READY TO USE MENTORING

# Progression and regression

Have you ever planned something, only to find your mentee rolling their eyes, looking at their watch or getting frustrated? It may be that you have pitched it with slightly too high expectations or a bit too low and they are not being stretched enough. They may feel patronised or they may feel it’s going over their head and they are drowning in a sea of new information that feels beyond them. No worries. If you get the balance wrong, just admit that to them and discuss how to find a better level…here’s a tip for making every session work as closely as possible to your mentee’s particular level.

## Further options

When you challenge your mentee in some way, plan contingencies or further options for how they respond to what you are asking of them. In sport coaching this is called ‘progression and regression’. So, if you ask them to learn a new running drill and they are getting it quickly, you have a pre-planned extension that will make it harder (or easier, if they’re not struggling to pick up your original activity).

The underlying value of mentoring and coaching is about taking your mentee out of their comfort zone to just the right degree so that they are stretched and see progress in some way. But it is also our responsibility that we do no harm – that we do not put them off or damage their self-esteem, trust or excitement about growing.

If you have been in the mentoring relationship for some time, you will no doubt have a good idea of their limits and abilities and can do this intuitively. But being intentional about planning contingencies can be really helpful for your own practice. You are also extra prepared to be flexible and responsive to their needs. In newer relationships it can also be very helpful when you are less sure how to pitch your conversations and activities.

## Judging the level

Think about when you ask them a hard question – can you tell from their face and body language if they find it too basic or arbitrary and need to be pushed further to discover deeper things within themselves? Or perhaps you can tell what you are asking is too complicated or too vulnerable for this point in the relationship, and you need to back off a little and find a better balance of fun vs challenge.

This is a delicate balance – get it wrong and the conversation or relationship could get a bit awkward or counterproductive. Get it right and you can really facilitate significant growth and self-discovery for them.

Try it! When you plan a session, add one option to make it harder and one to make it easier. You only need to put these into action if you sense either would make a better use of your time together and better meet their needs. You may not need either but have them up your sleeve.

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