

Michael Comyn

Masterful Mentoring

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MICHAEL COMYN Good evening, everybody, and thank you for the opportunity and the invitation to speak to you today. I'm going to start by making a promise: I never, ever overrun. Years of broadcast training. So we will not be going over. I appreciate that some people in the room today might just be a little bit tired. Could I be correct? So I'll see if I can put some energy into the presentation for you, and again, welcome to what it is we're going to do.

So let me just tell you a little bit about me, and how come I get to do this. My background for the last thirty years has been working with crazy people. I have two lives: One life is in broadcasting. I have an independent production company that makes radio programs. We don't go near TV. That's for the scary people. We work on the radio side of things. And I also present, obviously. But in my other parallel life, I have a communications company, and work usually with entrepreneurs, but most recently with creative people, particularly towards coaching and mentoring, and getting and achieving the goals you set out to do. The reason I put the train up there [on a slide] is that if you ever travel on public transport in Ireland, it is *my* voice that tells you to "mind the gap". [audience laughter] So if you're ever in the country, you've already heard me speak to you as I said that to you. And as I said, we have a production company as well.

What I really want to share with you is that in the time I've been doing this, I find myself either coaching producers, business owners, or Google executives in Mountain View, California, where I spent three years working with young engineers toward their particular goals. One of the things that I would ask you to do, if it suits you today, is to interrupt me, because sometimes when you leave questions to the very end, you forget, or more importantly, you lose the energy. So I have absolutely no difficulty if you want to stop and ask a question at any point of time. I really would appreciate that.

So let's have a look and see about this journey that I want to take you on today. I came across a phrase recently, and I just love this: "People come into our lives for a reason, a season, or a lifetime." So why am I here in your life this evening? Well, it's for a specific reason. I'm here to talk to you about mentoring. But also the reason that you as a coach would come into somebody's life is for leadership. It's very easy when you talk about mentoring to think about stereotypes, and I'm very conscious that I'm in a room with a group of people who understand the principles of character and what goes into a character and defining that character, and possibly *avoiding* the stereotypes. But we all have the various different people who come into our heads when we think of mentors. Very often elderly persons, or an older person, or a wiser person. I'm going to show you this evening that this isn't necessarily the case. There are other alternatives as well.

I came across this phrase as well from one of my favourite actresses. It's maybe one of the reasons that we get involved. I really do love this. She says: "As you grow older, you'll discover that you have two hands. One for helping yourself, and the other for helping other people." Maybe this is the spirit we will take it with this evening.

So the rationale or the notion behind mentoring is that we draw thoughts and ideas from the person that we work with rather than impose our own. And it's very, very easy, and I want to spend a little

bit of time in my presentation to you this evening, just talking about how the difference might be between how a coach would work and how a mentor works, and some of the lessons that can be learned from that. We've had various different people in our lives who mentor us, whether it's an elder or a parent. But I started going through movie metaphors around this, and kept coming up with Yoda: "Try? There is no try." Then another one obviously is *Dead Poets Society*. It's very hard actually to find female role models in film as mentors. Can you think of one or two? Again, a challenge we might look at. There's a whole lot going on behind the scenes as to this idea of mentoring.

Let me call on somebody else's work to start the process. A couple of years ago, I had a really wonderful opportunity to study with Professor Robert Kegan and Lisa Lahey. They're both working at Harvard University in Boston. They run a program there called the "Immunity to Change" program. It's a lovely title. The Immunity to Change program is about how mentors and coaches can work with a person who is stuck. So you have an ability, you have an idea, you know what it is you should be doing, but you're stuck. And they run that program a couple of times a year. And when you do the program, you can then teach the topic to others. And that's what I want to do with you this evening.

So the background to that program – there's a lot of text in this, but bear with me for a moment, because I want to set the idea that Robert Kegan says to us that we as a society are people, and even people within an industry, fall into three categories. The first category he refers to as the 'socialised mind'. We were having a little bit of fun before the presentation when we were talking about Facebook and Twitter, and a whole generation of people out there who want to be liked, to have what they say liked and approved of by other people. It's interesting, I even went on a little walk down to the city today, and I noticed so many people sitting with their phones, immediately expressing communications to a vast number of people outside, but to nobody close to them. Just a perspective on it.

Well, what Robert says is that about 58% of the population fits into the category called the 'socialised mind'. Fitting in is what matters. Fitting in, belonging, having the right clothes, having the right glasses, having the right way of speaking, having the right approach to your colleagues and fitting in becomes incredibly important.

Now think about his for a minute, and broaden it out in your mind for a moment about the three different kinds of people you may be mentoring, and also yourself as a coach or as a mentor as well.

So anyway, 58% of the population will probably never pass that fitting in and belonging kind of focus. Then along comes the 35%: the 'self-authoring individual'. A self-authoring individual is very interesting because this is the journey we take when we first develop our own personal authority. If you think about it, the first time somebody gets to direct something, the first time somebody gets to line produce something, the first time somebody gets to set up their own business, the first time somebody becomes a supervisor at the local bar. But at that very moment, they have a transition into the 35%, and fitting in is no longer as important as having a personal authority, and developing that personal authority. That's a very good place for coaches to be. You can work very well in there, and there are lots of people like coaches who help people through that process. And it's *not* pretty. There's lots of stress, and there's lots of distress as we find our authority.

