

# How to Train your Mentor

And get the best value from mentoring  
Jacqui Carrel



JACQUI CARREL

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# HOW TO TRAIN YOUR MENTOR

## AND GET THE BEST VALUE FROM MENTORING

How to Train your Mentor: And get the best value from mentoring

1<sup>st</sup> edition

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# 1 INTRODUCTION

Congratulations on opening this book and starting on your journey to improve the benefits of having a Mentor.

Some people are born Mentors, some people become Mentors through training and experience, but most people have mentorship thrust upon them.

The problem with most Mentors is that they actually know very little about how to be an effective Mentor. To get the best from a mentoring relationship, it is frequently down to the Mentee to lead and direct the Mentor! I've been training Mentors for quite a few years now, and have come to realise that Mentees can be trained to get the best from their Mentors, even if their Mentors have no training or natural inclination. Mentees too, are (or should be) highly motivated to do this. After all, they are the ones who expect to get the most benefit from a mentoring relationship.

There are many self-help and other leadership books out there written by mentoring gurus. Most seek to educate you on the basics in how to start a mentoring relationship. However, very few deal with what to do when you find yourself in the middle of a mentoring relationship, as a Mentee, and are uncertain as to whether you are getting the best value from that relationship.

Over the years, I have found that my mentoring style needed to flow and change as I worked with a variety of different Mentees with differing needs and differing styles of working. I am fortunate in having had Mentor training, but my observation is that many Mentors have not. Putting an inexperienced Mentor together with an inexperienced Mentee is not a recipe for success! Mentors also have a variety of styles and approaches, some of which may work for you and some of which may not.

In thinking back over my 20+ years of both mentoring and training Mentors, I extracted several ideas and tips that I learned, used and found very helpful to start the conversation for improving how Mentees can direct the changes they need and get best value from their Mentors.

This guide is not a substitute for good, in depth mentoring training. However, if your Mentor has not had training, it will help you keep things under your control. Mentors who plan to mentor more than one person over a sustained length of time should still have training. Until they do, this book will help you get a whole lot more from your Mentors now.

**Chapter 2 and 3** focus on what mentoring is, some of the myths around mentoring and the different situations where you would benefit from having a Mentor

**Chapter 4 and 5 focus** on what a good Mentor looks like, how different Mentors behave and how to get the best from each type

**Chapters 6 and 7** focus on reviewing and understanding where you are in your mentoring journey.

**Chapter 8** focuses on best practice mentoring, including lots of tips for getting the best from you Mentor in different situations and at different stages

**Chapter 9** focuses on what to do when you run into trouble.

**Chapter 10** focuses on how to finish. A mentoring relationship should always last for a finite time. This chapter explains when you might want to finish early, and how to do it.

Some of these ideas and tips may seem obvious to you, but they will not necessarily be obvious to everyone else!

## 2 WHAT IS MENTORING?

Mentoring is a powerful personal development and empowerment tool to enable you to learn from the skills and/or experience of someone else. Sometimes this is structured, as in an internal mentoring programme; sometimes it is more a series of useful conversations to help you towards a particular goal. There are three basic types of mentoring:

- ‘Traditional’ mentoring, where the Mentor is more senior and experienced than the Mentee
- ‘Peer’ mentoring, where the Mentor and Mentee are at a similar level of skill or experience, often in different but related areas, and who exchange ideas
- ‘Bottom-up’ mentoring, where the Mentor has a specific, often technical, skill to share with a more senior Mentee

Although a Mentor will guide you based on your and their experience, the final decisions are always yours to make.

### 2.1 MYTH 1 - MENTORING AND COACHING ARE THE SAME THING

There are a number of different views on the difference between coaching and mentoring, depending on your industry. This is my definition, as appropriate for mentoring within a business type environment<sup>1</sup>:

**A Coach** has been trained to ask questions to help you to focus on identifying the options you already know about, but where you find it hard to choose the best for your circumstances. They will motivate you, but usually do not have any direct experience of your business situation and cannot offer additional business or career suggestions. They often focus on specific performance issue, and are generally useful for short-term, focussed assignments.

**A Mentor** will have experience of your business environment, be able to ask specific questions about your situation, offer alternative solutions based on their own experience, help you choose between these and your own ideas and motivate you to learn how to solve them yourself. The main difference is the transfer of knowledge from them to you. Mentoring tends to be for longer term and for more complex needs than a coaching assignment, where you will benefit from a more holistic approach.

Both coaching and mentoring are very useful, but which is most appropriate for you, will depend on your circumstances and goals.

## 2.2 BENEFITS OF HAVING A MENTOR

A Mentor is someone to help you think about your options, define your goals so they are both challenging and achievable and to help you focus on achieving those goals. A Mentor is someone with whom you can discuss issues and challenges in confidence, who is independent of your situation and, through their experience, can help you find different options. They should also help you to build your confidence in making decisions for yourself.

For example, a Mentor can help you:

- Get an outside/different perspective on a difficult business or career problem
- Talk you through the different options and help you to decide which is the best one
- Give you a broader perspective on your options
- Give you a sounding board for new ideas and for considering those options as they relate to your own situation
- Bring your knowledge of key business related areas up to date
- Develop your skills and knowledge
- Help you learn from someone else's successes and mistakes

## 2.3 MYTH 2 – MENTORING IS ALL ABOUT THE MENTEE

While a Mentee certainly gets most of the obvious benefits, the Mentor also benefits, as does your organisation. It is often helpful to remember this, when putting forward a justification to your organisation for the time and cost of having a Mentor.

## 2.4 BENEFITS TO THE MENTOR

Mentoring is an effective way to develop essential leadership skills:

- **Shared knowledge and experience**, as the Mentor will see more value of their experience as they see new ways to use it
- **Improved communication skills**, as the Mentor practises their listening skills
- **Increased motivation**, as the Mentor sees someone appreciate their involvement in helping someone achieve their goals
- **Satisfaction of seeing someone learn from your mistakes**. This adds value to what might otherwise feel like a negative experience

## 2.5 BENEFITS TO THE ORGANISATION

The success of an organisation is down to the effectiveness of its people, so having people learning ‘soft’ skills before the risk of putting them into a management or leadership role:

- **Grow more potential leaders**, as essential key skills are being learned through both being a Mentor and a Mentee
- **Faster and more relevant development**, as skills development can be targeted and focussed on the particular needs of the individuals in your organisation
- **Better employee retention**, as people feel more cared about and supported
- **Cost effective**, as mentoring is much less expensive than external training courses
- **Better change management**. Using Mentors to help people transition during change programmes can increase the probability of success many-fold.

## 2.6 MYTH 3 - MENTORING CAN FIX ANYTHING

You might now be forgiven for thinking that mentoring can fix anything! It cannot resolve all problems, and a successful mentoring partnership needs a willing and committed Mentee and Mentor. In addition, there are some things to bear in mind:

- **A Mentor will not have exactly the same experiences as you.** They will have different experiences, which will give you more options.
- **Mentee drives the partnership**, and sets the pace
- **Mentee takes responsibility for actions**, and makes the decisions
- **Mentors do not find customers!** They can however, suggest strategies for attracting them.
- **Mentoring partnerships should last for a finite time**, and be focussed on achieving some sort of agreed outcome or goal
- **A Mentor will not just hand over their network**, although they will often introduce you to additional people who can help you achieve your goals

## 2.7 MYTH 4 – MENTORS ARE BORN NOT MADE

Few people are born to be great Mentors without some help. They may already have some good skills, but not know how to use them effectively. They may be missing key skills, or need to develop those skills further. Most people, however experienced in their field need at least some guidance or training to be truly effective as Mentors.

The good news is that with the help in this book, you can help them!

## 2.8 MYTH 5 – ANYONE CAN BECOME A MENTOR

Just because they have the right experience, it does not mean you can develop the rapport needed to work them to achieve your goals.

Just because someone is very senior or has been successful does not mean they will be any good as a Mentor. Mentoring requires a special blend of good coaching skills, empathy, and relevant experience. A good mentoring relation requires mutual respect, good listening skills, and the ability to challenge you, but not in a threatening way. Without these, mentoring can be a discouraging experience.

Many senior people are very good at giving you ‘advice’. While this may be helpful, it usually does not help you to apply it to your particular situation.

## 2.9 SIGNS THAT YOUR MENTOR MAY NEED SOME HELP

No one wants to be less than a great Mentor, but some Mentors do need help. Here are some things that may indicate that your Mentor needs your assistance to become better.

- **They do most of the talking.** All they want to do is tell you how wonderful and successful they are, regardless of how relevant this success may be to you.
- **They have you doing endless and unnecessary tasks with unrealistic deadlines.** This is usually a senior person who has forgotten how long it takes to do things they now have minions to do.
- **Their experience is mostly in one organisation.** If this is a similar organisation to yours, this is not a problem. Ideally, though, you want your Mentor to have a breadth of experience to give you a wide variety of options.
- **They do not have the experience you thought they did.** A particular issue if you are in a reverse mentoring situation, where a more junior Mentor is trying to share their technical expertise with a more senior Mentee.
- **They do not explain well.** It may be that your Mentor is just not very good at explaining things to you in simple terms, or may not be good communicators.
- **They TELL you what you should do.** I do not mean a little push, but out and out bullying. This will not build your confidence in being able to take decisions for yourself.
- **The critic.** The person who doesn't give you useful suggestions, but who tells you that you are an idiot, and don't know how to do anything correctly
- **They are never available.** It may all have started very well, but either they overcommitted themselves, or they just don't see mentoring you as a priority

- **You do not feel comfortable with them.** Sometimes we are just not comfortable with someone. It is not anyone's fault, but the chemistry just is not there.
- **The 'buddy'.** While empathy is important, you want the mentoring relationship to stay business focussed. Buddies often do not respect boundaries.
- **They do not ask you questions.** It is very difficult to build rapport with someone who does not ask questions! It is also hard to get an in-depth understanding of a situation if you do not ask questions.
- **They ask too many questions!** About what you did at the weekend, how your marriage is doing and what you think about the Brexit situation. Asking questions is an essential part of being a Mentor, but some people just do not know when to stop.
- **They do not respect your confidentiality.** There is a saying that loose lips sink ships. You will not feel comfortable exploring improvements, if there is any risk of your concerns getting back to the wrong person e.g. your boss. This is a particular risk with in-house mentoring programmes.
- **They just want to complain about how awful their life is.** These people suck the positivity and life out of you very quickly. You may even find yourself trying to mentor them!

Some of these are fixable with a little training or adjustment by your Mentor. For example, confidentiality is often not something an in-house Mentor thinks about, as they may assume you will want your manager to know everything. A short initial conversation about what they can and cannot share may be all you need.

The challenge is to find a way to help your Mentor become a better Mentor.

## 3 DIFFERENT MENTORING SITUATIONS

I mentioned earlier that mentoring could be beneficial in a variety of different situations. Let us look at the possibilities in more detail.

### 3.1 CAREER DEVELOPMENT

When most of us think of mentoring, career development is often the first thing that springs to mind. Your Mentor acts a trusted adviser, both personally and professionally, to give you ideas towards making your career more successful, smoothing the path to greater career success. Your Mentor is usually a more senior person in the same career path as you yourself are in e.g. a more senior manager in your own organisation or a more senior technical person in another organisation etc. Traditionally, this would often be a long-term relationship, as you grow and become more successful. However, it does not have to be. Sometimes, what you need is a short, sharp engagement to help you over a hump in your career path e.g. finding a new job, managing your first 100 days in a new position etc.

