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## DIFFICULTIES AND DIFFERENCES

### TROUBLE SHOOTING YOUR MENTORING RELATIONSHIP

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What do you do if things are not going to plan; or you don't feel that the development is progressing? Ideally the mentoring relationship is forged in trust and mutual respect but sometimes the conversations are simply not stimulating; or you do not feel able to really express your thoughts safely.

This quick guide is designed to give you some ideas for reviewing how the development is progressing and negotiating improvement for the conversations.

#### WHAT CAN GO WRONG AND WHY:

Like any relationship there is likely to be a complex and varied set of reasons for why things don't feel quite right, but what is important to remember is that mentoring is a collaboration between two people whom both have a responsibility for making it work well.

As a starting point it can be useful to check in with the list below to see if any of the indicators apply. Some signs that all may not be well:

- Somehow it feels **uncomfortable** and you are not looking forward to the session.
- You are **not willing** to share important experiences that would aid learning.
- You appear to be having a very **formulaic** conversation.
- The meetings are frequently **cancelled**.
- Actions taken forward by the mentee are **ignored**.

However, don't panic if any or all these relate; this does not mean the mentoring relationship is 'broken'. But it may mean you need to reflect on what might be going on below the surface of the conversations. Some mindsets that can affect the dialogue:

- **Fear** of getting it wrong and not helping/learning enough.
- **Fear** of exposing too much and sharing vulnerabilities.
- **Fear** of change and being too comfortable in what you believe.
- **Fear** of difference and the risk of disagreeing.
- **Fear** of losing face and attachment to ego.

Another way of reviewing the effectiveness of the spoken conversation and its' contribution to learning is to use [David Clutterbuck's helpful paper 'The Seven layers of Mentoring'](#) which outlines the stages of dialogue that naturally occur and how this can be used to map where the mentoring conversations are occurring and review if this matches the mentor/mentee expectation.

Managing expectations are at the heart of establishing and sustaining mentoring which is why 'contracting' and using a template 'learning agreement' to understand and negotiate how the relationship will work is so important.

## HOW TO REVIEW AND RECONNECT:

Regular review to check in with experiences and avoid assumptions is an important aspect of mentoring. Even when things feel like they are going well, it is good practice to assess where the mentoring is and how the development is progressing. This means observation and asking for feedback. This can feel a bit risky though and understandably mentors might feel personally responsible if the mentee's experience is not ideal. Equally, the mentee might feel so grateful for the time the mentor is donating, they may feel unsure about asking for a change.

Consider the role that power plays in the relationship. As a mentor are you doing enough to 'defuse' your power in order to allow the mentee to share thoughts and experiences honestly? As a mentee are you doing enough to critically appraise all ideas and not allow biases to contaminate making up your own mind? Consider the ideas offered by [Megan Reitz in her research concerned with 'Being Silenced and Silencing Others.'](#)

Therefore, building in the review process regularly can help normalise the experience of talking about what is working and what isn't. Try using the following questions at the end of a mentoring conversation:

- "What is working well for you in these conversations?"
- "What is working less well?"
- "What else might you need from these sessions?"
- "Is there anything else we could be doing together to aid your learning?"

You may recognise that it could be useful to reconnect through refreshing common ground:

- Consider what you **share personally** or professionally.
- Reflect on experiences you both have **recently encountered** that builds rapport.
- **Encourage the difference** and acknowledge how this may help.

And finally, it may be wise to re-contract if you feel you have lost your way and the conversations are not as stimulating or valuable as they could be. This is OK and is no way a reflection of failure or poor performance. It is a reflection of the developmental nature of mentoring.

### SUMMARY

1. The mentoring process can sometimes feel difficult.
2. Mentoring is a collaboration and both parties are contributing.
3. Power can sometimes get in the way of thinking freely.
4. Listening is crucial but advancing the dialogue is vital to development.

#### **Additional Resource:**

[David Clutterbuck – Seven Layers of Mentoring](#)

[Megan Reitz – How Your Power Silences Truth](#)

If you would like further support, please email the [ACCELERATE programme manager](#).

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