Then I want to talk to you finally about this beautiful, illusive 7%. There may be one or two in the room. The law of average is that there's at least one. By the way, it's not necessarily me. But who are these seven percenters? 'Seven Percenters' are self-transformed individuals. They no longer care. They're no longer motivated by the approval of others. They don't equate acceptance of other

people with internal wholeness of themselves. They can hold contradictory thoughts. If you disagree with a seven percenter, they will say to you: "Oh, tell me more." If you disagree with a self-authored individual, they'll say: "What do you mean? I'm right, you're wrong." But can you imagine if you can exist at the feet of a seven-percent mentor? If you can spend some time in the company of one of these wonderful seven-percent people, in fact, if you could become one of these seven-percent people, how amazing and magical that would be.

So there's a quick way to summarise this. It's called the "18/40/60 Rule". At eighteen, you desperately want to be loved by everyone. At forty, you don't care whether other people love you or not. And at sixty, you get the realisation they weren't thinking about you in the first place. [audience laughter] I bet you can't wait till sixty.

Now I've put this as an idea: to become a mentor is fine. Someone can give you the title, somebody can tell you what the job entails, and off you go. The truly superb mentors, those people that can influence us, those people who make that transition, I'm always asked the question: What is the difference between a coach and a mentor? Is the person who themselves has more or less come to this realisation, has come to this space that transforming of the people is not done by brute force, but it's done by giving the person the opportunity and the space to do it themselves.

I don't know how much of a farming community is around here or if we have any farmers in the room, but where I come from, the farmers are not very far away. I wake up to the sound of the cows every morning in the village I live in. There's a young boy, and he's trying to feed a calf with milk from a bucket, and the calf will not drink it. So he takes the milk, and he pours it over the back of the calf. And he says: "If you won't drink it, you can soak in it." [audience laughter] That's often the kind of relationship we will have with somebody that we're trying to help. We become quickly frustrated that they're not absorbing the information, they're not absorbing the knowledge or insight at the pace we're transmitting it to them. So we need a structure and we need a shape on that.

Why do we need a mentor? Because somebody's done it already. Because you've already done the heartache, because you've already figured it out. I love the idea of this still from a documentary of orang-utans using tools. They teach each other. We can teach each other so many things quickly. And again another simple phrase; this is an Irish phrase, I'm sure it comes from other countries as well: "An expert is a person from fifty kilometres away with a briefcase. All we need sometimes is just that tiny little bit of extra insight, and if we can share it.

Now that would make mentoring really easy, and it's not. So what are the challenges that are in there for us? Well, it depends on how you see mentoring. Some people see as a very formal relationship where you sit down, and there's going to be a gradient in that relationship. I want to talk to you a little bit about the psychology of that gradient shortly. But to me, mentoring can be a conversation. It can be a Skype call. It can even be a walk in a park with somebody. It doesn't necessarily have to be in a very formal structure. But there's something that happens. There's a little magical component to it that we're going to try to identify.

Okay, so I need to just do some housekeeping really quickly. I've put up a very busy slide, but it's about the differences between coaching and mentoring because this is confusing for a lot of people. Let's do them really quickly. The key goals when you're coaching are to correct probably an inappropriate behaviour, to improve a poor performance or impart some skills. So if you're trying to fix a problem in an organisation, you'll very often spend money coaching the individuals. In mentoring, that's not the case. What we're doing is we're guiding and we're supporting personal growth. We have a vision for where this person will be at the end of the experience. The initiative very often is about directing learning, whereas in mentoring, the protege is in charge of the learning. It's very hard to do, time consuming and can be very, very frustrating.

There's some volunteering about it as well. You don't necessarily volunteer for coaching. You're very often sent for it. The focus is usually on immediate problems and opportunities with a coach. Whereas there's usually a long-term process of development for the person who is being mentored. The roles in coaching rely heavily on telling with lots of feedback. Whereas in mentoring, it's heavy on listening, lots of listening, and really to things that you've already heard before and that you already know. The duration is usually short-term in coaching and long-term in mentoring. And the relationship: the coach is often the boss, and in mentoring, the mentor is rarely the boss. It's a very different relationship.

So there's the foundation put in place. You don't have to be old. You don't have to be from fifty kilometres away. And it doesn't have to be a very, very formal process. But I am going to suggest to you a couple of tips if you're going to enter into a mentor relationship. These are learned from twenty-five years of doing this with other people.

First off, you need to draw up a contract and have some guidelines. It doesn't have to be a formal contract. It doesn't have to be notarised by an attorney. But you will have to have guidelines for both parties as to what's involved in the process. I always build into all of my coaching and mentoring contracts a no-fault divorce. A no-fault divorce can kick in after three sessions. What that means is that at the end of three sessions, if it isn't going anywhere, we either part and say, "Thank you. Nice to have met you. And good-bye." I think I've done that twice in fifteen years that I can certainly recall, where I said to the person, "You know what, this isn't the time," or, "we're not getting on," or, "the process isn't there." Weirdly enough, it hasn't happened in the other direction back, but it's something I would recommend to you that you build into the process. Don't push on if you can't build that relationship.

