

How to explore feelings in a mentoring conversation

Helping your mentee to understand what emotions they are currently experiencing can be difficult, but it is important to do so. Often whilst living through turbulent times we tend to lock down as individuals and 'put a lid' on our emotions. What a mentor can do, with care, is to help their mentee surface and explore some of these emotions.

Mentors are not counsellors or therapists, so they must not dig deeply into areas where they could do harm. Quite simply, supporting their mentees to be able to name the emotions they are feeling and to understand them is often the first step to helping a mentee to process and regulate some of the emotions they are feeling.

Here is a technique called 'Stepping in and Stepping out' which uses a mixture of rational and emotional questioning to explore both the mentee's perspective of the situation they are in, as well as facing up to the thinking and emotions of individuals who are outside of that perspective.

Questioning from Different Perspectives: Stepping In/Stepping Out

Effective mentors have the talent of keeping dialogues moving, primarily through switching perspective: they rarely allow the mentee to remain in the same mental state for long. They constantly shift the nature and style of the questions they ask to identify components of an issue.

A mentee may bring an issue from any of the perspectives shown in the diagram e.g. from what they think or what someone else is thinking/feeling either rationally or emotionally. Helping them to find good solutions depends on using questions to guide them gently from one perspective to another, until they are able to see a different and better way forward. It doesn't matter if you visit all four perspectives several times in the same conversation, or only some of them — what's important is that the mentee finds a more productive way to look at their issue.

To truly understand and deal with an issue, it is frequently necessary to explore it from each of these perspectives. A small insight into one perspective can generate progress in another and a skilled coach/mentor uses frequent shifts of questioning perspective to generate these incremental advances.

Stepping In

Stepping into the box is about acknowledging the individual's own perspectives, joining them to try to understand what they are thinking and feeling, and why. Some people may come at an issue from a purely rational viewpoint, not wanting to explore their emotions for fear of what they might discover about themselves. Others may simply be too caught up in the emotion of a situation to think about it rationally.

Stepping Out

Stepping out of the box is about helping them to distance themselves from the issue, either to examine it intellectually from other people's or broader perspectives; or to help them empathise with and understand the feelings of other protagonists in the situation under discussion.

Using the Model

When the mentee is stuck in their thinking (or their emotions), it usually takes a shift in perspective for them to find new solutions. Observation of effective mentors tells us that they rarely spend more than four or five questions exploring an issue from the same perspective.

Stepping in is where we help a mentee explore their own thinking and feelings about an issue from either a rational or emotional perspective.

Stepping out involves asking them to take someone else's rational or emotional perspective. For example, a mentee might come to a session in some distress, perhaps having had a disagreement with a colleague. They may have a mixture of emotions, including anger, resentment, some shame or guilt at having lost their temper, and so on. Before they can focus on finding a solution to this problem, they will need to adopt a more rational perspective. The mentor should start with questions from the perspective the mentee is already in – for example, stepping in/emotional –

What's the dominant emotion you are feeling right now? How often do you get angry like this?

As the mentee feels listened to and begins to calm down, the mentor has two choices. They can shift to questions that are still from the mentee's own perspective (stepping in, rational), such as - **Do you sense a pattern of events here? How important is it for you to have a good working relationship with this person?** Or they can move into looking at the other person's feelings (stepping out, emotional), asking questions, such as **How do you think this person is feeling right now?**

From either of these perspectives, it is a relatively easy step to move into stepping out/rational perspective where mentor and mentee can discuss practical ways to rebuild the damaged relationship.

Some suggested questions

		Stepping in			
Rational	<p>What actual harm has the incident done to your self-esteem?</p> <p>How has the issue affected your ability to do your job?</p> <p>Is this a one-off incident or has it happened before?</p> <p>Are you good at your job?</p> <p>Would you like to rehearse how you are going to open the discussion?</p>	<p>What did you feel when the incident happened?</p> <p>How do you feel about it now?</p> <p>Might your feelings change on the matter?</p> <p>Do you normally enjoy your job?</p> <p>Do you have the courage to tackle the issue?</p>	Stepping out		
	<p>How likely are colleagues going to use the incident against you?</p> <p>Were there wider issues involved with the incident?</p> <p>Do you think you have a responsibility to your line manager, your colleagues and your organisation to confront and deal with this issue constructively?</p> <p>How can you make it easier for your line manager to accept and discuss the impact of their behaviour?</p>	<p>What do you think your line manager was feeling to make them behave this way?</p> <p>How do you think they feel about it now?</p> <p>What do you want the relationship between you and your line manager to look like moving forward?</p>			
		Emotional			

