

Case study: **Lightbulb! It is me not them.**

March 2021

Setting the scene.

The mentee - a very experienced manager, struggling to adapt to her changing role post-acquisition of her employer.

The mentor - from within the acquired business, needed to be agile to meet the changing needs of the mentee. The main aim being to help her to adapt to her new working environment and rebuild her confidence which was damaged as she had been labelled by her new colleagues as 'difficult' to work with.

The employer transfer process had been frustrating and demoralising for the mentee and she felt that her new management team and colleagues were arrogant, condescending about everything that she and her former employer had achieved and that they were not willing to listen to her ideas and opinions. Rumours of redundancy were rife in the business for managers under toupee, as they were too expensive. This left the mentee feeling unappreciated, lacking confidence and worried about finding alternative employment during challenging economic conditions.

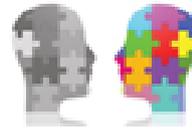
The mentoring

The first mentoring session crystallised the following objectives:

- Establish whether the mentee wanted to build a career with the new business or move onto fresh pastures
- Rebuild confidence and feelings of self-worth
- Increase her awareness of how she comes across to others
- Encourage an understanding of the pressures and perspectives of her new manager and colleagues
- Focus on career goals
- Practical guidance in preparation for a potential job search

The approach

I had worked with the mentee over previous years on several employee relations issues but did not know her very well on a personal level. The initial approach was to understand her better, explore where we had commonality and shared experiences to quickly build rapport, trust, and confidence as well as her background, influences, how she got where she is today, what motivates her to get up in the morning, what her goals are for the future and what her passions are. Ground rules were set to manage what she was hoping to achieve from our sessions and to explain how I could assist her goals by:



- pass on appropriate knowledge.
- provide introductions to appropriate contacts,
- share some of my experiences with storytelling to resonate with the mentee and
- establish me as a suitably qualified and critical friend who could assist her during this formative part of her career.

The discovery

The mentee is a 'strong' manager, who would resist showing any sign of weakness. Using the principle of 'peeling away the onion', it was essential that I used active listening, curious questioning and challenged her thinking to establish the issues that she was facing, most critically; getting beyond the tip of the iceberg and truly understand what was important and the impact these challenges were having on her.

During each session, we explored self-reflection challenges to gain greater insight into her view of the world, how this was possibly impacting her reactions, attitude and behaviours as well as how she came across to others.

These included:

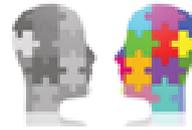
- Celebrating successes and positives – reframing her approach to setbacks and disappointments.
- Self Awareness – the mentee completed an on-line personality assessment, which we explored together.
- Influences – we discussed the greatest influences on the mentee throughout her life, and how they may have shaped her attitudes and decision-making.
- Opportunities – we identified opportunities that had helped the mentee to develop and the barriers that had gotten in her way.
- Learning & Growth – we explored what she had learned throughout the mentoring sessions and how these insights could be applied going forward.

One of the first concepts that we explored was discovering how the mentee saw herself in contrast to how others may see her. We also considered the 'two-pronged' approach in exploring her mindset and capability to establish, clarify, reframe, and set her interim goals (both personal and work-related). The focus became achievable targets, just outside of her comfort zone, to help her towards her long-term goals.

Results achieved, change in mindset and barriers overcome

We explored the potential barriers that were getting in way of the mentee's success and identified these as:

- a lack of self-confidence,



- a lack of awareness of how she can come across to others and her lack of motivation now that she was no longer a key influencer within the business.

The themes for the sessions were constantly changing as the mentee's attitude to her current job went from negative and demotivated to more positive and engaging.

We were originally preparing the mentee to move to a new employer, but for her mental wellbeing it was essential that we made her workplace experience less tense in the interim. Helping the mentee to build more effective relationships with her manager and peers, she was able to see her new role and future career with her current employer more positively. Whilst we were still developing the mentee's future employability and exploring alternative career possibilities, we also worked on increasing her credibility and aspirations in her existing role.

The **'light-bulb'** moment for the mentee happened very early on in the process when we explored how she came across to others. The sale of the business had been very difficult for her as she rapidly went from being a star-player to being considered as troublesome. We explored how her defensive attitude considering this change in status may be viewed as 'hostile' by her new manager and colleagues and we considered the impact of this on her new manager and how he may be feeling 'on edge' prior to any meeting with her.

We developed an action plan for her next meeting with her manager, where she acknowledged how she came across and how this may have been challenging for him. She expressed that she needed support from him so that her skills could be better utilised.

To ensure that she did not come across as complaining and obstructive, we prepared her 'pitch' with a positive spin including the actions that she wanted to take to remedy her issues. This meeting completely changed the relationship with her manager, who was relieved that the mentee had 'cleared the air'. They were able to talk more casually and amiably and he was able to reassure her that there was no 'plot' to make her redundant. He was open and honest about issues within the wider team and wanted to work with her to use her skills and experience to build higher standards across the city. Over the course of the sessions, the mentee was able to build friendships and allies within the wider business, she was given greater control and responsibilities across the city. She was able to amicably set boundaries and expectations with her managerial peer and her relationships have flourished.

During the sessions, we also explored the mentee's personal life and her need to be constantly busy at work – which frequently overcame her homelife. By helping the mentee to appreciate the benefits of being less involved at work, she started to enjoy reduced stress and a greater work-life balance. We both reflected on the noticeable shift in her more relaxed demeanor and focus on her personal goals. By the end of our sessions, rather than feeling frustrated, angry, and overlooked in her current role, the mentee was no longer waiting for her dreaded redundancy. She was primed, confident and ready to move on – if the right prospect arose – but she was also enjoying her current role and exploring opportunities for promotion.