You have to norm the behaviours you want in your protege. Now 'norming' is a psychological term that I'm using here which is very simple. You have to be the things that you're expecting your protege to be. Whether that's punctuality, whether that's diligence to work, whether it's attitude, whether it's confidentiality – all the things that you would expect or that you're trying to teach you actually have to practice yourself. It's not as easy as it sounds.

You have to learn how to have a fight. In other words, you have to set down the ground rules and the processes, and build up that trust as to how you will have an argument or how you will disagree. Regularly, I say regularly in that it's certainly happened in the last two occasions that I can remember, that I remember of having a client that I'm working with threaten me. It's quite an interesting experience when you arrive into somebody's office, and you sit across from them, and this guy, the last one said to me: "By the way, if you're not any good, I'll make sure you never work in this city again. Never mind in this city again, I'll make sure you never work in this town again or this country again." "Good morning. How are you?" And that's the opening line that you got from somebody.

There's a nice little end to that story, and that is that when I met him for our final consultation, our final session, I asked him: "By the way, how are we doing on the threat? Will you be following it up?" And he goes: "What threat?" And I said: "When we met first, you said to me if I'm not any good, I'll never work in this town again, in this city again, in this country again." And he said: "I never said that." And I said: "Oh, you did!" His next question was interesting. He said: "Well what did you think when you heard that?" And I said, "I heard you say: Please be good. I'm scared. And I've been hurt by other people in relationships like this before." He said: "You're absolutely right."

Sometimes the expectation that we have of the person that we're working with is a good communicator, is competent in how they express themselves, will disappoint us. And you have to be able to work that. You know, and I hardly have to say this, that mentoring and coaching is not

therapy. I trained as a therapist, but I never engage in therapy with a client in a coaching or mentoring kind of relationship. It's not what you're there to do. It's fine, by the way, insurance for it is usually half the cost of being a therapist. But that's another story.

How to treat your goodie bag for your protege? You know, it's a simple thing. It can be the easiest things in the world: tickets to a TV show or a favourite concert. But every now and then, manage the relationship. It's almost a little bit like you would manage a personal relationship. Every now and then, you need a reward system, the simplest of things that you can actually do to keep that going.

So there are a couple of extra tips for you on that one. Happy so far? All right. Let's not put a structure in place. People like structure. I have this as a handout for you later. It's on the table; if you want to take it away with you afterwards, you're more than welcome. And similarly, these slides will be available later for any of the participants.

This is complex, but let's look at it in four parts. I'm going to suggest to you that there are four parts to a good mentoring relationship. First one in the far left-hand corner. We're going to be talking about freeing up our protege or our client. The job that we have when we mentor is to get the person to move, to move towards potential, to move towards their ability, on the principle that if we weren't there, and they didn't need us, that they might actually do this themselves. So we engage for specific reasons to free the person up.

We're being visionary with them. Sometimes people get a very narrow field of vision. Whether it's through stress, anxiety, life experience, or otherwise, one of the things that you have is that you've been in that space already. You can provide that person with the insight that's missing. They then may need assistance in the implementation of that vision. And then finally, we need to get them towards a situation where they can attract success themselves.

So those are the four parts to it: being and doing, the individual environment that you got them in. Who am I? Where am I going? How do I get there? And am I getting there? Is this process actually continuing for me?

So, let's go down a little bit into that. We've talked about freeing up, envisioning, implementing, and attracting and evaluating. Let's start with the freeing up one first. I had a very interesting assignment recently. I was mentoring retirees, people who were about to retire after many years of service. That was a very interesting experience for me, one I hadn't come across before. And it was very interesting because I would role play situations where the person would introduce themselves, having left the organisation. How do you think retirees introduced themselves in a social environment? What did they say? "Hi, my name's Michael and I'm ..."

AUDIENCE "... used to."

COMYN: "... used to work in TV." I used to be a doctor. I used to be a lawyer. Isn't that interesting how people will very often hang on desperately to an *old* identity, rather than look to the next one. I've always liked that one. And I listen carefully to how the person introduces themselves. It's a very useful exercise for you as a mentor: Listen to how your client sets themselves up to you. Just have a conversation where you listen. Give the person an opportunity to describe themselves, and they will give away phenomenal amounts of data in the way they simply introduce themselves. "I'm trying to ...", "I used to ...", "I hope to ...", "I'd like to ...". Listen for the aspirational language the person has. This is how they place themselves on a timeline. Very consciously you know a lot of these structures already from storytelling. When you think about it, when you're working with somebody, find out where they are on their timeline. Are they in the past? Are they in the present?

Are they in the future? That will give you some really useful clues to where you are going to go, then match this person and join them in the process.

It should be empowering to be in your presence. Even if you're only aspiring to be in the seven-percent, being around you as a mentor should be empowering. The person should come away from the experience buzzing. They should come away from the experience enlightened. They should come away with a glow from them, and all you did was give them a little bit of your undivided attention.

I had a super teacher at a program that I did years ago. He said something quite controversial. I'm going to throw it to you now. He said that most people go through life having only five in-depth, critical conversations in their entire life. I disagree with that. I think it's six. Because so much of our conversations, so much of our dialogue is superficial.

AUDIENCE What do you mean with "in-depth, critical"?

