

Evaluating Progress

Article by Patrick O'Brien, Managing Director of The Amanuenses Network Pte Ltd

Progress: Knowing How Far They've Travelled

The purpose of the Mentoring journey, is to foster Mentee growth in a desired direction. That progress is typically discussed on a regular basis, as part of monthly Mentor-Mentee meet-ups.

To help maintain perspective on the gains achieved, it is sensible to structure in less frequent check-in sessions. These allow both learning partners to take a deeper, reflective, evaluative view of progress, to appreciate how far they have already come. These can be scheduled in every six-months, and, as part of the formal closure of a long running Mentoring relationship.

A deeper evaluation looks back, to appreciate both the distance travelled, as well as the quality of that journey. It gauges their "Where's"; the places they've reached through joint effort. It also examines their "How's"; the personal feelings they've experienced along the way.

To be meaningful, evaluation needs to afford both Mentor & Mentee the ability to explore what's taken place between their points of departure, and, subsequent places of arrival. This encompasses their initial starting points, courses mapped out, actions deliberately practiced, issues that surface, learning that occurs, and importantly, growth that each experience.

In a Mentoring context, "Growth" targets are used to measure how far a person has "Stretched" towards a target, rather than to simply judge whether they've hit a target or not. Measurement encompasses an evaluation of the past, to chronicle the distance travelled. It also assesses the future, to feedforward on the actions still required to stay on track, and reach that target.

Contemplation: Setting Out with the Best of Intentions

An effective Mentoring relationship, maps out the means that take a Mentee from one place to another. This is achieved through early joint dialogue, where Mentor & Mentee collaboratively clarify their "To What", "From Where" & "So How" questions. During their initial meeting, they work through their desires, to set directions, find headings, and, determine destinations.

As a pre-cursor to that initial meeting, it is appropriate for each to singularly, and purposefully, engage in a little quiet contemplation. Embarkation on a Mentoring Programme is a significant commitment of resources over an extended time period. Each therefore needs to understand their "Raison de faire", their "reason to do"; it's important they know their "Why's".

For a Mentee, the overriding reason for participation in a Mentoring Programme is usually personal, they've a need to bring about Transformational Change in their Self. It's helpful for a Mentee to contemplate at the outset, their desires for, and commitment to, personal change.

Oftentimes, they feel they have a limitation, i.e., some "Thing" is holding them back. This may be a negative "Thing" they wish to let go of, a no longer relevant "Thing" they cling on to, or, a positive new "Thing" they hope to acquire. Their beliefs usually reveal a desire to differentiate themselves from others, or to increase perceived alignment and compatibility with a future role.

Though this “Thing” may be a skill, some knowledge, an attitude, even an experience, it doesn’t really matter what it relates to. What matters, is that a Mentee can pinpoint with precision, what that “Thing” truly is, what life can be like with more (or less) of it, and, how committed they are to make the personal changes required to achieve the Transformation desired.

For a Mentor, the driving reason is usually personal too, they’ve a need to increase influence and deepen their skills, through Cultivating Others. It’s helpful for a Mentor to contemplate at the outset, the relevant skills & experience they already have, and what they’re willing to share.

Given a Mentor’s seniority, they can be a little reluctant to compile a portfolio of experiences they have to offer. This requires consideration of the industries, organisations & roles they’ve been exposed to, as well as the functional & project skills & expertise they’ve developed.

A Mentor needs to consider the duration of each experience, the context of their exposure, and, form a view of the quality & strength of skills developed. It’s not just about “Hard”, “Technical” skills, but also the personal & interpersonal “Soft skills”, ones transferable to a Mentee.

Determination: Taking Stock of the Progress to-date

Contemplation creates a set of expectations, which feed into a potential list of benefits. In contrast, Determination examines the quality of the journey taken (How), and, the distance travelled (Where). It provides insight to the extent to which those expectations are realised.

For a Mentee, research suggests that the some of the more common benefits sought are ...

- The potential to experience deep, Transformational change
- Access to a trusted confidant who can provide impartial advice
- Mechanism for challenge and exposure to new ways of thinking
- Potential to achieve recognition with improved organisational visibility
- Environment for safe application of ideas that develop relevant competences
- Long-run relationships that allow a Mentee to build much improved confidence

Research also suggests that for a Mentor, some of the more common benefits sought are ...

- Personal satisfaction from seeing the difference they make, to Others
- Increased self-awareness, of their leadership approaches and styles
- Opportunities to enhance their leadership and coaching skill sets
- Realisation and strengthening of their functional expertise
- Greater influence within their personal networks
- Space for their own reflection, and growth

Progress is determined by measuring both the desired Outcomes, and, the Mentoring process; Where the benefits are achieved, and How their journey is experienced. Where examines the Competences gained, and learning that occurred. A high-quality relationship evidences growth as it generates noticeably new Competences that stretch a Mentee some measurable distance.

How examines the Relationship created, and the extent to which it was safe for mutual sharing. A high-quality relationship feels good as it supports experimentation, is steeped in feedback, and serves up a satisfying exchange of ideas using continuous, honest, open dialogue.

It's important to remember, that the Mentoring process is a long-run game. Evaluation of progress is always accompanied by an Assessment of what else is required for the next stage of the Mentee's journey; their growth never stops.

Staying the Course

In the next Article, we'll consider the challenges of keeping the relationship active and fresh. Because Mentoring is a long-run Programme, motivation is often tested along the way. We'll dive into Motivation and consider how to Keep Things Fresh, to Stay the Course.

The Article was originally commissioned by the Institute of Singapore Chartered Accountants (ISCA) and the Singapore Accountancy Commission (SAC), as part of their CFO Mentoring Programme. It was written by The Amanuenses Network Pte Ltd (www.amanuenses.net) and republished on their websites and the IS Chartered Accountant Journal, with all rights reserved.

For More Amanuenses Soft Skills Articles, Click Here