Here are some areas of career development that a Mentor could help you:

- Building your confidence
- Asking for promotion
- Preparing for promotion
- Overcoming a career 'hump' or dead end
- Improving your communications
- Getting a different perspective
- Exploring alternative career options
- Transitioning to a new career
- Validate your search assumptions and career trajectory
- Gain perspective on new markets/companies/roles
- Think outside the box about your next steps
- Prioritize your search efforts
- Prepare for "make or break" interviews
- Job search
- Cope effectively with the isolation and frustration of a prolonged search

Do not assume that, just because you are well established in your career, that a Mentor would not be useful. Careers today are not the smooth trajectory they used to be. Nowadays, we can expect to have at least two careers; many of us will have three or even four different careers!

Mentoring gives you the opportunity to get individual attention from another professional person who has 'been there, done it, and bought the T-Shirt'.

A Mentor may have more experience of the position you aspire to, and may be able to offer more information about what that job is actually like to do. They can give you some ideas on how to present your experience and skills in such a way that you are seen as making a natural progression to this new role. Often, they can share how they themselves made this upwards transition, what mistakes they made, what they found to be useful etc.

If they have been responsible for recruiting people into this position, they can help you rehearse your answers to the sort of questions an interview is likely to ask you.

They can give you someone to share your thoughts with, when the search or preparation takes longer than you thought, making suggestions on alternative approaches.

**Tip: many Mentees are looking for how to get onto the next rung of the career ladder. Mentors do not need to be miles ahead in their careers to help with this.**

### **3.2 JOB RELOCATION**

Chasing a better career opportunity these days will often require you to change locations. Sometimes this can be far across the country, or even the world. This can be quite daunting. Although you will probably get good support from your new organisation, this may be generic and even patchy. You may feel isolated as the 'new girl/boy' and start to lose confidence, as you no longer know everything about your new role. A Mentor can be invaluable in helping you to make transition to a new geographical location, a new organisation, or a new culture. This is often a great time to consider forming a new mentoring relationship. This will help you to form a firm foundation and allow you to thrive in your new location.

A Mentor can also help you with identifying new opportunities that an unfamiliar environment may mean you otherwise miss. They can act as a sounding board and listen to new ideas in your new environment, being objective in a way that your new boss might not be. They can offer advice and perspective on how to present these ideas too.

Here are some areas of job relocation that a Mentor could help you:

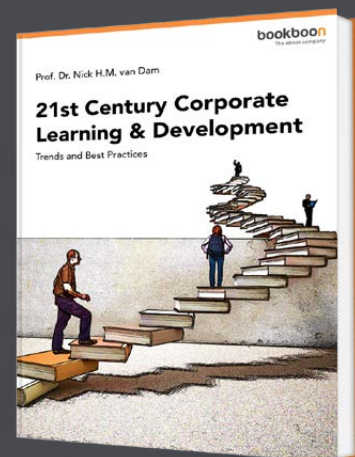
- Building your confidence
- Preparing for your new environment
- Practical suggestions about your new location
- Coping with change
- Reviewing your communications
- Getting a different perspective
- Transitioning to a new role
- Gain perspective on new markets/companies/roles
- Think outside the box about your next steps
- Cope effectively with the isolation and frustration of being the 'new boy/girl'

Tip: Ask your Mentor to help put you put together a 'moving' plan

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### 3.3 STARTING A NEW BUSINESS

For some of us, facing the challenges of doing work for someone else will push us to the stage where we believe we would prefer to do it ourselves. If you have not run your own business before, the practicalities can be quite daunting (I know this from personal experience!). A Mentor can help you:

- Identify what kind of business you want to run
- Understand your options
- Work out how to write a business plan
- Find funding
- Decide when to jettison your safe fulltime job
- Build your confidence
- Improve your communications
- Get a different perspective
- Exploring alternative business options
- Gain perspective on new markets/companies/roles
- Think outside the box about your next steps
- Cope effectively with the isolation and frustration of being a small business owner

A word of caution here. There are a large number of people who call themselves Business Mentors. Some are really 'Life Coaches', some are 'Business Advisors' and some are really Bank Managers! All can be useful, but be aware that their primary role is not to be a Mentor.

**Tip: be cautious if your Mentor doesn't have experience of starting their own business or at least helping someone else successfully do this recently. Starting a new division of a large organisation is not the same.**

### 3.4 PROFESSIONAL UPDATING

There is no doubt that the pace of change is increasing. Technology is all around us and being used in ever more creative and useful ways. This means that almost every profession, trade, or business is changing almost faster than we can cope with. This is certainly true for anyone at the 'coal-face' of technology, managers of those people, and people whose role it is to determine the strategic direction in light of those technological changes.

However, it is not only technology that is changing. Today, a professional may see changes in law, society, medicine, politics all other areas of the environment<sup>2</sup> within which we work.

Having a Mentor who has more experience in one or other of these can help you stay up to date without having to commit to expensive or time-consuming training. They can help you identify key trends that you need to stay aware of, new practices you need to master and discuss the potential impact of new trends.

If you are new to your role, they can help you fast track to greater competence.

Here are some areas of professional updating that a Mentor could help you:

- Building your confidence in new technology
- Overcoming a knowledge ‘black-hole’
- Improving your communications
- Exploring alternative developments
- Transitioning to a new role
- Gain perspective on changes in your environment
- Bring your knowledge up-to-date
- Think outside the box about opportunities that new technology presents
- Discuss the trends in your profession
- Help you reach an expert level in your profession
- Identify key players in the field you must get to know

Only an expert Mentor in your profession or trade can play this role. You may be fortunate to have your manager as an expert in your profession or trade, but they are often even further out of touch with the kind of key knowledge that a practitioner needs to know.

**Tip: if your Mentor’s professional experience isn’t current, suggest you go to a professional updating event together.**

### **3.5 SPECIALIST/TECHNOLOGY KNOWLEDGE**

For those of us who are not already technology experts, the rise of automation, social media and other technology applications can be quite daunting. Technology has become pervasive. It is there in everything we do. As mentioned in the previous section, the pace of change is also increasing. Yet, we are expected to master these quickly. Indeed, it is fast becoming essential for many roles that we do so.

One way to stay on top of this is to have a technology Mentor. This is often where a bottom up Mentor can be very useful i.e. someone who is much more familiar and confident with using the technology.

- Building your confidence in new technology
- Gain perspective on technology changes in your environment
- Understand the impact of the technology on your role
- Bring your technical skills up-to-date
- Think outside the box about opportunities that new technology presents
- Answer questions about new technology tools
- Advise you on new systems to learn or explore
- Work with you to develop a plan for exploiting leading technologies

**Tip:** think about having an additional 'bottom-up Mentor' for this.

### 3.6 RETURNING TO WORK

For women returning from maternity and childcare absence, and for anyone returning from a career break, it can be hard to get back up to speed with work practice and technology change. Having a Mentor before your return can help with this transition. We lose far too many skilled workers in STEM<sup>3</sup> professions, and a good mentoring programme can make a lot of difference in ensuring that these scarce skills are not lost.

For an organisation, retaining key skilled workers is also essential. By supporting them with a Mentor, they can ensure that that experience and skills are not lost, and that valuable resources are retained within the organisation.

There is no doubt that returning from break of even a year can feel like an insurmountable challenge. It may be that you want to (or need to) explore alternative but related roles. A Mentor can help you review your skills to see which are most transferable. Chances are too, that you may need to reacclimatise yourself to the workplace, as that too has changed.

Here are some areas that a Mentor could help you with when returning from a career break:

- Identifying your transferable skills
- Building your confidence back
- Reacclimatising to the workplace
- Improving your communications
- Exploring alternative roles
- Help you negotiate part time working
- Transitioning to a new role
- Gain perspective on changes in your environment

- Bring your knowledge up-to-date
- Discuss the trends in your profession
- Update your professional networks
- Overcome 'CV gap' barrier of traditional recruitment
- Opportunity to return to a STEM career

With a Mentor, you do not have to lose your skills when you take a career break. You do not have to go right back to square one in your career.

**Tip: if your Mentor has not taken a similar break to you, it may also be helpful to draw on their job changing experience.**

### 3.7 TRAINING CONSOLIDATION

After a training session, having a Mentor in a particular subject can consolidate what you just learned.

Quite often, we attend expensive training programmes and return to the office fired with enthusiasm to try out new techniques and ways of doing things. Very quickly, we find that we have forgotten some of the nuances of why this new way was a good idea. Slowly, or in some cases quickly, the gloss is tarnished and we fall back into the old way of doing things. Sometimes we even do the training again, hoping that this time it will be different.

If you have a Mentor, you can discuss how these new methods will benefit your work while the training is still fresh in your mind. Better still, talk to your Mentor before you go on the training, so that you can consolidate the new learning directly and quickly. Use your Mentor to bounce new ideas that have arisen during the training and to review what and how these might work best. The sheer act of discussing this with your Mentor will help to consolidate the knowledge you have just acquired from your training.

Developers need developing in soft skills too, and a Mentor with a technical background can be very beneficial

**Tip: discuss your training with your Mentor before and after you go.**

The next chapter will help you identify what a good Mentor looks like.

## 4 WHAT MAKES A GOOD MENTOR?

There are thousands of Mentors out there. Some are good, but most are just average. Having said that, a good Mentor for you will not necessarily be a good Mentor for your friend Josephine Bloggs!

So how do you choose one? Or, how do you assess whether the Mentor you have, could be trained into being a good Mentor for you?

Here are some skills and behaviours you probably want your Mentor to have:

### 4.1 GOOD MENTORS

Not all Mentors will have these, but expect them to have a good majority of these:

- Experiences of success and failure
- To be inspirational (to you)
- Broad knowledge and experience in your area
- Someone who know that mentoring is a skill, and will want to be as good as they can be
- Understand about potential conflicts of interest
- Have Empathy: the ability to see the world through your eyes
- Be willing to ask a variety of questions: open questions, probing questions, but not leading questions
- Listen Actively
- Suggest not tell
- Manage your expectations about what they can and can't do
- Understand about personal goals and objectives
- Boost your confidence
- Is someone you feel you can trust

**Tip:** a Mentor will not have exactly the same experiences as you. They will have different experiences which will give you more options

## 4.2 RESEARCH YOUR MENTOR

Especially useful before you engage with a Mentor, but still helpful if you are fairly early in your mentoring relationship. This may seem obvious, but is often forgotten. Do not be afraid of looking them up on LinkedIn or their company website, or ask about their experience as a Mentor. They will respect you for asking, and it shows you are serious.

**Tip – look them up first and then ask them questions about something relevant that interests you about their experience at (or before) your first meeting.**

## 4.3 WATCH OUT FOR CONFLICTS OF INTEREST

However wonderful your Mentor may appear to be, if they break trust, then the relationship is probably over. Here are two true stories:

### 4.3.1 STORY ONE

When I was managing a large mentoring programme, I once had a Mentee come to me with concerns about her Mentor. It would appear that although her Mentor worked in a completely different organisation to the Mentee, she knew the Mentee's boss. Unfortunately, the mentoring relationship came up in conversation and the Mentor let slip that she was mentoring the member of staff. While I do not believe the Mentor shared any confidential information, the pure fact that the Mentee now knew her boss knew her Mentor, was enough to create a trust concern. She could never be sure that her boss would not find out about her private and confidential concerns about her working environment, how she was coping with it etc. Fortunately, I was able to find her another Mentor.

