



Eureka!

Conversations that create insight



By Ann Rolfe

“Eureka!” is what Archimedes yelled as he leapt from his bath and ran naked in the street. Meaning “I have found it”, the word has become associated with the excitement and satisfaction of a solution or great idea that suddenly jumps into consciousness.

History is replete with anecdotes of inventions and scientific breakthroughs linked to sudden insight. Most people have experienced an “Aha” moment of brilliant perception, as if a light is switched on. This kind of understanding or knowing is powerful.

Unexpected flashes of insight often occur when the brain is at rest or occupied in pleasant, undemanding tasks, such as sleeping, bathing, walking or driving. The conscious mind, idling like a car in neutral, suddenly shifts into gear and gets traction on an issue that’s been floating in the unconscious.

Learning and development professionals know that insight can also be orchestrated through activities in the classroom, experiential learning or action learning and that it is the reflection after the event that creates insight. Without a well-facilitated debrief, learning is left to chance.

Likewise, life events and work experiences are a rich source of personal and professional growth. Someone once said: “There is no such thing as a mistake, just learning opportunities.” And reflecting on positive outcomes and how they were achieved is just as powerful. But if we don’t take time to stop and reflect, learning may not surface. In our overcrowded thinking space, great ideas, innovative solutions even epiphanies often get lost.

■ Mentoring conversations

Mentoring conversations facilitate reflection. Conversation can provide the time and conditions conducive to insight. A relationship of rapport and trust heightens the learning available to people when they talk through their experience.

Mentoring conversations can also elicit values, priorities, and aspirations. These conversations create the insight of self-awareness. They allow the candid explorations of strengths, challenges and opportunities so necessary for personal, professional and career development.

Conversations need to be confidential and can be free-ranging, taking a holistic approach to the person, their life and work. Mentoring conversations are not just talk. The purpose of creating insight is to capture it and use it to make informed decisions and act on them.

The role of the mentor is to allow a person to talk about their issues and aspirations. They need to draw out the mentoree’s thoughts and feelings, find out what’s important to them and why. Once they understand where the mentoree is at, what their current reality is, the mentor may be able to offer useful information. If it’s appropriate and relevant they may share their own experience. So it’s important that the mentor knows how and when to elicit and when to impart information. Think of it as a sliding scale, adjusted to the person and the situation.

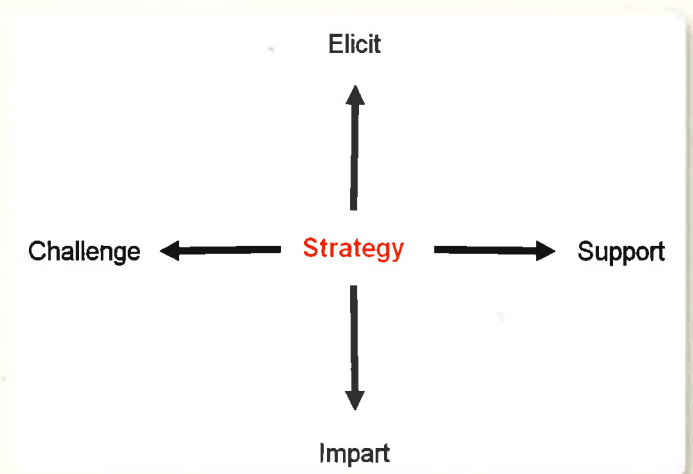


Figure 1: A mentor’s role

Sometimes the mentoree simply needs support, encouragement, a plan or practical techniques for getting the outcomes they want. Sometimes they need to be challenged, perhaps even confronted, to bring out their best. Again, different situations call for different strategies.

Such conversations need to be future-focussed. They are strategic and practical, addressing where a person is, where they want to be and how they can get there. An ongoing mentoring relationship helps a person stay on track and fine-tune actions to achieve their outcomes, or re-evaluate and re-set goals.

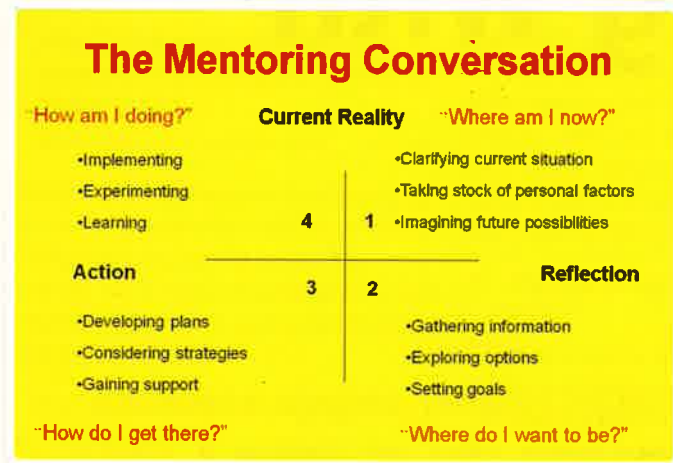


Figure 2: The Mentoring Conversation

A mentoring strategy

Mentoring conversations do happen informally and by chance. However, organisations can capitalise on the strategic value of mentoring by implementing a mentoring strategy. Implementing a mentoring strategy demonstrates that the organisation values its people, builds human capital and organisational capability. Most often, mentoring is used by organisations striving for:

- Employee engagement – to attract, retain and develop people for increased productivity;

- Knowledge management/skill building – to prevent the loss of both tacit and implicit information and develop skills; or
- Culture change to influence behaviour based on values, assumptions, and common practice, for enhanced organisational performance.


Implementing a mentoring strategy involves:


- Determining organisational outcomes and key performance indicators
- Deciding on a target group
- Identifying mentoring goals and likely benefits for participants
- Designing the overall program, activities and resources
- Developing a plan and timeline for implementation
- Designating responsibility for planning and coordination of mentoring
- Obtaining an appropriate budget and acquiring or developing resources
- Communicating and promoting the program
- Selecting and matching participants
- Training and education
- Support and follow-up
- Monitoring and evaluation

Mentoring represents the very best of human endeavours. It establishes connections and builds relationships. It provides personal and professional growth that benefits people and organisations. Most importantly of all, mentoring facilitates conversations that create insight. Eureka! ■

Ann Rolfe is the founder of Mentoring Works and The Mentoring Network Online. She offers resources on mentoring, books and assistance for organisations and individuals to enjoy the benefits of mentoring. Contact Ann at ann@mentoring-works.com. Website: www.mentoring-works.com

Ann will be delivering a workshop at the 2010 AITD National Conference “Mentoring – Brain based benefits of conversations that create insights.”





It's home to Australia's #1 MBA program, the AGSM MBA and the prestigious AGSM Executive Programs and features:

- two large tiered theatres
- two Harvard-style theatres (u-shape tiered theatre with movable seating)
- two flat-floor seminar rooms
- exhibition space
- entertaining and dining areas
- 43 single-bed hotel rooms with en-suites and 1 facilitator or program manager's suite
- up to 16 breakout rooms
- a comprehensive business centre; and landscaped courtyard

THE UNIVERSITY OF NEW SOUTH WALES, AGSM BUILDING, RANDWICK
 Tel: 02 9931 9230 | Email: residentialcentre@unsw.edu.au | www.venuesandevents.unsw.edu.au