Other questions that might be asked are:

- How does **this** situation make you feel?
- What are your thoughts on the new way of working?
- What do you feel about working from home i.e. isolated from colleagues etc.?
- How are you physically responding to the changes?
- What are you learning about others/ your organisation/ your community?

Prioritising Mentee's Objectives

Usually setting objectives is one of the first tasks in the mentoring relationship and will set the direction for the mentoring pair. Sometimes the mentee may have too many areas they want support with and, if this is the case, the mentor needs to help them in prioritising them down to maybe two or three.

Also, as the relationship progresses, circumstances may change for the mentee and the objectives might need to be reviewed and amended to meet these changes.

If the mentee's objective is long-term, then this will need to be broken down into the steps needed to achieve it, and the full objective may not be expected to be achieved with the one mentor. If this is the situation, when the smaller step is close to being achieved, the current mentor can support the mentee in looking at who/where to get the support they need for the next step(s).

Prioritising

Tools to help prioritise goals involve discussion between mentor and mentee and some reflection on the mentee's part. Here are a couple of suggestions to try out and you may know of others to use also.

Weighting exercise

One way is for the mentee to 'weight' their objectives by giving them a numerical or alphabetical score to determine importance to them. The mentor's role is to discuss and question why they have given the score. They might also be able to offer some insight on how long it might take to achieve and whether it is within the timescale of the mentoring relationship.

After the initial weighting exercise, the mentee re-evaluates the list and puts it in order with the highest scoring objectives at the top. The mentee then agrees the objective(s) they wish to work on within the mentoring relationship.

Change Balloon Technique

The mentor has a large sheet of paper on which a hot air balloon is drawn. The mentee is asked to list all their objectives on a separate sticky note for each and stick them to the basket of the balloon.

Then, the mentor points out that the balloon has a leak. A sandbag must be thrown overboard – which one will it be? As the leak worsens, more and more sandbags are jettisoned, in order of least importance, and placed in a pile. When only two are left, the mentor asks "Do these intuitively feel the highest priorities for you?"

The pile of objectives that have been jettisoned can be revisited later if required as they are now in priority order.

Structuring a Mentoring Conversation

We suggest that you have mentoring sessions on a 4-6 weekly basis to maintain momentum in your mentoring relationship. After the initial mentoring meeting to get to know each other and start to look at the mentee's objectives, the subsequent mentoring sessions are to further identify the mentee's development needs in the following ways:

- By the mentee's own analysis and insight
- Reviewing any experiences or situations they have encountered since your last meeting to see what they have learnt, and how they will use that learning in future
- Progress against the development goals in their personal development plan, or other agreed objectives.

In order to gain the most from your mentoring sessions it helps to follow a structured approach, as described below.

Check-in at the start of each meeting:

- Start by re-establishing your rapport and feeling comfortable together
- Follow-up on commitments and actions from the last session
- Mentee shares recent experiences (challenges, opportunities, and successes)
- Mentor and mentee explore recent issues and challenges and discuss options and approaches. Mentor should feel free to share personal stories and anecdotes.

Checking in questions to use:

- How are you?
What's on your mind?
- Any reflections/follow up from
last time?
What has happened since our last conversation?
- What should be the agenda today?

Development Dialogue: Body of the conversation

The mentor will probably use a process model for this part of the conversation e.g. The Three Stage Process, GROW or CLEAR, or just listen as a Thinking Partner. During this part of the conversation:

- Regularly review progress against the objectives
- Assess the need to revise or update the objectives
- Identify development opportunities and solutions
- Encourage self-management – the mentor's role in the relationship is not to create dependencies by dictating problem-solving techniques and decisions to their mentee. Mentors should encourage mentees to manage the achievement of their objectives themselves and providing their experience as a source for ideas, letting the mentee choose and decide.
- Mentors should support, listen, challenge and only guide and provide advice at the request of their mentee once they have gained some insight themselves into the issues being discussed.