**Tip: have that conversation about potential conflicts of interest as soon as you can. If you have not had it yet, have it now.**

### 4.3.2 STORY TWO

This is even more of a potential problem when a Mentee and Mentor work for the same organisation. At a recent training session, I was surprised by a question from an attendee: 'when do I discuss what the Mentee has told me with their manager?' Some in-house

mentoring programmes have a communication connection to a Mentee's manager. I believe this compromises the trust between Mentee and Mentor, as the Mentor will then find it difficult to be completely honest about issues they may have with their manager and/or their organisation's culture etc. Even if this is not the case, there is a greater likelihood that your Mentor may know someone you work with, and be tempted to share your confidential conversations with them.

**Tip: explicitly check whether your Mentor understands your expectations regarding confidentiality. Do not assume they do.**

## 5 MENTOR BEHAVIOUR

Although it is very tempting to assume that all Mentors are the same, experience tells us that this is not the case. Each person will have their own way of working; knowing which your Mentor's preferred style is will help you manage them better.

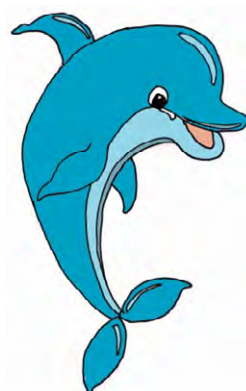
It would be very nice if you could pick a Mentor and know they were going to behave in the exact same way. Or would it? In the same way that each of behaves differently, Mentors are the same. A few years ago, along with some colleagues, I did some research on how people behave in a working environment, resulting in the book 'Field Guide to the Workplace Jungle'.<sup>4</sup> I have now extended this into how Mentors behave.

Here are some of the different 'behaviours' you may experience and some tips for getting the best from them. You may like to try to identify your own Mentor.

Please take the animal behaviour references here with a pinch of salt. They are simply to help illustrate that different Mentors will have different approaches to how they want to help you. While this is light-hearted, it does help you to think a little differently about the different behaviours that Mentors employ.

Even if you do not have a Mentor who best suits you, at least you will know what you are dealing with.

### 5.1 THE DOLPHIN



Dolphins are loyal, intelligent, and highly emotionally intelligent. The Dolphin is an expert at helping you to understand your own skills, will empathize with your troubles, and offer sympathy when you are uncertain about your progress. They are easy to get to know, as

they have great social skills. If you need someone to help build your confidence, but do not need a long list of alternative options, a Mentor who behaves like a Dolphin can be just the sort of Mentor who will suit.

Dolphins form strong social ties and are often very good at networking too, although not as good as Spiders!

**Strengths:** empathy, intelligence, and confidence building.

**Weaknesses:** can be sensitive or defensive.

Tip: ask them to be there for you, and to help you build your social empathy.

## 5.2 THE BULL



Having a Mentor who behaves like a Bull can be great when you are planning to do something new, and you want to test how robust your idea is. The Bull is excellent as a sounding board in this situation. They will challenge your ideas and help you put together robust arguments to support what you are planning to do. A Mentor who behaves like a Bull will use their own experience to challenge your thinking and help you to thoroughly examine your own arguments.

Bulls can also help you prepare for tricky interviews, as they will know all the most difficult questions!

**Strengths:** challenging, assertive, robust.

**Weaknesses:** can be challenging (!) or overbearing.

Tip: ask them to act as 'devil's advocate' to help you think more robustly.

### 5.3 THE BAT



A Mentor who behaves like a BAT is superb at listening, so can be a great sounding board. Not because they are necessarily insightful, but they will provide you with a way to air your own thoughts, while gently prompting you for detailed information based on their own experience.



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Good listening skills are rare, so if you find a Bull a little too much, look for a Bat who will take a more gentle approach. Mentors who behave like Bats are often very good at reflecting back your ideas in a way that will increase your understanding and help you communicate your ideas to others.

**Strengths:** listening, gentle, understanding.

**Weaknesses:** can be shy or hard to find.

Tip: ask them to listen and reflect back your meaning.

## 5.4 THE BEE PROFESSIONAL



Mentors who behave like Bees are natural specialists, having been trained for specific roles e.g. technical specialist, lawyer, doctor, engineer etc. As specialists, Bees are knowledgeable about their own particular field. They will know the latest trends, changes in thinking in their area and who the key players are. They will also enjoy sharing their knowledge with you, either to consolidate what you already know, or to expand your knowledge into new areas. In fact, a Bee will not be able to help sharing what they know.

They do tend to be solitary, so may lack the social skills necessary to connect you to key people.

**Strengths:** specialist, up-to-date, enthusiastic.

**Weaknesses:** can be single minded or not very aware of the wider world.

Tip: ask them to explain what the latest thinking in a particular field is.

## 5.5 THE SPIDER



Mentors who behave like Spiders are the world's natural networkers. They spin an ever-widening network of links between useful and interesting contacts. If you have an interview, they probably know someone at that company to talk to beforehand, to learn more. Better still, they really enjoy connecting people.

A Spider can also help you understand the techniques needed to create your own network, although you may have to learn this by watching what they do, rather than asking them to explain, as many Spiders do what they do instinctively.

**Strengths:** networking, connecting people, intelligent.

**Weaknesses:** can be better at doing than explaining and may guard their network.

Tip: ask them to help you create your own network.

## 5.6 THE ANT

Like Bees, Mentors who behave like Ant are also specialists. Unlike Bees, who can be solitary, The Ant is very good at co-operating and sharing resources. This means that they not only know who the key players are, but they probably know some of them personally.



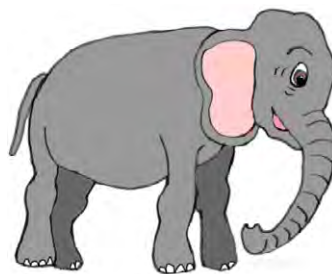
Ants are great at helping you to understand how to co-ordinate with other people. They are usually experienced managers of specialists too. If you need to create a specialist team, working with a Mentor who behaves like an Ant can be invaluable in giving you alternative ways to find the right people and get them working together as a high functioning team.

**Strengths:** Specialist team building, co-operation, co-ordination.

**Weaknesses:** Not as 'technically' specialist as Bees and can over rely on other people.

Tip: get their help in creating or refreshing a specialist team.

## 5.7 THE EXPERIENCED ELEPHANT



Mentors who behave like an Elephant are what we tend to think when we think of a Mentor. Older, wiser and very, very experienced, they can provide insight into a wide range of different situations. These are the 'been there and bought the T-shirt' Mentors! If you are in the middle of your career, they are often a great source of experience about alternative paths to the top, or options for starting your own business etc.

The catch is that sometimes their experience may be from some while ago, and not as related to the current state of the business environment as it could be. They are usually intelligent enough to know this, and be able to relate it to your situation.

**Strengths:** experience, knowledge, confidence.

**Weaknesses:** can be intimidating or may assume that their way is the only way.

Tip: ask them for their relevant success stories, and discuss how they might apply to your situation.

## 5.8 THE SMART SQUIRREL



Squirrels are smart. Mentors who behave like Squirrels are smart too. Give them a problem, and they live for solving it! They will squeeze the last drop of ideas from their experience and use it to achieve their objectives. They will listen to your challenges, and come up with 101 different ideas that could resolve it.

They are particularly useful if you are a bit stuck, and need some clever thinking and new options. Squirrels can really help with this.

**Strengths:** lots of new ideas, superb problem solvers.

**Weaknesses:** can bombard you with too many ideas or not listen to you concerns.

Tip: ask for new ideas to solve a specific problem.

## 5.9 THE LION KING



Mentors who behave like a Lion King are similar to Elephants in that they are experienced. Unlike Elephants though, they are in their prime. They have not just been successful, they are successful right now. Of course, this can also mean it is very hard to get their attention

and/or time. However, they are magnificent to watch. They do not just reflect on their past experience, but they are creating it here and now.

Lions are the Mentors you have to go out of your way to make contact with. Be flexible about how you interact with them and value their time e.g. have breakfast with them, as this is often the only time they will have free.

**Strengths:** confidence, current experience, energetic.

**Weaknesses:** can be very busy or intimidating.

**Tip:** Do not ask them what to do - watch them. Go and sit in their office and watch how they work.

## 6 REVIEW WHERE YOU ARE NOW

Before you start to look at what you can do to improve the mentoring relationship you are already in, or how to resolve a problem you may have, it is worth spending taking a brief step back and taking stock of the whole mentoring relationship.

### 6.1 WHAT KIND OF MENTORING RELATIONSHIP ARE YOU IN?

If you haven't already done so, go back and review what kind of Mentor you have and what you really want them to help you with. For example, are you looking for help with your career? How is your Mentor supporting you with this?

### 6.2 UNDERSTAND YOUR MOTIVATION AND SKILLS

Whatever your reason for wanting a Mentor, it is vitally important that you know why you think a Mentor can help you with this. Usually, it is because you have a gap between the skills you have e.g. professional, technical, social, business etc., and the skills you think you need to achieve your goals and objectives.

Many of us fall into a mentoring relationship without any real idea of how it might help. Perhaps we think that a Mentor will 'magically' solve our problem. To get the best from a Mentor, you need to do a degree of self-reflection. Otherwise, you may find yourself coasting along and achieving very little. Some questions to ask yourself:

- What do I want to achieve?
- What do I need to know that I do not already know?
- How could a Mentor help with this?
- What would a great Mentoring Relationship look like?

### 6.3 REVIEW YOUR GOALS

We all know that people who set goals are more likely to succeed. Goals give you focus and direction, and give you a benchmark against which to measure your success.

Mentoring too works best if you agree goals with your Mentor at the start of your mentoring relationship. Your Mentor is not psychic, so will not have any idea other than probably a

vague notion that you want to ‘improve your career’. Sadly, this often does not happen, and the relationship drifts with the Mentor having no clear idea of what you, the Mentee, actually wants. If that is your relationship, do not worry, it is never too late to set your goals, and it is a good idea to review them from time to time.

You may want your Mentor to help you define how to achieve your goals in more detail, but you should at least have an idea of what they are.

Let us take an example: you want to improve your career – what does this actually mean? Does it mean that:

- You have a specific job in mind
- You’re looking for the next step up
- You want more responsibility
- You want to be better rewarded for what you do
- You don’t really know what you want to do, and need some ideas
- You know where you want to work, but don’t know the best way to get into it
- You hate your job and want something (anything!) else
- You want to change your career to X, this year
- You need help negotiating the corporate culture at a higher level
- You’re unemployed, and need help find your next position

If you are really stuck defining your goals, here are some key steps to make it easier:

### **6.3.1 GOALS SHOULD BE MOTIVATING**

You should jump out of bed in the morning wanting to work towards achieving your goals! A goal should have tangible value to you personally. If you are not motivated toward achieving your goals, it is unlikely that your Mentor can make you so. Being motivated is key towards achieving goals.

**Tip: write a value statement about your goal describing ‘What’s In it For Me’**

### **6.3.2 GOALS SHOULD BE SPECIFIC**

Make your goal clear and well defined, as it will then be easier to create a meaningful action plan with your Mentor. Do not have too many goals, as you will then have conflicts about which goal is the most important.

