

THE MAGAZINE FOR THE IT PROFESSIONAL

ITNOW

SUMMER 2019

DIGITAL TRANSFORMATION CULTURE / PROCESS / TECHNOLOGY

BCS

The
Chartered
Institute
for IT

bcs.org/itnow



MANAGING YOUR CAREER BY BECOMING A MENTEE

In the last issue of *ITNOW* I explored what mentorship is – where the idea comes from, how the process works and what it feels like to be a mentor, writes Patrick O'Brien, Managing Director of The Amanuenses Network.

Systems architect, now that was a job title that turned my head the very first time I heard it. To be fair, by then, I'd long moved up from the ranks of development and into business leadership. Nonetheless, it still resonated.

Back then, architecture conjured up grand visions, elegant designs and the creation of new and wonderful experiences. The word invoked images of spaces that looked big, were bold and felt beautiful.

These days I see parallels with a mentee, someone who acts as a responsible 'architect' for their job, their career, even their life. A mentee creates that grand vision for their personal future, designs desired possibilities and plans a unique roadmap that relates to their particular needs.

However, as skilled craftspeople, it's easy to get caught up in the busyness of business, isn't it? That means our time is absorbed constantly by other peoples' tasks. Wouldn't it be smarter to instead invest a little of that precious time working on the development of our own self?

People that choose to mentee do just

this. They go well beyond their daily tasks. They take ownership of their future – with a mentor they architect their own roadmap. They select a set of competences, all chosen to align with their aspirations.

'A mentee recognises that their tomorrow is going to be different from their today.'

A mentee recognises that their tomorrow is going to be different from their today. Enrolment for them as a mentee, is an active and outward expression of their desire to play an active part in shaping those tomorrows. Mentees are individuals who wish to spend less of their time doing or being and instead, commit to the rewarding process of becoming.

Setting realistic expectations, in a strategic way

Mentoring is a collaboration where two individuals both commit equally to personal growth. From a mentee's perspective it's about imagining a different and positive future – one allowing them to

achieve change.

Their success is measured by the track they take and the distance they travel, so they need to set clear expectations. Very early on, a mentee needs to address: What, where and how? The answers to these

questions are important because they will inform the direction of travel.

Figuratively the pair will create a map for their journey. They'll paint a high-level vision. They'll use that map to identify and signpost a set of competencies that are relevant to the next stage of their life journey. These milestone markers will shape and motivate the mentee's growth throughout the mentoring programme across three key areas:

- Setting direction
- Using deliberate practice
- Engaging their mentor in feedback.

Focusing finite energies to be resourceful and responsible

Mentoring is an enjoyable journey of

For More Amanuenses Soft Skills Articles, Click Here

discovery. Best outcomes are achieved when the mentee focuses their soft skill energies in three areas.

1: To maintaining a heading

'What do I want from my mentoring programme?' This is a challenging question. The mentee must grapple with this early on. It's tough on two counts: timing and the type of thinking required.

Firstly, the answer provides direction, so it must be addressed right at the start. Sitting back passively and assuming the mentor knows best is not an effective strategy. Doing so creates a deferential and hierarchical relationship.

Participation means a mentee is responsible for their own personal growth. Creating that positive future allows a mentee to stand on their own two feet. And to do so independently of their mentor. This is an important aim.

Secondly, thinking about the future is hard for three reasons. Imagining the unknown is a difficult task for the brain. It takes great effort and energy. Next, our brains are constantly bombarded and distracted, which makes them less effective. Finally, our brains rely on something called temporal discounting. In essence, we prefer smaller gains in the present, to larger gains in the future.

So, though it can seem tough, time invested early-on to imagine desired futures, is the most crucial and rewarding action a mentee can take. Setting out a broad direction for growth, selecting related competences to cultivate and knowing which outcomes to value are vital. Together, they provide the mentee with the compass they need, to set and maintain their heading.

2: To develop competences, use deliberate practise

Once a mentee knows where they're heading, the next step is to clarify what set of competences is relevant to them. From that, they can identify projects that expose those competences for development. Finally, they can work to develop a mindset that allows them to practise their desired

competences, with confidence.

To identify competences, it is often more effective to draw from existing competency frameworks, such as the BCS SFIAplus model. A good strategy develops a focused list, limiting choice to perhaps only three to five critical capabilities.

Next, target specific projects to develop competences. Be strategic, view the incoming task stream as a portfolio of possibilities, despite each having competing demands for speed, quality, cost and service. Triage larger tasks in terms of product, process and priorities. Those with flexibility around the process may allow experimentation, the key to competence development.

'An effective mentee is able to convey their desire to hear and ability to receive mentor feedback at all times.'

Also look out for opportunities to knowingly conduct small experiments. Yet, remain mindful that in business, results count. Risks need to be minimised. Practising with deliberate intentions is a good strategy. To do this, adopt a mindset that separates performance, from practise.

A performance mindset exploits what's already known, to focus on delivery. It operates at optimal effectiveness by actioning known processes. This frame values high end results, access to assigned resources, certainty of effort and appropriate metrics that align effort to outcomes.

A practise mindset explores what's unknown, to focus on development. It experiences new content and processes, by experimenting with unknowns. This frame values growth, isolation of competences, conscious effort to build specific skill sets and reflection on what unfolds.

3: To stay on track, engage your mentor in feedback

Deliberate practise needs their mentor to provide timely feedback. The mentee needs to understand how their actions impact expected outcomes, so they need to pause, reflect, and learn. They can feed forward

positively into their future practise, any and all insights gained.

An effective mentor is able to provide constructive, real-time, feedback, that's relevant to the task at hand. They are also influential communicators, who empathetically bring the wisdom of their experiences to bear.

An effective mentee is able to convey their desire to hear and ability to receive mentor feedback at all times. That feedback is relevant during deliberate practise and experimentation. They can also feedback to their mentor. This allows them to share things they need, what's working, what isn't and what other help they need from their mentor.

Dialogue and the continual sharing of feedback is the third of three critical areas a mentee needs to work on. And though direct feedback can sometimes feel uncomfortable, when given with sincerity, in a timely fashion and within a relationship based on trust, it is more effective.

Mentees are architects of their desired future

In summary, involvement as a mentee means taking ownership and responsibility for one's career. It means looking ahead to frame a vision, a purpose and a path for development. It also means working in concert with a trusted adviser, consulting with a mentor whose role it is to help the mentee get on-track to achieve a positive, transformational growth trajectory.

In the third and final article, we'll turn our attention to the mentoring process, to cover the roles and perspectives of both mentor and mentee.

Written by Patrick O'Brien MInstD CMgr FCMI and Managing Director of The Amanuenses Network Pte.
More soft skill articles can be found via the website: amanuenses.net