tendency to seek out things that did not work as planned. It's natural, as humans love to learn, fix, and get it right the next time. This tendency to look for and find the worst, is known as "Negativity Bias". It stems from our primeval, caveman instincts to survive. It's not necessarily bad, so long as it's managed.

Secondly, culture can play a part, especially where weight is placed on group harmony. By nature, communication can be less expressive, and perhaps more reserved. Finally, looking for the positive in things may not yet be habitual; not everyone practices it with great regularity.

At a “Meta” level, choose to be kind to yourself. Give yourself some wiggle room to err. The Mentoring Process is not about perfecting, but about making mistakes, learning, and growing. Choose to express gratitude for the small things that both of you have seen and done. Fully appreciate the efforts invested, not just the results achieved. Celebrate, with pride, and joy.

The Final Act: Waiting for the Curtain to Fall

Having conducted a formal, fruitful, “Final Session”, one critical question often remains; what next? The answer is typically contingent upon Mentor & Mentee perceptions, related to three relevant aspects. First, how much personal Growth was achieved. Second, how well each experienced the Process. And finally, what if any, respective future intentions each hold.

Established relationships often continue following a successful Mentoring stint. That said, it usually morphs into a different form. Optimistic indicators are: an ability to appreciate joint accomplishments, holding positive feelings towards the other, and, comfort in expressing gratitude to the partner.

Where all three aspects are present, there’s a high likelihood that Mentor & Mentee continue ahead in a positive relationship. This may remain formal, or not, depending on the new needs.

So, whether Mentoring continues as a process for “Giving”, or one for “Getting”, both paths are equally good. Tending to the details and conducting the relationship personally, professionally, and fullheartedly, always will lead to “Gains”, and “Growth” for both; enjoy.

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