**Tip:** explain your goal to your Mentor. If they do not understand it then you have not been specific enough.

### 6.3.3 GOALS SHOULD BE A LITTLE BIT SCARY

If they are not at least a little bit challenging, then you do not need a Mentor to achieve them. Without a challenge, you will not feel any sense of achievement. On the other hand, do not make them too scary, or you will have many sleepless nights or feel demoralised when the going gets too hard.

**Tip:** review your goal with your Mentor and ask them if they think it's challenging enough

### 6.3.4 GOALS SHOULD BE MEASURABLE

Without a way of measuring your success, it will be very difficult to know whether you have been successful! One of the most frustrating things about being a Mentor is not knowing whether you are really helping your Mentee. Having tangible measures of success will not only motivate you as a Mentee, but will also motivate your Mentor too.

Measures could include:

- Specific timescales e.g. June 2020
- Percentage improvement e.g. in salary
- Actual salary you want to achieve

**Tip:** setting some intermediate measures as milestones will give you a good sense of progress.

### 6.3.5 WRITE THEM DOWN

It is too easy to tell yourself that you will write your goals down once you are ready. Believe me, that day will never come if you wait. Goals do not become tangible until you physically write them down. If you do not write them down, you are just chasing rainbows.

Use words like ‘I will...’ not ‘I would like to...’ Saying ‘I will’ has power, and it is easier to see yourself achieving those goals.

When you have written them down, share them. Nothing focusses your mind on achieving goals, more than other people knowing them as well as you do.

**Tip: send your goals to your Mentor for feedback.**

## 6.4 SWOT ANALYSIS

You may well already be familiar with doing a S.W.O.T. analysis for your business, but S.W.O.T. is a technique that works well for assessing almost any situation. It works equally well for analysing where you are with your mentoring relationship too.

It helps to create a matrix on a piece of paper, and to write down the key elements.

Strengths	Weaknesses
Opportunities	Threats

### 6.4.1 STRENGTHS AND WEAKNESSES

Strengths and weaknesses are the factors currently inside your relationship. Look at yourself, your Mentor, and the mentoring relationship. Some factors to consider:

- How clear are your goals
- Do your style and your Mentor’s style fit?
- How committed are you?
- How committed is your Mentor’s?
- Does your Mentor have the experience and skills you need?
- Do your expectations match?

- Is there empathy between you?
- Do you have an action plan?
- How motivated are you?
- How experienced is your Mentor at mentoring?
- How good a Mentee are you?
- How well is the mentoring relationship going so far?
- How well can you see the positive progress?
- Can you measure the benefits of mentoring?
- Are you able to meet with your Mentor how and where you want?
- Are you both clear about confidentiality?
- Do you trust your Mentor?



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## 6.4.2 OPPORTUNITIES AND THREATS

Opportunities and Threats are the external factors that could impact on the mentoring relationship. Look at yourself, your Mentor, and the mentoring relationship. Some factors to consider:

- Could another Mentor add more value? (You can have more than one.)
- Does your Mentor have experience or skills that you do not currently utilise?
- Are there additional resources available to help with your mentoring?
- What mentoring programmes are available inside your organisation?
- What mentoring programmes are available outside your organisation e.g. your professional institute?
- Does the culture of your organisation make mentoring easy/difficult?
- Does your organisation support you in having a Mentor?
- Does the relationship between your organisation and your Mentor's organisation create possible conflicts of interest?
- Is there funding available to help you pay for having a Mentor?
- Are there any personal issues that make it difficult for either you or your Mentor to continue?
- Are you tied into to your Mentor for a particular length of time?

## 7 REVIEW WITH YOUR MENTOR

Now you are ready to review where you with your Mentor. In case you're still wondering why we did all that work first, this is because in order to get the best from your Mentor you need to focussed and clear about where you are going.

The best mentoring relationships should be Mentee driven, with only the occasions nudge from your mentor.

### 7.1 CLARIFY EXPECTATIONS

Knowing what you want a Mentor for is an essential first step towards creating a successful mentoring relationship. However, how do you want them to help you? I mean at the practical level. For example:

- Where can you travel to? Are you restricted by public transport?
- Where can you meet (don't meet at your home initially)
- How often do you want to meet e.g. every week, once a month?
- Do you prefer face to face or can you meet online?
- How long would you like to meet for e.g. an hour, 2 hours?
- Which days are best for you?
- What time is best for you?
- How long a mentoring relationship do you expect e.g. 3 months, a year?
- How to communicate between mentoring sessions

If they are not trained Mentors, they may have a different expectation on how they can work with you. This may seem daunting, but will save misunderstandings later.

**Tip – agree expectations at your first meeting, and review at least every 3 months.**

### 7.2 CONFIRM CONFIDENTIALITY

Especially if they are inside your organisation, your Mentor may assume its ok to speak to your manager or HR directly. Most Mentees would prefer that they do not do this! Make it very clear what they can and cannot share, and with whom. Get them to agree by email. It is perfectly reasonable to ask them to keep everything you discuss confidential.

The Mentor should agree the boundaries of confidentiality with you before starting the relationship. Ideally, this should be not to share anything the Mentor says with their manager or other members of the organisation without free agreement by the Mentor.

**Tip: make it very clear what information you consider to be confidential and how and with whom any information may be shared**

### 7.3 SHARE YOUR GOALS AND OBJECTIVES

Mentoring too works best if you agree goals with your Mentor at the start of your mentoring relationship. Your Mentor is not psychic, so will not have any idea other than probably a vague notion that you want to ‘improve your career’. Sadly, this often does not happen, and the relationship drifts with the Mentor having no clear idea of what you, the Mentee, actually wants.

Your Mentor needs to know more than just your goals. You need to review with the how they can help you achieve those goals. You can help them help you, by identifying what you want to achieve, and how you think they might be able to help you achieve them. You will need to discuss how you think they can help in broad and specific terms.

**Tip – tell them what you would like to achieve from your mentoring relationship**

### 7.4 MAKE A MENTORING PLAN

Work with your Mentor to create a plan that takes you from where you are right now, to where you want to be at the end of your mentoring relationship. Decide how much time you are willing to give to this, and find out how much time your Mentor has.

- Agree the purpose of your mentoring relationship
- Agree how you will be working together
- Make a list of the things you think you need your Mentor to help you with
- Brainstorm together what the key stages should be
- Identify some key milestones, where you can review and measure progress
- Write it down

Tip: use something like Excel or a simple project management tool as this will make it easier to update.

## 7.5 SHARE HOW YOU FEEL

It is your responsibility to take charge of the mentoring relationship. While you may not feel very comfortable about taking charge, it will help build your confidence and your Mentor will thank you for it. Although your Mentor will get benefit from being a Mentor, the primary purpose of mentoring is to help the Mentee achieve their objectives. If you are not committed to achieving these, why would you expect your Mentor to commit to them?

This means being proactive and demonstrating your commitment.

Tip – Do not wait for your Mentor to contact you and complete any agreed work on time.

## 8 KEEPING IT WORKING

The challenge is to find a way to help your Mentor become a better Mentor! This may sound perverse, but most Mentors have no training or, indeed, any clear idea on how to be a good Mentor. Many senior people are very good at giving you 'advice'. While this may be helpful, it usually does not help you to apply it to your particular situation.

What follows in this chapter is a mix of mentoring good practice, ideas I've learned from my experience to improve the value you'll get from a Mentor and tips to 'train' your Mentor into doing it. Although this chapter is one you can jump in and out of, I strongly recommend that you read the preceding chapters first. Doing this will give you a stronger grounding in good practice, and make the ideas easier to implement.

Tip – be prepared to lead your Mentor through the process

### 8.1 DON'T EXPECT TOO MUCH TOO SOON

Rome was not built in a day, and neither is a mentoring relationship. Developing rapport takes a little time, as you get to know each other. Your Mentor needs time to understand your situation and your goals etc. In most mentoring relationships, the timescales look like this:

#### 8.1.1 STAGE 1 - INFORMATION EXCHANGE

This is where you get to know each other as people, exchange your expectations and agree how you will work together. You will also take some time to explain to your Mentor what your current situation is, what you want to achieve from the mentoring relationship.

This usually takes 1-3 meetings.

#### 8.1.2 STAGE 2 – PLANNING

This is where you agree the goals you want to achieve as a result of the mentoring relationship, and create an action plan to achieve them.

This usually takes 2-3 meetings.

### 8.1.3 STAGE 3 – GROWTH AND DEVELOPMENT

Stages 3 and 4 cycle round as your mentoring relationship develops and you start to see successes.

### 8.1.4 STAGE 5 – REVIEW

Ideally, you should aim to have a review when:

- You've missed at least 2 deadlines
- You've run into a problem that you are both struggling to resolve
- It is two months since your last review

### 8.1.5 STAGE 4 - COMPLETION

Hopefully, you will be completing because you have achieved your goals. Whatever the reason, this is an opportunity for reflection on what went well, what could have been better and what you would do differently next time.

**Tip: Do not let your Mentor rush you into giving advice before you have agreed your goals or to miss doing a review.**

## 8.2 EAT YOUR ELEPHANT IN CHUNKS

Depending on how ambitious your goals are, it can be overwhelming for both you and your Mentor if you only focus on the big goal. If your Mentor works in a large organisation, they probably have a team of minions to worry about the details, so they may not immediately think of breaking a goal down into manageable chunks. If you have any project management experience, you will know the benefits of using this technique. Your Mentor may not have this experience directly themselves.

It is also much more motivating to have a series of smaller success leading to your bigger goal.

**Tip: If your ambitions are as large as an Elephant, break them down into manageable chunks. You cannot eat an Elephant in one sitting.**

### 8.3 BUILD RAPPORT WITH YOUR MENTOR

Just because your Mentor has the right experience, it does not mean you can develop the rapport needed to work them to achieve your goals.

Just because someone is very senior or has been successful does not mean they will be any good as a Mentor. Mentoring requires a special blend of good coaching skills, empathy, and relevant experience. A good mentoring relation requires mutual respect, good listening skills, and the ability to gently challenge you. Without these, mentoring can be a discouraging experience. Some ways to develop rapport:

- Use non-threatening language when you talk about shared experience
- Inject a little humour
- Be conscious of your body language and other non-verbal signals
- Summarise what your Mentor tells you
- Ask open questions
- Use your Mentor's name early in the conversation
- If you have to disagree with your Mentor, give the reason first then say you disagree

**Tip – Having rapport is essential for a successful Mentor and Mentee relationship. However, sometimes it does not work, through no one's fault. If the rapport is not there, do not wait – find a new Mentor quickly.**

### 8.4 MAKE AND SHARE NOTES

As the Mentee, it is your responsibility to take notes and to share them with your Mentor after each meeting. Sometimes, a Mentor will try to be very helpful and will volunteer to take them for you. Don't let them. Whoever takes the notes controls the mentoring relationship. It is important that you the Mentee stay in control.

