

Thinking Space No.28

Transactional versus transformational mentoring

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A key success factor in mentoring is moving on from transactional towards more transformational conversations. Read more about how to do this in this Thinking Space.

At its core mentoring is about providing support by listening and challenging by asking questions. Modern mentoring can be described as a relationship between two people who have different levels of experience. The mentor offers support and opportunities for development and listens actively addressing the challenges of the mentee.¹ Mentoring relationships can move from a transactional to a transformational relationship. Most relationships will be more transactional in the beginning and can develop into a transformational one.

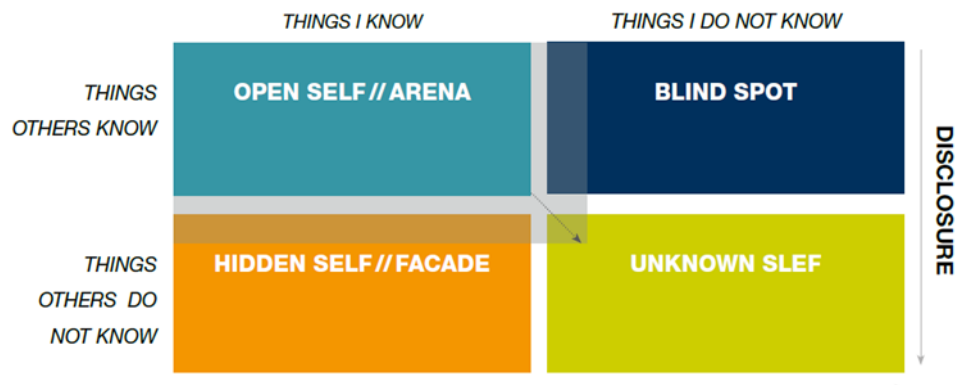
Transactional relationships tend to focus on finding quick solutions for rather technical challenges, for example, how to deal with customer complaints or where to find the next customer. The focus of such a mentoring session will be on finding a quick solution rather than trying to understand underlying issues. Such issues can be related to lack of knowledge but also related to character traits of the entrepreneur. Very likely the entrepreneur will benefit from the experience of the mentor and will be able to implement a new solution. However, in the long run mentees might benefit more from trying to understand underlying causes of the challenge by reflecting their own behaviour and trying to develop a deeper understanding of the situation at hand. Having such an open conversation with the mentor requires trust and rapport. A good indicator that the relationship moved forward into a transformational one is that mentor and mentee trust that something good will come out of their conversations. Obviously building such a transformational relationship requires time and personal commitment from both sides.

Transactional	Transformational
– expect something in return	– trust that something good will happen
– if ... then	– building rapport
– easy, fast	– taking time
– no commitment required	– requires personal commitment
– focus on challenges and solutions	– focus on personal development

Source: YBI SOS Mentoring Webinar No.5, 20 May 2020.

Moving on towards transformational conversations also requires explicit consent to explore the unknown and personal topics on the one hand and disclosure from mentor and mentee.

¹ YBI Mentor/mentee manual, forthcoming.



Source: Adaptation of Johari Window², YBI SOS Mentoring Webinar No.5, 20 May 2020.

This requires more time for building the relationship but it is also more rewarding if successful, as there is a learning on both sides. It requires understanding the difference between empathy and sympathy.³ Transformational mentoring is characterised through a relationship that is not driven by outcomes. In a transformational relationship a mentor is equally interested in the person and the business. In this role the mentor offers guidance rather than advice and serves as a critical friend.

This approach is especially important for young people who struggle with a feeling of doubt or uncertainties about their abilities. Mentees can learn that their value does not depend on their achievements alone and a mentor will appreciate and value the person they already are. This form of support allows for personal growth and building up confidence and self-esteem.

Mentors need to have access to (peer-) learning opportunities to familiarise themselves with appropriate tools and improve their mentoring skills. In general, such learning opportunities will be provided by the mentoring programme in addition to induction training sessions.