COMYN As in where all of the social niceties, the rituals are all abandoned. Where we're genuinely heart-felt. Again, I'm very conscious of the room that I'm in, but you all know how to write those critical conversations. But very few of us *have* them on a day-to-day basis. I'll use a small example from my own life. Recently at home, we were having dinner. My partner pointed a finger and said, "Don't use any of your psycho bullshit with me for the next hour!" That's a critical conversation. [audience laughter] I was being told I wasn't to use any of all of this [points to slide] in the next conversation. So I didn't.

You're there to empower people. You're there to lift people. Put them into a situation where they go, "Wow!" I have another word for it, and it's 'permission giver'. A good mentor is a permission giver that gives somebody permission to do something they could not maybe do. You give them permission, either through experience or through better risk analysis, for the person to try something that they might be a little afraid to do. You don't have to carry the risk with them, but you certainly can give them permission to do it, and that's what I like about the idea of empowerment.

Liberating from a past. This is a very thin line between therapy and mentoring for a moment, but sometimes people just need permission to leave something go, to let it happen. The mistake they made, the experience they had. Criticism is a classic one, where the person has received criticism from an important source to them, to which they thoroughly believe.

I spoke at a conference three years ago. I was the second speaker. The speaker before me stood up. She did a super presentation, really good. But when she sat down, her boss – another woman – touched her on the arm and said: "You'll do better next time." And in seconds, her shoulders dropped, she really just went straight into this state that this person had wrought. I think that's something to be very conscious of, that that will have happened to your protege. It will have happened at some stage to anyone who's creative, that somebody has given them criticism that was unfounded or inaccurate, but which they took completely to heart.

So one part of the job that you could do as a good mentor is look at how can you validate or re-validate. By the way, in that particular case, I did that. At the coffee break, I went up to the woman and I said: "Excuse me, I hope you don't mind me saying, but I saw what happened, and I thought your presentation was really good." And she looked at me and she went: "Bitch!" [audience laughter] That's mentoring. Because at that moment, I got her to re-establish, re-connect and get back into her oomph. And in that moment, that's mentoring. They have to write for the same time, but it's worth doing.

You might also, by the way, have a similarly difficult thing that your protege might be unable to accept any criticism, and you're going to have to build up a maturity in them that they can recognise how that criticism works. Yes?

AUDIENCE I've also experienced many times that proteges can't accept that they did something good.

COMYN Good?

AUDIENCE Yes, because they were pushed so many times on their head that they're not good enough.

COMYN And they start to doubt or lack trust because you become like a father or mother, who always says: "You're wonderful." That's not your job. You have to teach them a little bit how to take criticism and how also to take praise. It's very difficult. There are so many nationality traits bound up in that, religious traits and everything else as to the person accepting the praise and the compliment that goes with them.

If I could just deviate for a moment, because you reminded me of this, how I teach somebody to take criticism, and that is I use a phrase: "Tell me more." I have come across this for many years from producing radio, whereby you will get some feedback from a colleague, who will walk past and say: "Didn't like the show on Saturday." Now what's our reaction when they do that? So I now go: "Oh? Tell me more." Ninety percent of the time all they say is: "Oh, I don't know. I just didn't like it." What do we do with that criticism? Kick it out of the park. But if they turn around and say: "You know what? We've had that guest on three times now. You've never been a vested part of the story. You seem to be fixated on a particular topic." Then what do I have? Valuable feedback. The ability to disconnect ourselves from ourselves and our work is definitely one of the skills that we will be putting on the agenda for the development of the protege.

And the last part is obviously building confidence. I put all of those up there – Who am I? Empowerment, listening, liberating from the past, and building confidence. And here's the problem: that can actually be as much as you get in the relationship. You might not actually get any further than that. You might get completely caught in it. So what I'm going to suggest to you is that in every engagement that you have in your mind at least three parts to that engagement, and that you're going to be working on these towards an outcome.

So the second one is envisioning. This is the part where you're helping the person to see beyond the end of their nose or beyond where they are in a particular phase. So where am I going? Clarifying their values, creating the vision, and committing to that. You'll come across these in time management courses when people say things. I'll give you a very simple example of this. I was working with a senior business owner, and we discovered that one of the things this man no longer has in his life is spontaneity. So I said to him: "Between now and the next time we meet, I want you to do something spontaneous." He checked his diary and said: "Well, I could do something next Thursday at half past three." [audience laughter] That's not spontaneous. I'm not joking. That's the truth. That's so sad. Watch out for little things like that. If your client, if your protege has no room for serendipity, spontaneity, if they don't have that, it's one of the things you can work on with them. I told this guy in a more coaching way than a mentoring way that I gave him something to do. I told him what to do with his spontaneity. He did it all right. His sons enjoyed it.

Clarifying values. Listen up for these ones. Remember I'm putting it here as a suggestion that you're developing the individual as well as mentoring them. And within that, you're trying to get them from the 58% definitely into the 35%, possibly toward the 7%. They should be now

developing their own values. They shouldn't be borrowing them from other people. Sometimes test them on that. Sometimes challenge them on it. See if they will defend an idea to a point rather than simply just repeat it or replicate it. They should be really getting to that point where they're standing on their own two feet in their development, and you're mentoring their values.