**Tip: just record key decisions, ideas, and actions.**

### 8.5 MEET YOUR MENTOR FACE 2 FACE AT LEAST ONCE

Although you may be happy with conducting your mentoring relationship over social media or by phone, you will gain a great deal by having your first meeting face to face. The reason

is that even the very best video link will only give you a portion of the information about your Mentor that a face-to-face meeting will. This will give you:

- **‘Live’ body language information.** One good way to establish empathy is to mirror your body language. For example if your Mentor crosses their leg and you find yourself doing it too, or you find yourself speeding up or slowing down your speaking speed, chances are that you’re starting to empathise with each other. It is very difficult to mirror someone on a video, and even harder by phone.
- **Mutual experience of social niceties.** This may not seem very important, but it will give you an idea of how your Mentor treats other people, an opportunity to share small talk and other share social things we do to create rapport.
- **A more focussed experience.** It is far too easy to conduct an online meeting whilst having one eye on your email. You are less likely to do this once you are ‘in sync’ with your Mentor.

It is also a good idea to have periodic face-to-face meetings to re-establish rapport, especially if you do not feel the rapport is quite as good as it should be.

**Tip: arrange a face-to-face meeting every few months to keep the rapport going.**

## 8.6 DON'T BE AFRAID TO USE SOCIAL MEDIA

Having said that face-to-face meetings are a good idea, do not let that put you off using social media either! Sometimes, a great Mentor may not live geographically close enough to meet regularly. Rather than forego having them as a Mentor, look at the different social media offerings; they may be better than you think.

It is a good idea to set a few ground rules though:

- Pick a technology that works for both of you. Too often, the Mentee will pick their favourite technology while the Mentor struggles to make it work. Or vice versa.
- Do not meet for more than an hour. Longer can get quite tedious, and in any case, online meetings tend to be a bit more focussed.
- Allow 5-10 minutes of small talk at the start. This helps to build and grow your rapport.
- Expect it to take longer to develop rapport than it would in face-to-face meetings.
- If you are different time zones, pick a time that works for the Mentor. Be prepared to meet in the evenings or early mornings if necessary.

- Reassure your Mentor that you will work together through any awkwardness if this is unfamiliar to either of you.
- Have a backup technology that you both know how to use e.g. to use Skype if Zoom fails.

**Tip: be patient. Not everyone is comfortable with the technology involved and sometimes the technology will fail.**

## 8.7 TIMETABLE YOUR MEETINGS

It is a good idea to agree a set time and day for your meetings, whether they are online or face-to-face. Then they become part of your business routine and you are less likely to miss them or reschedule them. It also makes sure that both you treat them seriously and they do not disappear in the welter of mundane but urgent day-to-day tasks. If your Mentor can only spare you half an hour every other Friday, take it. Be ready on time (early if possible) and finish on time too. If you respect your Mentor's time, they will respect yours too.

The other reason for doing this is to get into the habit of planning your time, something not enough people do.

**Tip: Do not move these meetings because you have not completed your agreed tasks. Meet anyway and discuss how to get back on track.**

## 8.8 ASK FOR FEEDBACK

While it can feel nice and safe to carry on with meeting your Mentor at regular meetings, it is a good idea to get periodic feedback on how your Mentor thinks things are going. You may be very pleasantly surprised. Mentors often do not like to volunteer positive feedback, as it can feel a little bit pushy, especially for us British folk. It may also be an opportunity for your Mentor to make some additional suggestions to help things go even better.

Here are some suggested questions you could ask:

- I'd really value your thoughts on how I handled that situation
- Would you be willing to share your thoughts on how things are going overall?
- Can I talk you through what happened, and get your views on what I handled well and what I could do differently next time?

Tip: remember that your Mentor's feedback is only their opinion of what you have told them. Be honest in what you tell them.

## 8.9 GIVE YOUR MENTOR FEEDBACK

One of the great challenges of being a Mentor is not always being clear whether and how you are actually helping your Mentee. While you may be clear about the benefit (or otherwise) of the mentoring relationship, your Mentor may not be. After all, they do not see you every day, and only really know what you tell them.

Mentors are humans too, and need to know that they are making a difference, however small.

Even if you have a good action plan, it can be a long time between reviews.

Tip: spend 5-10 minutes of each session telling your Mentor what you did, and how they helped you with it



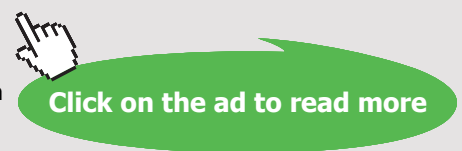
What if you could build your future and create the future?

The innovation accelerator

One generation's transformation is the next's status quo. In the near future, people may soon think it's strange that devices ever had to be "plugged in." To obtain that status, there needs to be "The Shift".

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## 8.10 BE HONEST WITH YOUR MENTOR

Your Mentor is not going to judge you, so you do not need to hide your mistakes. Indeed, talking them through with your Mentor can give you insights into why it happened, and help you find strategies to prevent it happening again. Your Mentor will understand that you are only human, and that everyone makes mistakes.

You do not have to agree with your Mentor's suggestions. If you do not agree, tell them. They may have misunderstood your situation, or your situation is very different from their own experience. Take this as an opportunity to review how different situations do not necessarily benefit from the same decision.

Also, if your mentoring relationship is not working for any reason, than tell you Mentor. It may be fixable by changes in what either or both of you are doing. Sometimes, for whatever reason, the spark does not happen between a Mentor and Mentee. It is not anyone's fault.

**Tip: your Mentor is not infallible. Accept this.**

## 8.11 BE ACTIVE IN YOUR OWN DEVELOPMENT

It might seem obvious, but you would be surprised how many people are really quite passive in their own development. It is almost as if they expect everyone to immediately see what a shining star they are and actively do stuff for them. This rarely happens! The only way to be sure that you are developed is to make it happen yourself. Ask your Mentor for suggestions, but remember that it is up to YOU to make things happen.

Personal development is a way for you to assess your skills and values, consider your objectives in life, and set goals in order to realise and maximise your potential. As an active participant in the mentoring process, you will achieve:

- Self-Awareness
- Sense of direction
- Better focus
- More motivation
- Greater resilience
- New opportunities
- Increased self esteem

Tip – after discussing possible actions with your Mentor, write down (or email) the actions you have decided to take and give a copy to your Mentor. Agree dates for when you will take the actions.

## 8.12 LOOK TO BUILD YOUR CONFIDENCE

The mentoring process should be building your confidence. If it is not, then talk to your Mentor about what you can collectively do to help with this.

Mentors build your confidence in several ways:

- They ask you what you want to talk about
- They listen more than they talk
- They give you their undivided attention
- They don't trivialise your concerns
- They share ideas as suggestions not instructions
- They don't talk down to you
- They share failures as well as successes
- They encourage you to share your concerns
- They encourage you to complete your actions
- But they don't berate you when you don't

Tip – if they do not do these things, suggest that it will help to build your confidence. It may be that they had not thought of it.

## 8.13 COMMUNICATE, COMMUNICATE, COMMUNICATE

Good communication is a key element of business today. You need to engage well with your colleagues, communicate well with your team, listen to your customers and stakeholders to get your message across – whether proposals, plans, budgets, recovery actions, self-defence or purely dissemination of information. If you have good communication skills then you are able to influence people effectively, motivate them towards their goals, and inspire the confidence that you can achieve them.

Unfortunately, while we might be very good at sending a message we are less good at ensuring that the recipient receives and understands the message in the way we intended. It is also very easy to assume that just because people are talking, that they are all communicating well too.

### 8.13.1 TIPS FOR GOOD COMMUNICATION

- **Think about your Mentor.** What do *they* need to know? For example, if they are busy executives, they probably just want a summary, with the opportunity to ask relevant (to them) questions afterwards.
- **Listen more.** Always remember that communication is two-way and interactive if it is to be effective. Great listening skills will enable you to hear what your Mentor is telling you. Through good listening skills, you acquire information, enabling you to identify and clarify issues, make decisions, resolve conflict and even be more creative.
- **Spend some time preparing.** Do not think you can always just ‘wing-it’! This is disrespectful to your Mentor and makes you look unprofessional. A little extra time spent preparing and practicing what you want to say will make all the difference.
- **Clarify.** Almost all experts in every field have their own terms to describe what they do as a short cut to communication within their own expert group. Unfortunately, they often assume everyone else understands these terms, which they often do not. Do not be afraid to ask for clarification for fear of sounding stupid. Your Mentor will respect that you value what they are saying enough to make sure you understand.

**Tip:** get into the habit of reflecting what your Mentor tells you back to them. This tells them that you have understood, and helps you make sure that you have.

### 8.14 ASK YOUR MENTOR TO GENTLY CHALLENGE YOU

One of the great ways to use a Mentor is to ask them to challenge your ideas and decisions. Not in an aggressive way, but in a way that makes you think harder about why you thought that was a good idea. They probably have more experience than you do, and may know of obstacles that you have not thought of. They may know of alternate strategies that could be better or more effective. This could be a great opportunity to explore a wider set of ideas that may or may not improve your decision.

They are not necessarily correct! If you disagree, do not get defensive, justify or rationalise your ideas, but produce sound arguments that explain why your idea or decision is still the best one in your specific circumstances. This is also a great opportunity to practice your response to a hostile or unsupportive argument you may experience in your work environment.

It will also improve your abilities to argue your case successfully.

**Tip:** ask your Mentor to play devil’s advocate even if they agree with your idea or decision.

## 8.15 CHALLENGE WHAT YOUR MENTOR TELLS YOU

Sometimes, your Mentor may be unfamiliar with your exact situation and workplace environment and culture. Even if they are, they may still have a view that what they did was always right.

Mentors should be flexible in their approach and not make assumptions that their experience is always applicable. Sadly, experience can sometimes come with a bit of over confidence!

- **Do not assume** that their suggestion is the right one
- **Ask** your Mentor to explain why they are suggesting what they are suggesting, and to talk you through how this might apply to your situation
- **Challenge them** to tell you why they think this might work
- **Listen**, but do not be afraid to suggest that your situation is sufficiently different that their suggestion is not going to be realistic for you
- **Do not be afraid** to ask them for additional options.

This will not only help you to find the right solution, but will build your understanding of how it might work.

**Tip:** always listen to your Mentor's suggestion, but challenge them to explain why they are suggesting it for your situation in more detail.

## 8.16 ASK QUESTIONS

Do not be afraid of looking them up on LinkedIn or their company website, or ask about their experience as a Mentor. They will respect you for asking, and it shows you are serious.

You need to be asking many open questions to find out what information would be useful. Then ask closed questions to get to the detail.

### 8.16.1 ASK THEM TO TELL YOU THEIR STORIES

Ask your Mentor to tell a story from his or her own career. Hey, everybody likes to talk about themselves! For example, you could inquire: "How did you get to where you are today?" or "How did you land your current role?" Better still; ask more specific questions that address your career objectives and concerns. Some questions to consider:

- Was there a time you messed up and felt like you had failed? How did you bounce back?
- How did you learn to embrace risk-taking?
- Tell me about a recent business setback. How did you recover?
- Think back to five years ago. Did you envision your career as it is today?
- Was there ever a role you applied for and landed, but were not 100% qualified to do? How did you proceed?
- What do you wish you had known before taking your first management role?
- Which leadership skills were the most difficult to develop?
- Can you tell me about a time when you had a difficult boss? How did you handle the situation?
- What is the most important leadership lesson you have learned and how has it proven invaluable?
- How did you develop the skill of speaking so engagingly in front of groups?

