The Strengths Engagement Track™
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Identify-Change-Grow™

What the research reveals is that, to reach the level set by the benchmark study, organisations don’t need to redesign all jobs, and individuals don’t need to hold out for the perfect dream job. Besides, that perfect job doesn’t exist. Confucius said “Find a job you love and you’ll never work a day in your life,” but this is one of those few occasions where we’d be wise to ignore him. None of us, no matter how content we are at work, love our entire job. Whatever our job happens to be, it doesn’t consist of one activity “that we love.” Instead it comprises many different activities. Some invigorate us, some leave us neutral, and some deplete us, or bore us, or drain us. Given this, trying to design, or to hold out for that perfect “job we love” is a fool’s game. Instead the challenge, both for organisations and for individuals, is quite straightforward:

• How can we gradually but deliberately increase how often each person plays to his strengths? How can we get people from “once a week” to “most of the time?” To answer this we need to impose a new discipline – the identify-change-grow discipline. This identify-change-grow discipline must be applied to both individuals and companies. For individuals the discipline means that we need to learn three new skills;

• First, we need to sort through our activities and identify precisely which ones invigorate us, and which deplete us – most of us are still woefully vague when it comes to capturing vividly which activities strengthen us and which weaken us.

• Second, while others are pulling us in every direction, we need to stay sufficiently in control of our hours at work so that, over time, we load up on the invigorating kind, and push back hard if the scales gradually tip the other way – this will demand that we change either our actions and routines in the course of a regular week, or the way we perceive these actions and routines.

• Third, we must learn how to explain what we are doing persuasively enough to get our colleagues to want to help us - we need to learn how to talk about our strengths without sounding like we are boasting, and our weaknesses without sounding like we are whining.

Expectations of a mentor.

• Treat the relationship with respect and confidentiality

• Allocate time and energy

• Assist the Mentee to establish realistic career goals and plan how to achieve them. Show the big picture and provide guidance that Mentees would otherwise not consider

• Be a resource and pass on know-how and essential thinking patterns and attitudes that go with more senior positions

• Challenge the Mentee to face up to opportunities and problems, personal strengths and weaknesses. Ask probing questions, listen and provide feedback

• Act as a sounding board when the Mentee has major decisions to make and needs to talk them through. Provide perspective, support and encouragement

• Act as a gateway to other people and sources of knowledge. Provide exposure to different people and areas within the company and “open doors” for Mentees.

• It is also really important for you to clarify with your mentee what you expect of them and ask them to do the same. So understand what that is and set the record straight from the start.
**What you’ll be doing with your mentee**

Throughout your meetings and discussions with your mentee over the coming weeks, you will be:

- Sharing past experiences, identifying goals, designing plans and building skills
- Debriefing one another on meetings, projects and events
- Brainstorming around projects and tasks
- You might role-play situations faced by the Mentee
- Sharing tools and processes with each other
- Sharing perspectives of a particular matter under discussion
- Challenging each other on assumptions
- Continually evaluating and providing feedback on how well the relationship is working!
- Collaboration - both you and your mentee play a partnership role in their development
- Respect - mutual appreciation is core – both of your knowledge and of the mentee's investment of time and energy
- Responsiveness - as in any respectful collaboration, both you and your mentee need to be sensitive and responsive to the goals, needs and perspectives of the other
- Confidentiality - this supports the ability to be vulnerable, yet safe, in difficult conversations
- Joint Accountability – when agreements are kept, this strengthens trust and helps keep the learning relationship focused and productive
- Free and Honest Expression - you can share your strengths and weaknesses; your dreams and goals, and your past, present and anticipated experiences. Both of you can offer and hear feedback in the spirit of building on competencies and strengthening areas of weakness

**Question tips:**

- Ask questions that are supportive and challenging. For example: “I think the experience you had with your former manager has really supported your organisational skills - how could you apply this to your own team?”
- Ask questions that are going to help your mentee reflect. For example: “could you tell me a little more about what you mean by…?” “Take a moment to put yourself in their shoes - how do you think they may be feeling or reacting?”
- Ask specific questions that draw on your mentee's unique thinking and learning style. For example: “I think what you came up with is a great idea, but let’s assume that that is not possible and brainstorm some other possibilities as well.” Or perhaps “There are some really great options on the table - let’s do a list of the positives and benefits of all of the options - what is your gut feel?” Or, another approach could be “I love the way that you are thinking about solutions - if you were going to try and implement the solution you just suggested, what are the action steps?”
- Allow time for reflection. For example: “I think this is a really interesting subject - and I would love to understand more about it. Before our next meeting can you make some notes on the pros and the cons and possible solutions, as well as some thoughts on the impact to your team - and let’s go through that in detail in our next meeting.”