Okay, how will you get there? Goal setting, action planning, and acting and doing. Now there's a little word I want to use this evening in this presentation. It's around setting goals. Has anyone in this room ever set a New Year resolution? Yes? Okay. Most of the time it involves a gym or something. [audience laughter] I was talking to a guy who owns seventeen gyms in Ireland. He charges €670 to join on January 1st. And he tells me that 25% of the people go once. So he sells €650 swings to people who go once.

Isn't that wonderful? Because we're human beings. Because we set goals. What kind of goals do we set for ourselves? Noble goals. To continue in the area of mentoring, you need to have a very clear insight into the principles of noble goals because you're going to keep coming up against them, and you're going to have to know what to do with them. A noble goal is a goal that somebody sets because it sounds good. It's the thing to do. It's the noble and right thing to do. But for a lot of the time it's purely aspirational, and you need to get rid of it, or at least carve it up.

So the noble goals that infect society in general are around appearances, around things to do, about entering competitions, about getting stuff done, about the novel they want to write, learning Spanish, etc. There's a whole lot of them. People set these goals all the time. And I learned this as a very young coach twenty-five years ago, when I was really gung-ho and ready to go. I could do anything. And I had this client who came along to me, and he said, "Great! I have a whole lot of things I want to do, and you're going to help me do it." Okay, right. I've got my first client. So I said, "What precisely do you want to do?" And he said, "Well, I want to learn Italian. I want to cook. I want to learn more about wines." He has this big, long list. And he says, "Oh, and I want to play the piano in the Royal Albert Hall." [audience laughter] Okay, so as a good coach I said check the reality of the goal. So I sat down and said, "Can you play the piano?" "Oh, yes, I can."

Okay, so stranger things happen when you work in my world. Previously before that, I'd done a radio documentary about a man who tunes pianos, concert pianos in the concert hall in Dublin before every concert. His father had done it, his father had done it. It was a documentary, very small thing. So I thought, ok, that's interesting. I wonder what Paul would know about the guy who tunes the piano at the Royal Albert Hall. Maybe they're all part of a society. Maybe they're all in an organisation.

So I picked up the phone, and I called Paul, and I said, "So I've got this guy, and he wants to play the piano at the Royal Albert Hall. I can't really see him as a concert pianist, but is there any chance you would know the person who tunes the pianos at the Royal Albert Hall, and he could get him in to play it before he tunes the piano?" And he goes, "That's a great idea!" So he calls to his friend in London, who says, "Certainly! Send the guy over and we'll get him to play the piano in the Royal Albert Hall before the next concert starts but nobody's in the place."

I am an amazing coach! [audience laughter] How long did that take me? An hour. And I had this guy's dream achieved. I lost the client. What happened when I presented this to him as being organised and done? He was devastated because I had taken away one of the dream aspirations that he'd had, one of the things he could hold and bear forever and never have to do. Watch out for that in your mentoring. We do this all the time. We set these goals, and we place them so high and so out of place that they'll never be achieved unless some smart-arse comes along, and that's impossible. [audience laughter] Be careful with such things. Check the reality of the goal that you're going to be working on with the person in the case.

Action planning. It says in the textbooks mentors don't tell people what to do. Remember that. Sometimes the handiest, quickest way to do it is to get this person to make a good things to do list, and give them some actionable points, not forever. You don't become the person's personal assistant, but you can't push people towards that. I had one client, however, who likes to writes down these to-do lists of things she's already done so she can cross them out. [audience laughter] Not very good.

Are you getting there? Measurement of feedback. Be conscious of this one. Do you remember when you were in school – when you were maybe fourteen, fifteen or sixteen – and you had an essay to do for Monday. When did you do it? Sunday night? Monday morning? The clever ones did them on Monday morning, because what happened was that bright, intelligent people suffer from a little misconception that they work well under pressure. Have you ever heard this? Everybody here works well under pressure? Stop doing it please. It's not pretty. And I don't want my pilot or my surgeon ever to be under pressure. As for a screenwriter, is there good writing under pressure? Yeah, because see it's one of those things a good mentor will fix as well, and will work on. It's that misconception that everything works better under pressure. Introduce good work habits to people because things are actually better when they're re-written, and they are better when you spend a little bit of time on them than getting across the line at the last minute. That's the idea of getting good habits across when you're doing that. So new habits. We should come away from the mentoring experience with new ideas, new tips, new techniques, and new ways of doing things. And also we should be held accountable in relation to delivering results.

Okay, freeing people up. If I would suggest to you that I think one of the most useful things that a good mentor does is they remove blockages in the path to the person's potential. The name of my organisation is called the Fearless Organisation. You'll probably see some notes about some of the things that I do. I have spent time working with musicians, actors, and artists with stage fright, removing anxiety of presenting. I help people who are afraid of flying, weirdly enough. It's just one of those little hobby things that I do. But I also work with people who have good ideas toward freeing up and getting rid of the fear that surrounds their idea. Is fear useful? What do you think as a rule? Is fear ever useful? For what?

AUDIENCE If you have a wild animal behind you.

COMYN Yeah, okay. So there has to be an animal there?

AUDIENCE Yes.

COMYN What if there might be an animal there?