### **8.16.2 ASK THEM FOR THEIR EXPERIENCE OF SIMILAR SITUATIONS**

Now that the conversation is flowing, get more granular in your requests and bring a specific situation to your Mentor--one that you would like help navigating. For example:

- I tried to delegate a task last week and it did not go well. Can we work through what to do differently next time?
- Who are the people I need to align with in this organization to achieve success?
- My boss said I need to be more strategic. What does that mean?
- How can I let my boss know that I do not need to be micromanaged?
- How can I stay connected to key influencers who do not work in same office or geographical area?
- When trying to gain buy-in to implement a new program, what tactics have worked for you?
- My performance review is coming up. What type of preparation do you most appreciate seeing from your employees?
- I have two very different career path options available to me. Can you weigh in to help me make a final decision?
- I am considering a career transition. What are some other areas of the business that might be a good fit for me?
- I have heard that taking an international assignment could help my career trajectory. What are the pros and cons?

**Tip – look your Mentor up on LinkedIn to get an idea about something relevant that interests you about their experience**

## 8.17 LISTEN ACTIVELY

The Mentor (and Mentee) needs to learn to listen actively by not interrupting and by reflecting back what they have heard. Through good listening skills, you acquire information, enabling you to identify and clarify issues, make decisions, resolve conflict and be creative.

Never assume your Mentor has understood what you have said. It is also very easy for a Mentor to assume that you understand what they mean. They may forget that you may not have the same core knowledge that they do, nor the same capability or experience to follow what may seem obvious to them. Time taken to ensure your understanding will save more time later.

So ask questions, listen to the answers, and then clarify when you have not understood.

**Tip: reflect back what your Mentor tells you to ensure you understand.**

## 8.18 FOLLOW THROUGH

You should expect mentoring to be more than a nice chat every few weeks. It may surprise you, but some Mentees expect their Mentor to wave a magic wand and produce the perfect solution for them. Wouldn't that be wonderful? Expect to be doing work in between your meetings with your Mentor. Also, do not expect your Mentor to do lots of stuff. While they may very well help by reviewing your CV or your business plan, do not expect them to do things like extensive research for you. Your action plan is exactly that – YOUR action plan. A common reason for Mentees to perceive that the relationship is not producing the results they expect is because they do not get this. When you create your action plan, make it very clear which tasks are yours and make sure your Mentor agrees to any tasks you'd like them to do.

Mentors are busy people. If you are asking them to do things, make sure that they agree when you need them done. The best way to send the message that things need to be done in certain timescales is to make them small and to demonstrate timeliness yourself.

Finally, if they agree to do something, follow it up in a timely manner, do what you agreed to do in connection with it and say thank you.

**Tip: following through on both your Mentor's and your actions demonstrates that you are taking mentoring seriously.**

## 8.19 USE YOUR MENTOR AS A SOUNDING BOARD

If you have a new idea, that you are not sure will work, one very effective way to work with your Mentor is to use them as a sounding board<sup>5</sup>. You need them to:

- Listen to your idea without interrupting
- Tell you if anything they hear is ‘off-key’
- Not criticize
- Reflect back each part of your idea to help you gain further clarity
- Give you their opinion when asked
- Play devil’s advocate – to test your thinking in a safe environment

As far as possible, present your idea in orderly detail, focussing on the areas you are least confident about. Do not ramble about, or you will risk confusing your Mentor so they do not understand your idea properly. Be honest about the bits you are not sure about.

**Tip: ask your Mentor to listen without commenting for at least 5-10 minutes.**

## 8.20 BE PREPARED TO TAKE RISKS

At some point, your Mentor is going to suggest something that you have not done before. They may suggest an alternative approach or a new way of looking at your problem or situation. Until you try it, you will not know if this will work for you. While your Mentor is there to give you encouragement to think ahead and try new things, do not assume that they will know what risks you might be taking. Only you really know your organisational environment.

Nevertheless, do not let the unknown put you off!

Get your Mentor to help you assess the risks. You may already have your own approach, or your Mentor may suggest one. I use a simple traffic lights system:

- Red, yellow or green according to the impact of the risk
- Red, yellow or green according to the probability of the risk occurring

Then look at what you can do to minimize the risk or what contingency you could put in place, should the worst happen. In my experience, the process is a pain, but you feel a whole lot better about this new approach once you have done it.

Then take a deep breath, and do it.

**Tip:** If you want to succeed, you need to learn to take (calculated) risks and responsibility for the outcomes.

## 8.21 BE PREPARED TO MAKE CHANGES

Change is hard. Leaders understand that the world does not stand still, and are not afraid of change. They see change as a challenge and an opportunity. They are not afraid to think big and seek out radical solutions. They are not afraid of taking risks and making the occasional mistake. Great Leaders know that Innovation is the key to the future. They also know that the biggest challenge to implementing change is people. We feel uncomfortable in making changes for a variety of reasons:

- **We like to feel comfortable.** Even if our current situation is not safe or enjoyable, it is at least comfortable and familiar.
- **The unknown is scary.** We are conditioned to believe that the unfamiliar is dangerous, so we become cautious. Not necessarily a bad thing, but you can become so cautious that you become unable to act or move forward.
- **Loss of control.** If you are a 'control freak', like me, you like to know that you have the power and autonomy to make things happen. Change interrupts this autonomy by taking away some of your ability for self-determination.
- **It will go away.** Because change seems to be constantly around us, it is easy to say to yourself 'another change will be along in a minute', so why bother with this one.
- **It is all different.** Some of this is, of course, the point! However, as humans, we are creatures of habit. New habits take time and effort to create and, until we form them, we will feel uncertain.
- **Loss of competence.** While you may be confident about your ability to deliver now, you may feel concerned that you may not be quite so competent after the change. Maybe your skills will become obsolete.
- **Rework.** We all hate to do excellent work and then have someone say 'we don't need that now'.
- **Skeletons in the Closet.** While the status quo is in place, we hide resentments and cover up old wounds. Change can expose dark recesses where skeletons lurk, only to reappear suddenly to disrupt and disturb the project.

If your Mentor has suggested a different approach, ask for their help in planning the implementation of that change. You will want to ask them many questions, so prepare in advance, as it may not occur to your Mentor what you need to know. For example:

- What key elements should I be considering in making this change?
- Could we brainstorm some of the possible risks?
- What is a good way to assess the impact might this have on people?
- What response should I expect from my team?
- Can you help me create an action plan for this?
- How do I communicate the change to my team so they do not get demotivated?
- How can I coach them to accept the changes?
- What ideas can you suggest for ensuring people have the right information at the right time?

**Tip:** ask your Mentor to walk you through a similar change they have made, step by step.

## **8.22 ASK ABOUT YOUR MENTORS MISTAKES, AND WHAT THEY LEARNED FROM THEM**

Mentors are usually much more willing to share their positive experiences than their failures. However, you can often learn more from did not work than from what did. People often avoid thinking about failure in the expectation that if they do not think about it, it will not happen again, or they blame someone else! Then they go on to fail again.

By asking your Mentor to walk you through what they did, and discussing what they would do differently next time, without taking or assigning blame, you will not only help yourself learn, but you will be helping your Mentor learn too.

Mistakes usually fall into one of three categories:

- preventable mistakes – things we should know not to do
- process was too complex – creating misunderstandings
- too many uncertainties – so experimentation was needed

Use these categories to assess with your Mentor, what went wrong at each key stage, and then discuss how you can avoid or mitigate these mistakes.

**Tip:** reassure your Mentor that your aim is to learn not to criticize them.

## **8.23 ASK YOUR MENTOR TO HELP YOU CREATE A BUSINESS NETWORK**

Whatever your goal is, creating a great business network can set you up not just for this goal but for a wide variety of future goals too. Knowing more of the right kind of people will give you greater access to the people you need to know, facilitate the sharing of information and will make it easier to influence the people with the power to enhance your career or business. It is far easier to approach someone who is already in your network, than a complete stranger. It is about quality though not quantity.

Obviously, you cannot just ask your Mentor for a list of their most influential connections! What you can do though, is ask them to tell about how they created their network. They may need a little prompting with questions like:

- Who were the first five people you networked with?
- When you meet an influential person for the first time, how do you follow up the initial contact?
- How do you maintain contact with your key contacts?
- Tell me about a time that one of your network contacts was able to help you?

See if you can bring out the Spider in your Mentor.

**Tip:** if you want to approach someone in particular, see if your Mentor could help you formulate an approach.

## **8.24 DO NOT BE AFRAID TO ASK YOUR MENTOR WHAT THEY ARE GETTING OUT OF THE RELATIONSHIP. YOU MAY BE SURPRISED.**

It is very easy to assume that mentoring relationship is all about the Mentee. While, they are the person who is expected to most out of it, the Mentor should be deriving some benefit too.

Having mentored many people over the years, I can honestly say that I have learned things from every single one. Very few Mentees have ever asked me what I got out of mentoring (other than being paid). It is hugely motivating to see someone learn from your experience, your mistakes and mentoring helps you look at the world from a different point of view. I am quite sure that mentoring has made me a better manager, and has challenged my thinking on more than one occasion.

**Tip:** just ask your Mentor what they are getting from mentoring you. You, and they, may be surprised by the answer.

## 8.25 SHARE YOUR SUCCESS

Give your Mentor a sense of achievement when you overcome your problems by telling them about it. It is all too easy to assume that your Mentor will recognise your small successes, when it may not be apparent to them. Remember, they do not work in your office, so will not see the pat on the back your boss gave you, or the upbeat atmosphere in your team meetings. They probably will not think to ask, so be helpful, and tell them. It is very motivating for a Mentor to hear that their mentoring has been helpful for small things as well as large.

**Tip:** no success is too small to share with your Mentor

## 8.26 SAY THANK YOU

It may seem a small thing, but everyone likes to be appreciated for what they do. Thank your Mentor often and be specific in how their contribution helped you.

A little kindness and praise goes a long way to getting others to want to help you.

**Tip:** it is hard to say thank you too often.

## 9 WHEN YOU RUN IN TO TROUBLE

### 9.1 PLAN FAILING

At the risk of sounding obvious, you need to review your plan and be prepared to change it, or even throw it away and start again. If your plan is not working for you, it is not fit for purpose. There are all sorts of reasons for this. Signs that your plan is not working:

- You keep missing deadlines
- It isn't clear what you are supposed to be doing
- You're hesitant to meet your Mentor
- You don't feel motivated
- You keep looking for excuses not to meet your Mentor
- Your goals seem just as far away
- You find yourself making excuses
- You can't see the progress
- You find yourself discussing other things with your Mentor. A lot.

So what can you do? The first thing is to tell your Mentor and ask for their help in reviewing your plan. Have a look at the goal setting and mentoring plan sections in particular

**Tip:** as soon as you think the plan is not working – take action. It is unlikely to get better without an intervention.

### 9.2 YOUR MENTOR DOESN'T ANSWER YOUR EMAILS OR TEXTS

Sometimes emailing your Mentor can seem like writing a message, putting it into a bottle, and then tossing it into the sea. There are several reasons this might be the case.

- They are not used to reading their own emails. There are still some bosses around who rely on their PA to print off and filter their emails. Really.
- They don't read emails every day (or even every week)
- They don't manage their SPAM filter very well
- Your emails aren't saying the right things
- Your emails aren't clear about what you want your Mentor to do
- Your emails are rambling and full of irrelevant information
- They were expecting you to use another form of communication

If you did not have a conversation about the best way to communicate with your Mentor, have it now. Do not assume they will use email or any other form of communication that you might favour e.g. WhatsApp. Find out what method THEY prefer, and ask how often they check it and how quickly you can expect a response.