Especially young people, i.e. NEETs will benefit significantly from having access to additional soft skills trainings. Here the learning from peers is particularly promising. Such soft skills include resilience, grit, interpersonal skills, working with others and dealing with stress.

Transformational mentoring starts with trust, respect, understanding and genuineness⁴:

- Respect: Respect for others is a basic right and happens when we show a genuine interest in others, free of ego or expectation.
- Understanding: Learning can be enabled through asking questions and encouraging curiosity. It helps to understand feelings and emotions better and being able to respond differently. We humans love to have someone who is really listening and shows interest in what we have to say.
- Genuineness: genuineness allows us to accept ourselves and others for who we are and creates an environment where failures can be admitted. Accepting imperfections helps to become less judgemental and more accepting of others. Being authentic is not just about what we think or say but about what we do and how we interact with the world around us.

²Luft, J.; Ingham, H. (1955). "The Johari window, a graphic model of interpersonal awareness". *Proceedings of the Western Training Laboratory in Group Development*. Los Angeles: University of California, Los Angeles.

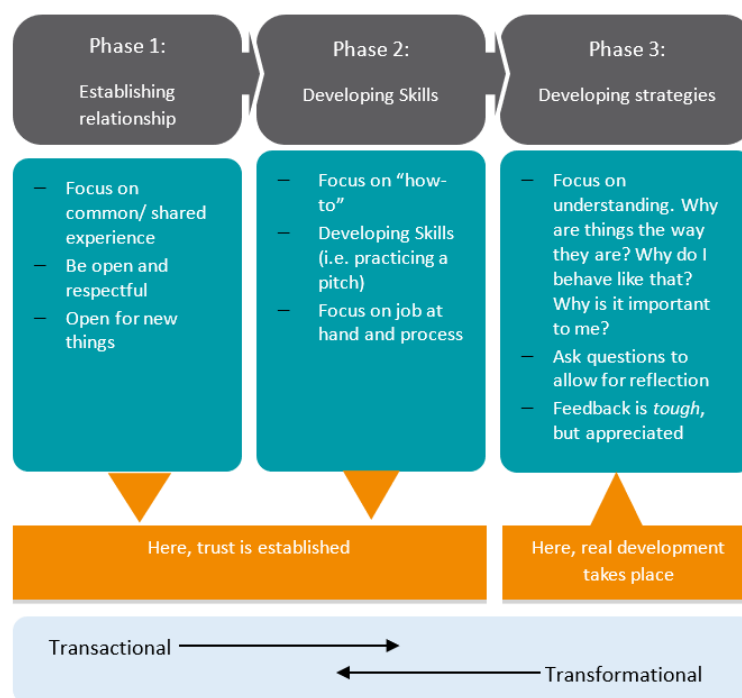
³ Brené Brown in empathy and sympathy: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=1Ewvgu369Jw>

⁴ YBI SOS Mentoring Webinar No.5, 20 May 2020

Recommendations

A mentoring relationship is a process that can, as depicted below, be divided into three phases. In the beginning of the mentoring relationship the focus is set on exploring shared interests and experiences. Mentor and mentee get to know each other and talk about their lives and businesses as much as it is appropriate and accepted (disclosure).

As the mentoring relationship progresses into the second phase the focus of the conversations will shift to how to do things and develop skills.



Source: Amended from YBI Mentor/mentee manual, forthcoming.

In phase three, when trust is established the relationships are deeper, more meaningful, more productive and can deal with challenges and risks that arise by creating a safe space. Such trust-based relationships also give room for professional and personal growth of the mentee, learning and change. Though young entrepreneurs have to take responsibility for their development⁵, experienced mentors can help them to explore their potential and support this process through reflections and asking.

⁵ YBI (2019), Entrepreneurial soft skills for the future: a scoping study, p.20, at: https://www.youthbusiness.org/file_uploads/YBI-SoftSkillsForTheFuture.pdf