AUDIENCE Be prepared.

COMYN You should be prepared. Okay. So you see the enemy that's creeping out there. Fears of pain. Fear in English is F-E-A-R: False Evidence Appearing Real. That's how I remember the word fear. False Evidence Appearing Real. And we're born as children with about four fears: we have a fear of heights, we have a fear of loud noises, we have a fear of unusual tastes, and we have a fear of things that move really quickly like a snake or a mouse. At about eighteen months of age, those four fears are cancelled. Any parents in the room will know this. What happens to an eighteen-month-old child in relation to heights? No problem. They're not careful, they're on the roof. Unusual tastes? They'll eat anything. Things that slither? "Look what I found!" [audience laughter] And loud noises? Not a problem.

And then what happens? Their carer puts all of the fears back. Some of them stick, stick to the point that they prevent the person from achieving their full potential. And that's again part of the laws of mentoring. You assist the person to full potential. And in doing so, identify any false fears. Sure, fear of heights are useful. Sure, fear of snakes is useful. I don't know how we're doing for snakes here today, but so far we're okay. But the ones that are not useful are the ones: What will people think? What will people say? What will happen if I fail? What will happen if I succeed? Those are the ones that I want to see removed.

The rest of what we have to show is an alternative. If someone gives us the alternative to tasks that we've done before, there's always a wonderful thing. I can't remember: Is it the four-minute mile or the three-minute mile? Four-minute mile, wasn't it? 1950s? A world record was broken. It was a big, big advance in human nature, to actually run a mile in four minutes. Six weeks later, it was broken. Why? Because the proof was that it could be done.

As a mentor, you're always reality checking your protege to a better reality. Reality testing, in my own opinion, is one of the most advantageous skills in intelligence, in one called 'emotional intelligence'. There are fifteen competencies in an emotionally intelligent individual. The top of those is the ability to test the reality of what's happening. And yet, if you think about it, a great deal of the time that we're involved in stuff, we're simply watching reality TV. It's about as real as nothing there. You have a very important thing as a mentor. And that is to get the person every now and then to reality check what's going on. Just to validate something. If they're working on an assumption, make them validate it. If they think, oh, it might get through, that's an assumption. If they say, "Oh, it might fail," that's an assumption. "I won't get the funding." That's an assumption. And you are honour-bound every now and then to keep an ear and listen to language that tells you that the person is holding an assumption as a fact.

I was out with some friends in a bar in Dublin. We have one or two of them in Dublin, as you probably know. And one of the guys likes gossip. He said to me: "Oh, you want to hear what Pat said about you the other day?" And I said: "Really?" And I picked up my phone and said: "Let me call him and ask him?" What happened next? "No, no, it's okay. I'm only winding you up." Because in that moment, what was I supposed to do? I was supposed to get upset. I was supposed to become engaged. I was supposed to go oh, oh. What my training is to do is check. And if he said: "Yeah, I said that about you," then I'd know that and could react accordingly. But very often, that isn't what actually happens.

And always make sure you're working from a valid perspective and not assumptions. So check if you possibly can. It's really important to have that as a skill. In any conversation that you have, listen *carefully* for assumptions, and then check them and turn them back into reality if you can.

So the notion behind mentoring is that you draw thoughts and ideas from a person rather than impose your own. What's the typical duration of a mentoring session for you folks? An hour? Forty minutes? Less? A bit more? It's kind of hard, isn't it? My recommendation is about 40-45 minutes. You need to build in a little bit of room for spontaneity or serendipity, as well, as to something else coming up in the session. The other thing I can suggest that you can do by way of a little tip is give the person an indication *before* you meet of things they might need to prepare. And if you're going to coach or mentor long-distance or remotely over Skype or Google Hangout or whatever, shorten the duration even further. Because there's lots of scientific proof now at this stage that even if there's even a delay of 500 milliseconds on the connection, it's impossible to build rapport. That's why people still travel. That's why people still go to close a deal because remote communication, remote mentoring, remote coaching is actually quite difficult. I do it because it's the nature of the work that I do, but I will always try to meet the person at least once face-to-face, if only just to establish rapport with them.

This is in the handout so don't worry about taking notes. I'm going to go through it reasonably quickly with you. Number one, you're going to be doing two things: you're giving information and you're seeking information. So there has to be a trade going on. You're telling the protege facts, reasons, opinions, and proposals, but you're also asking the protege for facts, reasons, opinions, and proposals. So make sure that you have equal quantities of that. When I say handout, by the way, I've put this together as a little table. And while you can become quite subtle about having it on the table in front of you, what you do is that you just simply mark the number of times that you've done something or at least the tonality of the questions that you're asking. And what we'll do is it will prevent you from getting into a rush and asking things the same all the time. It'll put a little bit of variety back into the process for you.

Let's have a look at some of those things that you do. You can give general opinions to the person. General comments, observations. You can give feelings, and behaviours that express either approval and support. You can give proposals, and you can give what are called builds. These are behaviours in which the mentor modifies and approves on an idea, proposal or suggestion. And that's in the back of your head you're going, okay, I haven't done a GF yet. I haven't given feelings. I haven't done a GP yet. I haven't given a proposal. I certainly haven't done a GB, which is I haven't built on something that the person is doing.