**Tip: be clear about the method and how often you communicate.**

### 9.3 POOR COMMUNICATION

Listening skills are essential to creating rapport in a mentoring relationship. It is very easy for a Mentor (or Mentee) to assume that they know everything, and that everyone understands what they mean, when they may not.

In these days of remote working and collaboration, you may be reliant on technical tools for part of your communications, and not be able to get the richness of being regularly face-to-face with your Mentor.

If you think your Mentor is not listening to you, try putting your thoughts down in writing. Demonstrate your own communication skills by making it clear and to the point. Do not criticize their communication skills, but make suggestions for how you would like them to communicate that would make things better for you. For example:

- Make the next meeting a face-to-face meeting. They will need to pay attention.
- Allowing you 5 minutes each meeting to explain what you've been doing – without interruption
- Ask them to make just one suggestion that you can both work through
- Ask them to explain why they think their idea is workable in your situation

It will also help to go back to the section on communication and asking questions.

**Tip: practice what you want to say or ask your Mentor in advance. If you demonstrate good, clear communication – your Mentor is likely to reciprocate.**

### 9.4 YOU LET YOUR FRUSTRATION GET THE BETTER OF YOU

It happens to all of us. You've had a bad day, or you were frustrated or stressed and you were rude or snappy to your Mentor. Maybe they touched a nerve, or told you something

you did not want to hear. I could suggest that you need to develop a thicker skin, but we all have thin-skin days! Including Mentors.

If you said or did something that your Mentor thinks is rude or unreasonable, you must apologise. Just that. Do not qualify your behaviour, or it will sound like you are excusing it. That is not what anyone wants to hear. It is far better to eat humble pie briefly, than to risk losing the trust between you and your Mentor.

Of course, if this keeps happening, then that is a red flag for the relationship, and you may need to take stock of whether you are ready for a Mentor.

**Tip: apologise first and do not justify what you said.**

## 9.5 MENTOR KEEPS CANCELLING MEETINGS

While your Mentor may have legitimate reasons for cancelling a meeting, it is not reasonable to do so more than occasionally. It is perfectly ok for you to ask your Mentor, why they keep doing this, as they may not have considered that it is causing problems for you. People often have to attend too many meetings, so they may not have realised that you mind your meetings being cancelled.

Tell them very clearly that you would like to find a way to make the meetings happen. Acknowledge that they are busy people, but that meeting with them is very important to you. Emphasise how much benefit you are getting from meeting with them. Some suggestions that you could make:

- Meet closer to your Mentor's place of work
- Meet somewhere more convenient for them
- Have shorter meetings (not less than an hour)
- Meet less often (not less than monthly)
- Meet on-line
- Change the time e.g. evening or lunchtime

**Tip: Do not wait for your Mentor to realise there is a problem. Act quickly.**

## 9.6 MENTOR GOES AWOL

There are many reasons why a Mentor disappears. Some of the reasons include:

- They've lost your contact details (most common)
- You didn't return their calls or didn't show up to a meeting (second most common)
- They don't have time anymore (and didn't tell you)
- They moved jobs and forgot to tell you
- Personal crisis
- They don't know how to help you
- Mis-match of expectations
- They feel disrespected in some way (rare)

Do not give up – make contact with them. It is almost always fixable.

**Tip: make sure you have at least 3 different ways to contact them e.g. phone, email, social media etc.**

## 9.7 MENTOR NOT TAKING MENTORING SERIOUSLY

What do you do if your Mentor goes AWOL? In this case, the Mentor is physically present, but is not mentoring you. This usually because they really do not understand the role of Mentor. This could be because:

- They think their role is to teach you what they know, whether it is relevant or not
- They want to sell you stuff e.g. products, services etc.
- They'd like you to do stuff for them
- They see you as another person to complain to

The key to overcoming this situation is to review where you are with them and make your action plan as solid and as focussed as possible. This makes the process of mentoring clearer, and removes distractions.

If the worst comes to the worst, see Chapter 10 – 'How to break up with your Mentor'.

**Tip: Do not go any further until you have review where you are. Do not let them distract you from this.**

## 9.8 YOUR MENTOR MICROMANAGES YOU

This usually happens because:

- you've dropped the ball a few times e.g. forgotten a meeting or not done what you said you would
- your Mentor thinks they're your boss, because they don't really understand the role of the Mentor
- they have time on their hands (least likely)

If it is the first reason, and you will know if it is, you need to either reset your Mentor's expectations on what you can realistically achieve. It is very easy to over reach when saying you are going to do things with your Mentor. Perhaps the task turned out to be more complex than you originally thought. Get your Mentor to help you break it down into easier to digest chunks. Also, be sure that you always turn up to meetings with your Mentor on time and ready. Treat them with at least the same respect you would expect them to give you.

The second reason is a bit trickier to handle. You will need to review how you want your Mentor to help you and take a bit more control of the mentoring relationship. This situation often arises when the Mentor is in the same organisation as you, and is a couple of levels above you in the hierarchy. Remember though, that this is your opportunity to show them your competence and assert your authority over the mentoring relationship. It may take a few rounds before they get the message, but be patient; it will build your confidence in the process. You will also be helping them to become better Mentors.

**Tip: your mentoring relationship is a professional one. Act accordingly.**

## 9.9 YOUR MENTOR KEEPS MAKING NEW SUGGESTIONS

Sometimes your Mentor will keep making suggestions, because they think this is helpful. It may be helpful under some circumstances, but mostly it is just annoying and confusing. Mentors frequently forget that when they did it, it took time for the idea to work out. This is where your plan is your friend. If you have agreed to include trying out one of their suggestions in your plan, then it makes it much easier to tell your Mentor that you want to follow through on that first, before trying something else. Always remember that YOU are in control.

**Tip: talk through the original suggestion with your Mentor and identify how long you need to follow it through before considering anything else.**

## 9.10 YOUR MENTOR IS PUSHING YOU TOO HARD

Sometimes, you can feel overwhelmed by what you think your Mentor is expecting; it is easy to forget that you are in charge of the mentoring relationship. Sometimes Mentors forget this too! Is it possible that in your enthusiasm, you have over promised what you can do? Perhaps you are afraid of letting your Mentor down? The probability is that it is not your Mentor who is driving you too hard; it is more likely that you have set an unrealistic expectation, and your Mentor has gone along with it.

If you find yourself in this situation, stop and have an honest conversation with your Mentor. Tell them you think you have taken on too much, and need their help with re-assessing the situation and modifying your plan. Remember that it is YOUR plan, and it has to work for you.

**Tip:** talk to your Mentor as soon as you feel you have taken on too much.

## 9.11 THE INTIMIDATING MENTOR

Very occasionally, a Mentor can sound like they know everything, how to solve every problem and that your best course of action is to Do What They Say. More often, they have an assertive manner, so their suggestions can come across unintentionally as instructions. This is not necessarily limited to very senior people or to Lion Kings. It is very easy to confuse intent with style.

The key here is to remember that YOU are in charge of what you do, and only you can decide what action you will take. If your Mentor appears to be rather forceful, you can do several things:

- Ask them to listen to your idea for ten minutes
- Ask them what other suggestions they have, so you can get a sense of the options available
- Ask them to explain how this is a better suggestion than other ideas e.g. pros and cons
- Tell them you need some time to consider their idea as you want to make sure you are making the right decision

**Tip:** gather the information from your Mentor and take time out away from your Mentor to consider their suggestions

## 9.12 MENTOR ISN'T BOOSTING YOUR CONFIDENCE

Mentoring should be positive experience where the Mentor is helping the Mentee to 'dare to be'. It is about helping you to increase your self-belief and motivation. However, there are a number of ways that a Mentor can unwittingly scupper these efforts, leaving the Mentee less confident than before. For example:

- They keep telling you what to do
- You only do what they tell you
- They criticise your actions
- They ignore or dismiss your suggestions
- They belittle you or your opinions

Sometimes you have to take a deep breath and say no. They will only get away with doing this if you let them. Do not take what they say at face value; challenge them to explain how it relates to your situation. Take charge of the mentoring relationship and set your plan to go at your pace. Chances are that your Mentor will respect you for it. You will certainly improve your confidence if you do this.

**Tip: Do not be afraid to challenge what your Mentor tells you.**

## 9.13 LACK OF EMPATHY

Empathy is the ability to walk a mile in someone else's shoes. Sometimes your Mentor will take your shoes and just walk away with them!

A key element of empathy is trust. It doesn't happen over-night, but gradually you will start to feel more comfortable about discussing issues that are more emotionally charged, more complex and more personally challenging. Not all Mentors are comfortable about this emotional element, with the result that they shy away. Not all Mentees are comfortable with this either; it is this emotional trust that allows you to explore your issues in greater depth.

This emotional connection can create a turning point in the mentoring partnership that many Mentors miss. Because the issues are now deeper, it may also take longer to explore them.

When Mentors miss that there are emotions present, they may try to focus only on the immediate 'technical' details of the issue at hand. What they miss is the fact that the Mentee is looking as much for empathy as for possible solutions.

Empathy - the ability to understand and share someone's feelings, should not be confused with sympathy, which is feeling pity or sorry for someone else. Mentees look for empathy from a Mentor because they have walked in the Mentee's shoes themselves. When a Mentor empathizes with a Mentee, they are connecting with a time when they felt how the Mentee feels now because they have had a similar experience.

What do you do if the empathy does not appear to be there?

- Try to understand your Mentor's comfort zone with feelings. Let them know that you will respect this.
- Open up and tell your Mentor how you feel, but keep it objective. Do not beat your chest.
- Ask them how they felt when they share stories from their own experience
- Relate your own experience to their stories
- If they do share their feelings, acknowledge but don't criticise

**Tip: empathy often takes time to develop. Do not rush it.**

## 9.14 TOO MUCH 'EMPATHY'!

Of course, it is also possible that your Mentor has too much emotion to share! Perhaps they are bogged down in trying to support you by being overly sympathetic, or in wallowing in your issues rather than making practical suggestions to allow you to move on. This can be emotionally draining and can drive the conversation into a maelstrom of feeling. As for not enough empathy, the answer is to clarify your boundaries:

- Explain your comfort zone with feelings. Let them know that you will respect theirs too.
- Open up and tell your Mentor how you feel, but keep it objective.
- Relate your own experience to their stories
- Keep your Mentor focussed on practical suggestions, while acknowledging their feelings about their experience

**Tip: keep your meetings short so that it is easier to walk away from discussions that get too emotionally charged.**

## 9.15 YOU'RE BOTH STUCK

Maybe you have discussed your ideas and problems, and everything is going well. Then you find yourself with a challenge that your Mentor does not seem to be able to help with. It could be that this is outside their experience too, or that you cannot explain it very well, or you have both just got bogged down in the detail somehow. Here are some ideas:

- Talk about something else for the rest of your session
- Go for a walk
- Do some brainstorming
- Get another Mentor (last resort)

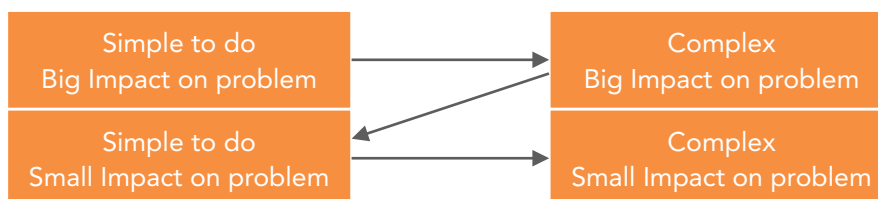
**Tip** Do not blame yourself or your Mentor. Sometime we just get stuck! We are all human.

