

Resource 11: A mentoring conversation

(This is a transcript from an actual mentoring conversation.)

Mentor: Can I take you back to this week, and the start of this new job. Something that's come up for me is that usually I know what's happening in your working life, and I usually know what's happening in your personal life, because you're very chatty, you share a lot. But this week, it's a big new beginning and you've said how you would have liked the head of section to show some interest. I wonder if you could say a bit more about that. It seems like a quiet start ...

Mentee: Yes, a quiet start ... um ... previously, he's been very supportive, but this week he's been very busy with other things. Another colleague, he says you have to manage him (*laughter*). When I was in charge of the last area, he would leave me to get on with it and I would feed him information from time to time. But this new job is different.

Mentor: It sounds like there is something you want from him?

Mentee: Er ... I think more information ... I think there's this other issue which comes up ... that he suffers from 'last minute-ism', in time management, and you know what I'm like with time management. You know, if it's not in the diary three months ahead, I find difficulty with it really. For example, there is a very important meeting today that I was just told about on Wednesday. Well, I'm sorry, there's no way I can go to it ... (*laughter*) ... so there's that issue.

Mentor: That's his style ...

Mentee: Yes, yes ... worries me a touch ...

Mentor: Somebody you are having to work to ... yes ... and that's a problem for you ...?

Mentee: Yes, simply on that one, generally he's very good, the 'last minute-ism', it gets a bit close for comfort, and personally I find that very difficult. I like plans in the future.

Mentor: You're usually very up front with people, would you think about going to see him?

Mentee: I think I would, actually, although ... I've not really thought about it ... (*pause*) ... I think... (*pause*) ... yes, I do need to go and see him and say 'Now look, that meeting was important, you knew it was coming up, could we have this information more in advance'. With other things he doesn't control directly, the administrator has put in place some of these dates and we now have them. And I think he needs to learn some of that ...

Mentor: This issue has come more to the fore this year with the shift to the new role as director. It's something to do with the last job being less important than the new work and here you are with a high profile. And it means you've got a different sort of relationship with him.

Mentee: Well, it's big business, it's worth a lot of money, in the picture of things, the last job is worth peanuts really, actually, in financial terms, whereas this one is worth a lot of money.

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Mentor: So the stakes are higher?

Mentee: Absolutely

Mentor: This relationship with the head of section is perhaps more important than it's been before.

Mentee: I think it is. *(pause)* I just wonder, just sometimes, I wonder whether it's me that's got the problem with this time management business ... um ...

Mentor: It's bit of a running joke, isn't it ...?

Mentee: It is really *(laughter)*

Mentor: I have a simple man's diary ... *(laughter)* ... you ... have a different sort of diary ...

Mentee: Absolutely ... absolutely, *(laughter)* ... and you seem to survive all right *(laughter)* ... um ...

Mentor: So is that another issue ...?

Mentee: I don't know ... but I wonder if, personally, it's a bit of an obsession. I think the busier you are, and all there is to do, you need to be organised. This view of time, which is ... *(pause)* fundamentally, I think that my time is mine and that I choose to sell it to my employer ... *(pause)* I don't think everyone sees it like that *(laughter)* so if I choose to sell it, then it's a negotiable thing.

Mentor: Well ...?

Mentee: I'm sure other people won't see it like that.

Mentor: There's the culture you come up against. *(pause)* I'm conscious that we've been talking for some time ... I wonder if it would be useful for you to summarise ...

Mentee: You want me to do that!?!?

Mentor: You start and I'll chip in ...

Mentee: All right ... well, I suppose the first thing is the issue of the past, what went on then, but I don't ... that's gone now, that was tense but I got out of that responsibility ... so in a sense that was quite satisfying. But it wasn't like frying pan to fire, it's a new thing opening up. What I have, you know, in terms of budget, and that's a bit nerve wracking. And then there's ... *(pause)* ... then there's the time management issue ... um ... which is ... I'm not sure whether it's my problem or his. Either way, we've got to sort it out. And I think that's probably the key issue. When people are busy you've got to sort out some sort of organisation around that.

Mentor: So when we take this further, we'll pick up these issues. You're in the early, very early stages, the first days of the new responsibility ...

Mentee: Yes

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Mentor: And working on the relationship with your line manager is a priority ...

Mentee: Yes, I think it is, I think you're right, and I think I shall tackle that ... although, I've always got on well with him ...

Mentor: Yes

Mentee: I don't have a problem with that. Because the stakes are a bit higher, the relationship is likely to be a bit closer.

Mentor: On the other side there's what you've described as being obsessive about time management. Perhaps it will be helpful to explore that more, so that you can get clearer about it, and that may help you with your manager.

Mentee: Yes, because it does create tensions. Last minute things create tensions for me, because my sense of responsibility says I should be doing that, and my sense of time management - which is 'my time and we negotiate' - thinks - I'm not going to be there because I've already made previous arrangements. So that's complicated. Feelings of guilt, I suppose (*laughter*) are around

Mentor: So we've explored what the new responsibility is like and two issues, one to do with your line manager and one more personal. I wonder if that is a suitable place to stop.

Mentee: I think it is. I mean, what's it done for me is draw out this time management issue which ... (*pause*) ... I think it does have the potential to be significant and it does have to be resolved. Before we started this, I didn't really know where we were going to go. There was a niggle there and I think I've clarified what that niggle is.

Mentor: Can we agree to pick that up next time?

Mentee: Yes, that will be useful.