Now I know this feels really clunky when you sit down to say have I done my one, two, three, my one, two, three, my one, two, three. After a period of time it becomes intuitive, and you start doing this anyway. But you'll also be able to recognise after a period of time that you've got a fuller conversation, and that you haven't just been drawn or led in a conversational approach towards mentoring. Very easy for us to do, and particularly if you've been self-taught in the process, is that you'll get into a rut and you'll find yourself just simply focusing on one or two areas. I just want to expand that out a little bit more.

From the giving you start seeking. And the big 'S' there is a reminder that we seek general observations. We seek feelings from the person. We seek effects, and we seek proposals. Seeking feelings is any behaviour in which the mentor is seeking a value judgement about the situation. It is as simple as: "How do you feel about that? How does that make you feel? How will people feel when you say that?" Those are seeking feelings. So you're looking at an SF, and you'll say to yourself: Yeah, I've got two SFs done. I've got that covered.

Effects: Any behaviours in which the mentor asks the protege to consider the effects or the consequences of a situation. What do you think will happen? You *don't* tell them what will happen. You ask them what do they *think* will happen, and then you match that up to the reality that you have from your experience. You can tell them after they've done that themselves. But if you simply tell them that's what will happen, the decision is made and there's no learning from it. And then seek any behaviours which seek ideas, suggestions, and proposals or commitments to action from the protege.

So you think about the conversation that you're going through. You've been giving information, you've been giving feelings, giving proposals. You've been seeking information, seeking feelings, and seeking proposals. And at least you now have a more rounded conversation. Do not let the conversation end until you have done a summary. And the clarification of that is check for understanding because remember you, too, may become the subject of assumptions. So you have to occasionally just check for yourself, and say: What does that mean? What does that mean? How will that affect? Tell me more about that? Dig down a little bit deeper until you get a clear insight as to it, and that you're both working off the same way. We're trying to cut down the possibility of misunderstanding as much as we possibly can.

Paraphrasing. What that means is saying it again in a different way. And there's one very, very valuable form of paraphrasing, and we don't see it used often enough. And that is: silence. Sometimes when your protege says something, say nothing. Let it bounce off the four walls after they say it so that they can hear it again. Some really interesting things happen if you hold on just a moment when somebody says something rather than simply continuing with the dialogue because we're ready to continue. It's a little unnerving. Be very careful how you use it. But it can be very, very effective when somebody said something really stupid.

And summarising. Behaviour by which the mentor re-states in a compact form a number of earlier points of discussion.

So there's a structure. We now have giving, we have seeking, and we have summarising going on.

Okay, so all of this is around a conversation. I would, if I were you, before you start each session, write down somewhere an objective. You don't have to do it in a corporate context. Remember the 'SMART objectives'? Have you come across those in other training? What are they? Specific, Measurable, I don't know. I have them in there somewhere. A simple one for me is, at the end of this conversation, the client will _____. At the end of this conversation, the protege will _____. And have a very, very clear understanding for yourself. Otherwise what will happen is it will just become an aimless conversation. It will be really nice, it will be very pleasant, and we must do this again. But have a very clear idea for yourself in terms of measurability of what you want to achieve. The sessions may be less structured, but you also still need to leave your protege with the feeling of being guided. And you'll do that in the summary. Don't let the session come to a conclusion until you have summarised, or indeed if you want to, you can ask them to summarise: What did we do today? What are you taking from it? What has been achieved?

Okay, I need to talk about the gradient. Now if there's anyone in the room with a psychology background, you'll recognise this very quickly. But I just want to talk to you about the work of one particular psychologist who lived in Carmel in California called Eric Berne. He was really Bernstein. And Eric Bern gave us a really lovely metaphor for which, again I know it's come up in scriptwriting, so let's see if I can tap into it if I possibly can, and that is the gradient about the relationship that we have. I've used the words 'parent', 'adult' and 'child'. Has anyone ever come across this before? Okay, great.

So when two people meet in a conversation, when two people come together like this, we very quickly establish a gradient or hierarchy, where one person will take a superior role and the other will take a subordinate role. And society does that for us. So if I stop somebody in the street, I don't go: "Hey, you! Where's the post office?" Because that's unlikely to get me a good answer. So what we do is I take a subordinate position when I ask you for directions. So I say: "Excuse me, could you please tell me where I'd find the post office?" I put myself one down to the other person, who I leave in a one up position. That's a really simple transaction when it happens. And if I'm lucky, I get my directions. Okay, and we do that when we put ourselves one up and the other person puts themselves one down.

Now, very often of course, that will happen but we don't get the particular reaction that we'd expect. So I look at myself in a down position, and I arrive at the check-in desk at the airport, and I go, "Hello!" And the person goes [makes unfriendly face]. So at this particular moment, I put myself one down. What happened? I didn't get the transaction I'd expected. The person very clearly indicated to me that I'm so down and so low that I'm not going to get any attention at all. Do I stay there? Probably not. I now try to invert the relationship. And so I go one up and the other person goes one down, and I say, "Excuse me." And I've now completely changed my particular position.

