

Participation: Mentee Perspective

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A Strategic Role: Setting Realistic Expectations

Mentoring is a collaborative learning process for two individuals, who are both committed equally, to personal growth. From the Mentee's perspective, their emphasis revolves around achieving change; deep, personal, *Transformational* change.

Because they measure success by the distance they travel, and the track they take, a Mentee's expectations must be clear. To be effective, they will address "To What", "From Where", and, "So How" type questions, very early on. The answers will inform them in setting broad direction, finding appropriate headings, and, determining relevant destinations.

Creating the "Map" for their journey flows out of that crucial first step. Smart Mentees will ensure it paints a high-level vision, using broad brush strokes that build flexibility into chosen pathways. They'll maintain perspective, knowing that it's a "Map", not, the "Territory".

They'll use that Map to identify and signpost a set of "Competences" relevant for the next stage of their life journey. As milestone markers, they will shape and motivate Mentee growth throughout the Mentoring program, to align and focus actions across three important areas ...

- Setting Direction
- Using Deliberate Practice
- Engaging their Mentor in Feedback

A Resourceful Responsibility: Focusing Finite Energies

Best outcomes are achieved when a Mentee focuses their soft skill energies in three areas.

1: Setting Direction, to Maintain Heading

One of the toughest questions a Mentee needs to grapple with is, "*What do I want, from my Mentoring Program?*". It's a question that requires early consideration in order to best channel energies during a program. The answer subsequently helps them to evaluate their participation.

It's a tough question, because of its timing, and, the type of thinking required. First, the answer provides "Direction" for the program, so it must be addressed right at the start. It's easy to sit back passively, and assume the "Mentor knows best". This is not an effective strategy, as doing so tends to create a deferent relationship, based upon hierarchical Dependence.

Participation as a Mentee brings responsibilities, one being the ability to cultivate their own personal growth path. Creating that positive future, allows a Mentee to create capabilities so they are able to stand on their own two feet, Independent of their Mentor; this is a pivotal aim.

This brings us to the second challenge, envisioning the future is "Cognitively hard" for three reasons. First, imagining the unknown is a difficult task for the brain; it takes great effort & energy. Next, it's constantly bombarded & distracted, which makes it less effective. Finally, the brain uses "Temporal Discounting", preferring smaller gains now, to larger gains in the future.

Irrespective of the difficulty, investing time early on to imagine their desired future, *is* the most crucial and rewarding action a Mentee can take. Setting out a broad direction for growth, selecting related Competences to cultivate, and knowing those outcomes to value, are vital. Together they provide the Mentee the compass they need, to set and maintain their heading.

2: Using Deliberate Practice, to Develop Competences

To develop appropriate Competences, a Mentee first needs to clarify what's relevant for them. Next, they'll need to identify projects that expose those Competences for development. Finally, they'll need a Mindset that allows them to practice the desired Competences, with confidence.

When identifying Competences, it is better to develop a selective list, perhaps limiting choice to only three or four critical capabilities. This can be quite a detailed and daunting task for some. A good strategy is to use a relevant "Competency Framework", or "Competency Model".

Most large organisations have already mapped out Competences they feel are relevant. There are also insightful generic Models available for specific Industries. Professional organisations too, often derive Competency sets relevant to the experience levels of their professional members. These can all be helpful resources for a Mentee, early on in their research.

Next, identifying projects to experiment with new Competences, can be challenging. For many Mentees, their work environment may not encourage this. Their daily jobs may appear quite stressful, like a constant stream of urgent tasks, all flowing straight to their desktop. Life can seem like a plate-spinning exercise, with competing demands for speed, quality, cost & service.

A good approach is to view the incoming task stream strategically, as a portfolio of "Possibilities". Look ahead to assess the larger tasks in terms of product, process and priorities. Triage those that must be done now and in a prescribed way, from those with flexibility around their process. The latter ones may allow experimentation, the key to developing Competences.

It is vital a Mentee looks out for opportunities to knowingly conduct small "Experiments". However in business, results count, and risks needs to be minimised. Experimentation may at first glance, appear difficult. Getting the Mentee to practice with deliberate intentions is a good strategy. To do this, they need a Mindset that separates "Performance", from "Practice".

A "Performance" Mindset, focuses on "Delivery", actions known processes, and operates at optimal effectiveness. It exploits what's already known. When a Mentee views projects through this frame, they value high end results, access to assigned resources, certainty of effort, coupled with appropriate metrics that align their effort to expected outcomes.

A "Practice" Mindset focuses on "Development", experiments with unknowns, and experiences new content and processes. It explores what's unknown. When a Mentee views projects through this frame, they value growth, isolation of Competences, conscious effort to build new, specific skill sets, coupled with, reflection on the range of different outcomes that unfold.

3: Engaging their Mentor in Feedback, to Stay on Track

A Mentee's ability to regularly conduct developmental experiments is a real skill. To be effective however, deliberate "Practice" needs timely Feedback. They need to understand outcomes, to reflect, and, to learn. Insights gained, can be then fed forward into future practice.

One of the cornerstones of an effective Mentor, is their ability to provide constructive, real-time, feedback, that's relevant to the task at hand. They need to be a powerful communicator, who empathetically brings the wisdom of their experiences to bear, with influence.

One of the qualities of an effective Mentee, is their ability to constantly convey their desire to hear, and their ability to receive, Mentor feedback at all times. That feedback is relevant when deliberately practicing new skills, especially during periods of experimentation.

An effective Mentee also engages in dialogue to provide Feedback to their Mentor. They will share the things that they need, what's working and what isn't, and what else they need from their Mentor to help Contribute to their growth.

That said, once a Mentoring relationship is established, it can sometimes become, quite "comfortable". Both parties find their comfort levels, and soon, neither party wishes to disturb the tranquillity, peace and pleasure they may get from their regular interactions. In the balance of dialogue, harmony may dominate to the detriment of authenticity, else trust may be at risk.

It is important the Mentee keeps uppermost in their mind, the reason a Mentoring relationship exists; it affords them semi-structured opportunities for personal growth and transformation. A good strategy is to keep focused on the aims of the program, and recognise that to achieve the desired changes, an honest exchange of feedback between Mentor and Mentee is vital.

Continually using dialogue to share Feedback is therefore the third of three critical areas to work on. And though direct Feedback may not always be palatable, it is more appealing when given and received with sincerity, in a timely fashion, and within a relationship based on trust.

Switching Focus to the Roles & Responsibilities of Mentor

The next Article switches to the *Mentor*. We'll explore three relevant areas for attention, so that a Mentor can build effective relationships that support the Mentee on their growth journey.

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