## 9.16 GENERAL BLOCK - TIME TO GET CREATIVE

Sometimes it seems like neither you or your Mentor can think of a solution. Here is a brainstorming technique that actually works.

### 9.16.1 BRAINSTORMING

- Write down lots of alternative definitions of the problem
- Using post-it-notes, write down lots of ideas to solve the problem – 1 each per post-it-note
- Group your ideas according to the following matrix (or similar)



From this, you can identify which ideas you want to consider further, starting with simplest ideas with the most impact.

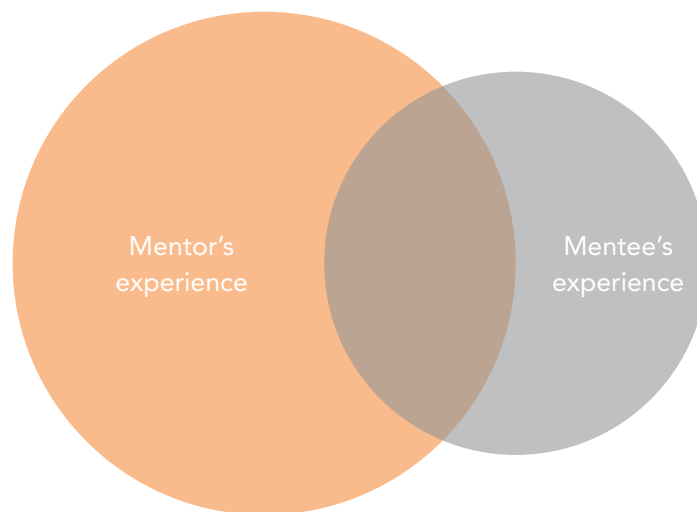
**Tip:** don't challenge any ideas until you group the ideas together and select the 2 or 3 to consider further

## 9.17 YOUR MENTOR DOESN'T HAVE THE EXPERIENCE YOU THOUGHT THEY DID/OR YOU THINK YOU NEED

Either way, you feel there is a mismatch between what you expected your Mentor to have and what you think you need. This usually happens because you did not get to choose your Mentor, you did not do enough checking up front, you are expecting too much or your circumstances have changed. Whichever it is, you need to discuss with your Mentor, what they can still help you with. The fundamental question is – can they still help you. The answer is yes, they probably can.

Sometimes Mentees assume that the only experience that is useful from a Mentor is directly related to their own field. The more specialist the field, the more likely you are to think this. While this is important, Mentors are likely to also have transferable experience e.g. people management, marketing, finance etc. Sometimes, looking at a problem from a different perspective can be even more valuable.

The ideal overlap of experience is not 100%, but more like this:



**Tip:** look at your Mentor's broader experience and see how this may help give you a different view.

## 9.18 CONFLICTS OF INTEREST

Although it is a good idea to identify any potential conflicts of interest from the very beginning, it is also possible that this will arise during your mentoring relationship too.

This can occur when your Mentor is in the same organisation, for example, your Mentor has influence over your promotion prospects. This should never happen, but people do move around organisations, so that hierarchical changes can occur that will impact your relative positions.

It can happen when your Mentor is in a different organisation too. Often, this is because one of your organisations becomes the customer of the other, or when your Mentor have acquired a new customer, that makes your organisations' competitors.

How you deal with this depends on how close to the potential conflict you are. If you are remote from the area i.e. you do not have any direct communication with the other organisation, then it may be possible to create a Chinese wall so that you only discuss ideas unrelated to the area of conflict. If you, or your Mentor, have any direct contact with the other organisation, then you should discuss whether you can both maintain sufficient objectivity to enable your mentoring relationship to continue. You should also check whether your organisations have any policies on conflicts of interest and, if necessary seek further guidance. You may be pleasantly surprised to discover that you are not breaching any rules and can happily continue.

**Tip: check your organisation's policy on conflicts of interest now.**

## 9.19 BREACH OF CONFIDENTIALITY

How seriously you respond to this depends on how serious the breach was. If it was a passing remark of little consequence to your manager, then you may be able to forgive it. Especially if you did not clarify what you understand regarding confidentiality with your Mentor at the start of your mentoring relationship. Anything else, and you may now feel that any trust, or future chance of trust is now gone. Fortunately, this is very rare.

In most cases, the only solution is to break up with your Mentor. Calmly tell them why, so they understand the consequences of their action.

**Tip: always make clear with your Mentor what you understand to be the bounds of confidentiality.**

# 10 HOW TO BREAK UP WITH YOUR MENTOR

Mentoring relationships do not last forever. Which is a good thing. Otherwise you risk finding yourself bowling along and either having lovely chats that no longer have anything to do with your goals, or you find yourself dreading another meaningless, time wasting meeting with someone who has no proper place in your life. There are four reasons a mentoring relationship ends:

- You've achieved your goals
- The relationship has broken down
- Your goals have changed and your Mentor can no longer help you
- One of you has moved away

## 10.1 YOU'VE ACHIEVED YOUR GOALS

We all hope that this is the reason your mentoring relationship has ended. This is a good opportunity to take stock and decide on what your next goals should be. It may be that your Mentor can help with these too. On the other hand, you may need to look for another Mentor with a different set of experiences and skills.

This is an opportunity to take stock with your Mentor and review the process you went through. Look at:

- What worked and what didn't
- What would you do differently regarding the process?
- What did your Mentor do that was particularly helpful?

Above all, give your Mentor your heartfelt thanks. If you can., give them a written recommendation e.g. on LinkedIn.

Then decide whether you want to stay 'professional friends' with your Mentor, by adding each other into your respective professional networks. It would be shame to spend all that time building a relationship, only for it to fade away.

**Tip: thank your Mentor both directly and in a form they will appreciate (ask them which form they prefer).**

## 10.2 THE RELATIONSHIP HAS BROKEN DOWN

Before you break up with your Mentor, give them a second chance. No one is perfect, and it is entirely possible that you can still salvage the mentoring relationship that you have put so much time into. Check out chapter 9, and see if there is some way to redeem your relationship. If you do decide that you have to end the relationship, be honest with your Mentor about why you need to do it. Take stock with them and share what they did do to help you. The exercise may even surprise you. You could discover that you have not been taking full advantage of your Mentor's expertise, for example.

Even though it is ending, end it gracefully and with thanks. You never know when you might not want their help again. End it quickly, as prolonging it does not help either of you and shows disrespect for their time. If your Mentor does react badly, listen to what they say, acknowledge it and move on. Above all, do not get angry and burn your bridges. The world may be a big place, but the professional world can be surprisingly small sometimes; you never know when you might bump into them again.

If your Mentor wants to end the relationship with you, ask them to give you another chance. If they will not, then ask them for honest feedback about what you could do better next time with a new Mentor. Do not get angry, it may just be that you had different expectations.

Before you find a new Mentor, think long and hard about what you could do to ensure that your next mentoring relationship reaches a more successful conclusion. Review your goals and expectations to see if perhaps these need to be more realistic.

**Tip: if you need to end things do it quickly, honestly and directly.**

## 10.3 YOUR GOALS HAVE CHANGED AND YOUR MENTOR CAN NO LONGER HELP YOU

It happens. Life changes and you need support from someone with different experience. But stop. Perhaps your Mentor has transferrable skills that are still essential to you achieving your goals. After all, you have probably spent a long time building a working relationship with your Mentor; do you really want to do this again with a new Mentor?

Before you break up, do three things:

- Review your goals and objectives with your current Mentor

- Ask for their advice on finding another Mentor with a closer skills and experience match
- Consider having two Mentors: one for continuity and one for specialist help.

**Tip: don't forget to thank your Mentor for their help**

## 10.4 ONE OF YOU HAS MOVED AWAY

As with changed goals, sometimes your job moves. It may be because your Mentor has helped you find new opportunities! Even though one of you has moved to another country, it does not have to be the end of your mentoring relationship. I have successfully mentored someone who lived on the other side of the world, meeting entirely by Skype and Zoom. Your relationship will change, as it is harder to get the nuances of a relationship via a computer screen, even with video. Time differences can also make it challenging. But it can be done. As with changed goals, talk through with your Mentor whether they are willing to at least give eMentoring a try for say, 2-3 months to see how it works.

**Tip: technology can be your friend**

Whatever the reason for breaking up with your Mentor, remember these:

- Be appreciative of any help your Mentor gave you
- Tell them what you learned – be specific
- Emphasise the positive
- Be decisive
- Don't burn your bridges

**Tip: try and leave amicably - don't burn your bridges**

# 11 SUMMARY

Mentoring can be one of the most enlightening, informative and confidence building experience you can have. A Mentor can make the difference between failure, middling performance, and outstanding success.

In an ideal world, all Mentors would have training. The reality is that most do not. All Mentors want to be successful and to help their Mentees as best they can. This where you, the Mentee, can make a big difference - you can help your Mentor to help you. You can help them by educating them in the best way to begin mentoring relationship, by following tips of both how to progress your mentoring relationship and how to overcome problems that, inevitably, will arise.

If you do have problems, don't immediately give up. An effective mentoring relationship takes time and effort. Sometimes, a few setbacks can make for a better relationship, as you both learn to be more effective together.

I hope this book has given you a few ideas for how to get the best from your Mentor and consequently achieve your goals.

Happy mentoring!

# AUTHOR BIOGRAPHY - JACQUI HOGAN



Jacqui Hogan has been mentoring business owners, managers, and directors to achieve their business goals since 2003. She is now known as ‘The Mentor’s Mentor’.

Jacqui has wide experience in mentoring senior management and middle managers to be more effective. This includes both internal management responsibility, as well as practical experience managing difficult and challenging external client teams as an outsourced manager. Her experience is particularly strong in improving productivity, team building, and developing managers within innovative IT companies, including those looking to improve their ecollaboration.

Jacqui is an experienced professional speaker on a wide range of management and non-management topics. She is also a regular blogger and you can share her management insights at <http://www.cocreative.co.uk> and on twitter [@CoCreative](https://twitter.com/CoCreative). As an author, she has written several business books including ‘The People Side of Project Management’, available on Book Boon, and co-authored ‘Together Works’, available on Amazon.

You can also find her on LinkedIn at <http://www.linkedin.com/in/jacquihogan>

# ENDNOTES

- 1 For example, this is not necessarily the case for Sports coaching and mentoring.
- 2 P.E.S.T.L.E. (Political, Economic, Sociological, Technological, Legal and Environmental) – a shorthand for identifying the key aspects associated with a changing business environment.
- 3 STEM (Science, Technology, Engineering and Maths)
- 4 With thanks to Ron McIntyre and Dr David Avery, my co-authors of the books ‘Together Works’ and ‘Field Guide to the Workplace Jungle’ in which we conceived the idea of translating animal behaviour to the workplace. Available on Amazon.
- 5 A sounding board was originally a thin wooden board in a piano or other instrument that served to reflect and amplify vibrations produced by the strings.