

Approaching the First Meeting

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The Metronomic Beat of Regular Growth Sessions

Mentoring is a collaborative learning process between two individuals, each committed equally, to the personal growth of the other. That learning happens within a social relationship, one that builds and blossoms through regular, constructive, growth conversations.

Effective conversations strike a chord with Mentor & Mentee. They set their own tempo to the growth via regular, active, sharing sessions. Those meetings are conducted in ways that create harmony; rapport is the common denominator.

Sessions strum a cadence that affords Mentor & Mentee greater clarity around expectations. They review progress to goals, hold each other accountable, provide developmental and reinforcing feedback, and, contribute different ideas that take the conversations forward.

As an outcome, both are continually able to renew and deepen their levels of trust. Yet, that positive accord happens less by accident, and more by design. That very first meeting between Mentor & Mentee is vital in hitting the right tone; its success is paramount.

The First Session: It's More than a Prologue

The first meeting a Mentor holds with their Mentee, is intensely significant. It provides each their first impression of the other. It sets a tone that influences how each wants their journey to evolve. And finally, it brings formality into how each choose to interact; it creates a "contract".

Treating that first meeting as strategic and special yields dividends over the life of any Programme. To do so, Mentor & Mentee can choose to focus attention in three core areas ...

- Establishing Good Communications
- Bringing Clarity to the Mentoring Process
- Making Sense of the Purpose in Mentoring

1: Communication: Making a Good Connection

Good communicators shape their environment so it's easy for others to connect. They manage their selves, using body language to convey feelings of warmth, comfort, and confidence. They create an aura of approachability, which puts others at ease and encourages them to approach. And, they select a neutral venue, that allows for comfortable conversations to flow.

They know that a good first touch begins with a positive mindset. Thus, they choose an attitude that beams out to connect with others. Just like a lighthouse, their intentions shine through. They recognise the power and safety of “chit-chat”, and how it helps others relax around them. They also contribute to the conversation, taking an active role to listen, clarify and probe.

Generating rapport is important when building a strong relationship replete with trust. So, they put aside “Devices”, focus attention on their partner, and when appropriate, share their story. Establishing a relationship on firm foundations is a vital action during that initial contact.

However, as with any first encounter, it's possible for emotions to run a little high, especially when much rests on a high stakes meeting. Good communicators are particularly sensitive to this, and do everything in their power to create a space that looks, feels and sounds safe for others. Great connectors choose actions that create strong, enduring, positive impressions.

2: Process: Clarifying How to Run the Relationship

The Mentor & Mentee need mechanisms to recognise and appreciate progress. It's important to work out how their relationship can best operate. Both need to contribute to decision-making, yet each brings different expectations & assumptions, to contrasting roles & responsibilities.

Agreeing a workable set of “ground rules” is therefore an important early action. Rules adopted become the glue that binds them as they traverse their growth journeys. They set the pace & cadence of Meeting sessions. They also help work through issues, if and when conflicts arise.

Much of the mechanistic minutiae needs to be walked through and agreed, such as; definitions of key roles, responsibilities & accountabilities, methods for sharing ideas, expertise & insights, manner of providing encouragement & support, mechanisms for journaling progress, evaluating growth & giving feedback. Remember to include respect of the need for confidentiality.

Clarifying the “What's, Who's & How's” in driving the relationship is fundamental to its success. Thus, it is good practice to codify the mechanics and ground rules in a simple Contractual form. This allows each to visibly express their commitment to act for the other during any Programme.

Given participant seniorities, creating diary space for regular meetings may be a challenge. Rather than keep dates open “to be decided”, agree on a regular schedule up-front. Commit to that fixed time slot, e.g., last Thursday of the month at 4:30 pm”, no matter what might pop up.

Agree also how ad hoc contacts are made, as well as the best way to talk; face-to-face might not always be possible, so what other options could work, such as voice or video call. Consider the venues for regular Meeting session too. Aim to choose more neutral settings, locations that are accessible to both, with environments that are conducive for relaxed, safe, personal sharing.

3: Purpose: Articulating Outcomes Desired from the Journey

The third and final phase assumes that a positive relationship is being established, and that clarity is forming around the Process mechanics. Once so, it is then timely for the conversation to move on to an exploration of the growth and contribution needs of both Mentee & Mentor.

Stepping back, the fundamental Purpose of a Mentoring Program is to enable a Mentee to achieve change, deep Transformational change. To that end, they'll need to articulate the destination & direction they've chosen to head. This will inform the conversations about the resources they need along the way, and how, their Mentor can best contribute.

The importance of a Mentor articulating what they need from a relationship, and how best to contribute, may be less obvious. Moreover, a powerful Mentor often has personal "growth" goals too. Being able to share those early on, contributes to a much more effective relationship.

That sharing requires honesty, transparency, and foresight, plus the courage to be vulnerable whilst airing private thoughts with a new "friend". As a result, conversations relating to Purpose can sometimes be the more challenging part of their initial meeting. They require both parties to authentically address core questions surrounding their involvement, e.g. ...

- Why are they participating?
- In what ways are they looking to grow?
- How do they believe the other person can help them reach their desired outcomes?

Involvement in a Mentoring Program brings benefits, yet it does require a substantial commitment of personal time and resource. In this regard, prior preparation is crucial, especially to the success of conversations related to discussion of Purpose.

Thinking ahead creates objectivity, which helps downstream when evaluating and assessing growth. Yet, to maximise the returns on that investment, it's important to show ambition early on; the Mentor & Mentee need to "think big".

Contemplating & Measuring Progress

In the next Article, we'll step back to consider how to track progress. As with most endeavours in life, good things all things "start at the very beginning", with a little up-front contemplation. We'll go back to basics as we consider the Contemplation for, and Measurement of, Progress.

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