Checking out and next steps:

Clarify any commitments made and anything that needs follow-up, and confirm next session date, time and agenda, if the mentee is comfortable to do this. Ensure you review both the process and outcomes from the session:

Checking out ideas:

- Mutual feedback on how the session went
- What does the mentee want more or less of for next time? (feedback, listening, advice, challenge etc)
- Where are we in the life cycle?
- What are the main learning and action points from the meeting?
- Do we want to organise the next session?

Feedback

Providing feedback, negative as well as positive, is an important role that a mentor and mentee can play. Both the mentor and mentee should ensure that they allow two-way feedback to take place and check-in with their mentoring partner regularly to see if the sessions are working or if changes need to be made.

Winding up the mentoring relationship

By reviewing the relationship regularly, both mentor and mentee will be aware of when the relationship is maturing (rather than it just losing a little momentum from time to time). In this way, the 'maturity review' is less scary for both parties. It is also a useful opportunity for the mentor to reflect, learn and improve their practice for future relationships.

If there is a need to close down the formal relationship, the mentor and mentee should:

- Recognise that the formal relationship must come to an end
- Discuss at least one meeting ahead how the ending will be managed
- Create an agenda for the final formal mentoring session:
 - Review/re-define outstanding objectives
 - Finish within a mentoring session
 - Allow time for moving on
- Look back at what you have both learned
- Look to the future
- Celebrate the relationship!

Questions which might be asked include:

- What have we achieved together?
- What would we like to thank each other for?
- Do we want to continue in a more ad hoc, informal relationship and, if so, what will the intent of this be?
- When we look back on this relationship, what have we learned that we can apply to our future mentoring relationships?
- What or who will take the place of the mentor?

Always try to finish on a high note, and both take time to reflect on what you have achieved together, and what you have learned as an individual. Allow time for 'grieving' too, which might mean that you keep in touch with each other for a short while after the relationship formally ends or that you agree to 'keep the door open' for future conversations.

How to get more out of your mentoring?

A short check list for mentees

What should a mentee do?

- Consider what you need a mentor for?
- Be prepared to be open
- Expect and welcome challenge
- Allocate sufficient time for preparation and the mentoring session
- Accept the mentor as a conscience
- Be realistic about the mentor as a role model

How well have you set direction?

- Are you working with clear direction?
- Do you have specific goals?
- Or general themes?
- Who is in the driving seat in the relationship?

Techniques to get more out of your mentoring

- Manage the relationship generally
- Achieve clear focus (what do I want to achieve?)
- Prepare for the mentoring sessions
- Articulate issues clearly
- Develop your learning net
- Overcome “guru syndrome” (don’t be in awe of your mentor!)
- Integrate appraisal data, career management and other sources of achievement goals into the mentoring dialogue. This may be useful

Reviewing your relationship

- How have the mentoring sessions helped so far?
- Have we begun to make progress towards realising my learning goals?
- What is our greatest success so far? And our biggest frustration?
- Are you preparing adequately for meetings?
- Are you reflecting sufficiently after meetings?

How to have an effective mentoring relationship

A short guide for mentees

1. What is Developmental Mentoring?

Having a mentor can be one of the most powerful developmental relationships a person will ever experience. Hundreds of thousands of people from all walks of life and at all stages of their careers are able to point to deep, personalised learning they have obtained from a developmental relationship with someone of substantially greater experience, who has taken a direct interest in them.

Successful mentoring is a two-way learning relationship involving help, support, role modelling and some advice and guidance on the part of the mentor to facilitate the achievement of the mentee's goals, and the development of both parties.

Developmental mentoring is characterised by:

A need by the mentee to achieve some form of change – for example, in their ability, their understanding, or their circumstances

A high level of trust and openness, which allows mentor and mentee to address difficult, sometimes uncomfortable issues

Being out of the authority line: mentoring relationships do not develop easily between line manager and direct report. This is why the Across Organisational Mentoring Programme is so useful. Effective mentoring relationships usually require the mentor to have little, if any, power over the mentee, or direct interest in their success

Generosity on the part of the mentor, in their time, energy and interest in the development of someone else

Recognition of the value of learning together, even though mentor and mentee may have very different levels of experience.