**Strategies for a mentor’s toolkit**

There are a number of strategies you can use to make your mentoring sessions great! Here’s a few with some critical thinking questions for you to complete along the way.

Ask questions - these are the key to inclusive leadership!

Questions and curiosity are the keys to a mentor’s success. When you ask your mentee a question this pushes them to reflect on how they will respond. This is a critical component of the learning process. Asking questions is how you can get the mentee to articulate his or her own thinking. Remember: ethical, role appropriate questioning is a must.
A mentee's world may be different from yours!

Think about it - is there any special context to your mentoring? How does this impact the expectations, ground rules and how the relationship will actually work from a practical perspective?

Our context influences how we perceive reality and also what we see as possible and achievable. Our own view of the world is how we form our opinions and attitudes. It’s important to remember this - and to remember that your mentee’s world view might be different to yours for a whole range of reasons.

The context of each mentoring relationship is going to be different - the circumstances, conditions and other outside forces that affect how we connect, interact and learn from one another. Sometimes this can be complex because of the many layers that a mentor or mentee may bring to the relationship context.

Think about what is going on in your daily life and the daily life of your mentee - at home, at work, your social situation, the way you were brought up, the way you’re educated, your cultural background and your family background. Both a mentor and mentee bring all these layers and influences to the relationship. It’s important to understand that where we come from and our experiences will often shape our opinions, behaviours and values. The important thing in a mentoring relationship is to recognise and respect that sometimes these are different.

The unconscious ways that we behave and form opinions are always there - and all of us have them. If you understand how this plays out within yourself - it will help you to read other people and situations. If you decide to emulate "ostrich behaviour" and put your head in the sand, this is going to significantly impair your ability to reach some great learning outcomes in your mentoring relationship with your mentee.

The way your mentoring program has been set up will also add a different context and level of complexity. Is the relationship formal, informal, sponsored or incidental? Does the relationship operate in a group? Is it a one-to-one partnership? Is it a combination of virtual and face-to-face, or just virtual? It’s important to remember that all these layers are going to affect both the mentor and mentee - therefore it is really important that both parties need to communicate expectations and establish ground rules and systems and processes that will work for you both as individuals (or as a group) taking into account the specific context of your mentoring relationship.
What differences are there between you and your mentee?

Think about gender, cultural background, age, sexual orientation, race, level of power, educational background, and stage of life. As a mentor, it’s vital to be aware that no two people - including you and your mentee - see the world through precisely the same lens. Very often, and quite subconsciously, we filter information based on our own subconscious bias - and that can lead to misinterpretation and misunderstanding.

It is really easy to make the mistake of thinking your mentees are just like you. It’s actually human nature to notice the differences between you and your mentee first - especially if he or she is from a different culture, religion, is older or younger than you, has a different sexual orientation, or is of a different ethnicity. It is not unusual for there to be a power differential. Ultimately the context of mentoring is difference: who we are shapes our thinking, our conversation, our relationships, and our behaviours. We need to be careful about stereotypical assumptions. It’s also important to recognise that we all have them!

Understanding cultural differences

Have you ever thought about how your cultural background - or someone else’s cultural background - can really frame how you see the role? For example, in some parts of Asia, a mentee may have a firm understanding of the role of mentor as a teacher, and that might be likely to affect how open that mentee may be in the relationship. Some mentees may have a cultural overlay which creates an expectation in them that the “teacher” must initiate all contact and communication - whereas the mentor may have a completely different expectation. You need to understand the cultural overlays that may exist in your mentoring relationship. So do your research!

If for example, the words “teacher” and “mentor” are interchangeable terms in that culture, you will need to clarify in your relationship that that’s not the nature of the relationship. An important skill for mentors - and managers - is to be able to understand cultural differences. Once you have taken the time to research and understand some of these differences you need to use what you have learnt to communicate and interact effectively with mentees of other cultures. The research shows that there are a number of competencies in establishing successful relationships around the globe.

These are:

• Becoming culturally self-aware
• Having a genuine desire to learn
• Becoming attuned to other cultures
• Developing a flexible cultural lens

Our understanding of other cultures can often frame how we see the world, our ability to be open and the way that we communicate. It is a key management and mentoring skill to understand differences in cultural style and to then have the intuition to use this understanding to communicate and interact in order to get the best results from people of other cultures. It’s important to remember that the goal is not to change someone of a different culture to be more like you.

It’s about understanding the culture, breaking down communication barriers - and also appreciating the value that the difference brings to the table. So it’s time to do some work and some research! Think about what resources you can access - online, ask questions, and explore any resources from your human resources department.