1. What is my role as a Mentee?

- Have clarity as to what both your expectations of the relationship are from the beginning, identify and initiate the learning goals
- Take ownership for yourself and your future – arrange the mentoring sessions
- Have a positive attitude towards mentoring and development
- Be open to feedback from your mentor and their ideas/ suggestions
- Have regular mentoring sessions with your mentor, show respect and don't cancel sessions
- Keep a mentoring journal, reflect on and record key lessons learned and most importantly, ways to apply learning

Active use of these roles will enable effective mentoring sessions.

2. Roles of a Mentor include

- Helping identify and address my development needs
- Supporting me towards goal achievement
- Developing my capability by focusing me on goals/ realising my potential
- Listening and giving advice when appropriate
- Encouraging me to take ownership of my own development

3. Starting your Mentoring Relationship

a) Establishing the relationship

The mentor's main concern is your personal development as a mentee, to help you develop yourself – but you must always decide the best solution for you even if it means challenging and confronting your mentor.

We would recommend that when preparing for the first meeting you start thinking about what you want the mentor to support you with. The first meeting is all about establishing the ground rules for the mentoring relationship and exchanging relevant information.

The three main aims for the first session are:

b) Establishing rapport

Get acquainted by discussing each other's background – tenure with your organisation, experience, motivation and interests to build trust and rapport. It is extremely important to spend a little time at the beginning to build the rapport and

trust required to have meaningful and open and honest mentoring discussions. In rare instances rapport cannot be built between a mentor and mentee and, if after 2 or 3 meetings you find this to be the case, please contact your AFP and they will try to rematch you, with no fault being attributed on either side.

To help build rapport with your mentor you might want to share information on:

- your current job: what tasks are involved, what relationships are important, and how you feel about your role
- the current climate within the team/department/overall organisation
- your career plans/ ambitions

c) Confirm purpose of the mentoring relationship

By the first meeting you should have an outline of what your objectives are to be within the mentoring relationship. Spend some time in this meeting outlining what these objectives are and why they are important to you, clarifying them with your mentor, and explore how they can support you in achieving them.

d) Build an understanding of what each should expect of the other

It is extremely important to have clear guidelines to underpin the mentoring relationship. Set out an agreement covering what roles and responsibilities each of you will have, and what commitment you are both making.

- Estimate the frequency and length of mentoring meetings and try to book into your diaries in advance
- Agree that you, as mentee, are responsible for booking meetings and agendas
- Agree that you both will keep to arranged mentoring sessions and only cancel if unavoidable
- Agree to review your relationship regularly and provide each other with honest and open feedback about your mentoring
- Exchange preferred contact details – we recommend regular communication between sessions
- Review your preparation work
- Clearly identify your learning needs, goals and objectives and discuss the development plan and goals

Consider if there are any boundaries and topics that are off-limits in the mentoring relationship and agree them up front. Review if anything crops up during the relationship that should also be included. Examples of this might include:

- the mentor will assist you in achieving your objectives and goals but you are in the driving seat and chose the way forward most suitable to you
- you will only enquire into each other's personal life by invitation.

You might make notes of the issues that are being discussed or mentioned during the session, sharing them with your mentor if you wish. This is a useful method to prompt you to keep track of problems that occur between sessions, and to reflect back on to see how you have progressed when similar situations arise.

4. Maintaining the mentoring relationship

It is suggested that you have mentoring meetings on a 4-6 weeks basis.

The subsequent mentoring sessions are for you to further identify and explore your development needs through your own analysis and insight; review any experiences or situations you have encountered since you last met to see what you have learnt, and how you will use that learning in future; and review progress against the development goals.

In order to gain the most from your mentoring sessions it helps to follow a structure approach, as described below:

Check In at the start of each meeting:

- Follow-up on commitments and actions from the last session
- Share your recent experiences (challenges, opportunities, and successes)
- Explore recent issues and challenges together and discuss options and approaches. Your mentor may wish to share personal stories and anecdotes.

Development Dialogue:

- Regularly review progress against the development plans/goals – you should monitor your progress and development needs
- Assess the need to revise or update the plan
- Identify development opportunities and solutions

- Aim for self-management – the mentor’s role in the relationship is not to create dependencies by dictating problem-solving techniques and decisions for you. You are encouraged to manage the achievement of your objectives yourself with the mentor providing their experience as a source of ideas, from which you can choose whether or not to use them.

Check out at the end of the session:

- Clarify any commitments made and anything that needs follow-up, and confirm next session date, time and agenda.
- Your mentor may provide feedback throughout the mentoring relationship (with your permission), and you should take the opportunity to feedback too.
- Provide feedback to your mentor on the process they use in the meeting, was it helpful? Are they challenging you sufficiently? Are they too directive, or not directive enough?

Personal reflection for mentees — after the first and subsequent sessions:

It is important for you to reflect after each session as to how you think the session went and you could structure it around the following questions:

- Preparation for the session – was it adequate?
- Purpose, desired outcomes – did the session achieve its aim? Did we discuss my goals?
- What actions, if any, do I need to follow up on?
- What have I learned? How am I going to use the learning?
- Do I need anyone else to help me achieve the next steps?
- What will I do differently/ better in the next session?
- Are there any outstanding questions I need to raise again?

Mentee Self-Assessment to help you gain clarity

Here are some ideas about mentoring to support and challenge you as you begin your mentee journey.

Purpose of Mentoring

Mentoring is a developmental dialogue between two people. It is a process of ongoing support and development, which can tackle issues and problems identified by the mentee. Having a mentor or mentors can be one of the most powerful developmental relationships a person will ever experience. Anybody at any stage of their life or career can benefit from having a mentor, whether it is deep personalised learning with someone with substantially more experience or having a sounding board with a peer, or working with a younger or more junior person in a reverse mentoring situation to support in finding out a different perspective on life. Often individuals can benefit from having more than one mentor in their life if they are going through a period of intense change. Mentoring taps into a basic instinct most people share – the desire to pass on their learning or to support development and help another person fulfil their potential.

Mentoring is a confidential, offline (not with your line manager) partnership between two people based on understanding and trust. Its chief aim is to build on self-reliance and self-confidence in the mentee. It is a positive, developmental relationship, which is driven primarily by the mentee.

What do I want to achieve from a mentoring relationship as a mentee?

- I want to progress my career, but I'm not sure how?
- How can I be more effective in my role?
- How can I work through the challenges faced in my role?
- How can I develop into a leadership role?
- How can I develop my skills in for example, developing others, thinking more creatively, making decisions?
- How can I be more influential?
- How can I develop my confidence/self-belief?

Are any of these questions applicable to you?

What am I looking for in a mentor?

Depending on your questions you may be looking for a person who:

- has specific experience or knowledge
- understands your world
- offers a different perspective
- is a trusted role model
- offers an independent sounding board
- is geographically close
- is able to challenge your thinking

Which of these points are most appropriate? It may be useful to raise these answers in discussion with your mentor.

What should you expect of your mentor?

In effective developmental mentoring relationships, the mentee should expect:

- Empathy – while the mentor may not have experienced exactly the issues that you face, he or she should demonstrate an interest in you and your development and a willingness to understand things from your point of view
- Constructive challenge/ stretching – your mentor will, when appropriate, push you to think deeper, address uncomfortable issues and set higher ambitions for yourself.
- Sharing experience – your mentor should use his or her own experience to provide guidance and advice; equally, however, they will be conscious that what was right for them, may not be the best solution for you. Holding back on talking about their experience is something many mentors find difficult, but they should be aware that the important outcome is that you should find a route forward that you feel comfortable with.
- Confidentiality – what is said between mentor and mentee is fully confidential.

- Professional Friendship – your mentor doesn't have to be your greatest friend ever. But they do need to offer you respect, trust and a degree of liking. It's hard to be fully open with someone you don't feel comfortable with
- Help in understanding how the organisation works – your mentor's greater experience and knowledge of people in the organisation can be critical in helping you achieve your personal goals
- Sounding board – whenever you need to make a difficult decision, or rehearse a difficult conversation, your mentor can help you think it through
- Listening – sometimes mentors help just by being there, when you need someone to talk to, who isn't directly involved in the issue.

So use these points to reflect on what you want to get out of your mentoring relationship and ensure you discuss this with your mentor.