So what I'm saying is simply that in most transactions, it's very, very rare for people to be on firm footing. And in coaching and in mentoring, it's incredibly rare. Because what happens is if that relationship matches or mismatches then the whole process is going to default. So what happens? You're the mentor. Where are you being put? One up. I'm the protege. Where am I being put? One down. And for some people, that's really comfortable. It's lovely. Once a week, once a fortnight, I go visit this lovely person, who says some really nice things to me, makes me feel cosy, makes me feel warm, pats me on the head, buys me coffee. It's great. Every now and then they get me to do some work. But you know what? I'll just be nice back, and they'll feel important. Yes, that's the general view.

Or you might come across the other person who thinks, "Ah, I've got this mentor, old guy. Around too long, shouldn't be doing this anymore. But I'm going to go anyway because it's a pain if I don't do this." So they put themselves one up and they put the other person one down. And it's knowing this relationship and knowing this gradient and how it actually affects the process because most parts of that – and Eric Burn called it 'the games people play' – can be identified around the rituals that we do. And if your mentoring relationship does not progress beyond the rituals and beyond the games, it's an incredible waste of time. It just absorbs phenomenal resources, phenomenal time, and nothing gets done. And those games can be played for a long, long time. People learn very quickly strategies to actually work around those games.

So a typical example of this one is the difference between men and women. "Oh, my God, I'm about to do something really dangerous." And he goes: "I have signs to go on in this one. It's nothing. Okay." But apparently when men go into a conversational relationship in coaching and mentoring, they look for a hierarchical gradient. We look for a means to know who the Alpha male is and who the subordinate is. And in that process, by the way, we're quite comfortable with that. Society really helps us. I watched two guys do this recently. One guy says to the other, "So what are you driving?" This was at the car rental. Well, we need to know really quickly who's the Alpha in this particular conversation. I'm going to put a little qualifier in this. Some of them have a slightly different approach. They don't judge on hierarchy and gradient; they judge on competence. They're not particularly worried whether the person has Ph.D.'s or Masters' degrees. They want to know what this person can deliver. Again, this is a little side thing, but when one woman compliments another, what would she do with the compliment? There are enough different cultural groups here to be able to draw on this. What would she do with the compliment?

AUDIENCE It depends on what kind of compliment.

COMYN Like something that you're wearing.

AUDIENCE It depends on your relationship.

COMYN Yes, it does. Okay. We're going to play the 'Depends on' game. And it's very rare for the person to take that badly. There's actually a phrase that has become common usage now: "Penney's or Five Euros" when somebody compliments someone on what they're wearing. Be careful with that one. Anyway, that's probably a cultural difference with Primark or Penney's.

The mentor is not a surrogate parent. That's the point I wanted to make here. If that happens, if we become the parent in the relationship, then our protege becomes the child, and we will get succession after succession of childlike behaviours. So you have to work really, really hard to get them into the adult eagle state. And the adult eagle state is not based on emotions, it's not based on hierarchy, it's not based on who the outfit is or who the media is. It's based on the fact that people are having a genuine heartfelt, non-scripted and non-ritualised conversation. And you will

have to, unfortunately, you can't go directly to that space; you'll have to enter the relationship through the normal gateway. And the normal gateway is establishing the hierarchical gradient.

Parents come to us in two flavours, according to Eric Berne. They are critical and they are nurturing: "Don't do that!" "Aren't you great!" Those are the two phrases that people use. They're nurturing and they're critical. And they bring from the child from an early age an adaptive behaviour or a free behaviour. "Thank you! Oh, great!" I've seen so many coaching and mentoring relationships where that's all that happens, that the relationship remains based on this nurturing parent to critical child, critical child to adaptive parent, and they just go backwards and forwards and backwards and forwards, and nothing gets fixed.

So you have to work really hard on that one, and it doesn't come automatically. And here's the final annoyance in this particular observation, and that is that most people can generally only sustain an adult-to-adult conversation for about three minutes at a time before it becomes contaminated, once again, by the default settings that they have or that they carry. So these are the little tiny windows in your coaching conversation whereby you will be able to get: Okay, now I have this. I have the person here. They're present with me. Now is the time to deliver my feedback. Now is the time to ask that particularly important question because the rest of the time we're going to default back into the ritual conversations that we have.

[Points to slide] This is how we wish people listened. I've presented this to radio producers recently. They were all getting very anxious about their programmes, and I'm training some new producers at the moment. And I was saying to them: "This is how you think people are going to listen to your documentary. This is how they actually listen. And this is the effect if we get it wrong." [audience laughter] It's a bit like that for our conversations that we have in our mentoring sessions as well. Your energy levels need to be up. You have to use all of the skills that you would do if you were engaging with people.

This is the principle I want to talk to you about: Flow. If you can get your protege into flow, you get amazing output from them. If they're bored, you lose them. If they're anxious, you lose them. Your job as the mentor is to create a space in the conversation where they feel safe. That means that you have to, to a certain extent, manage that experience. You've also got to check that they're not getting bored. You have to check that they're not getting anxious. And when you get them into that space, you have this flow channel. It's in the top, right-hand corner, where the challenge and skill levels match. Then you get this most amazing movement. The process really works.

Let's talk a little bit about this idea of being in the moment. I don't want to spend too long on this, but the idea – you hear a lot about mindfulness. Has anybody done any mindfulness training and stuff? It's big at the moment. All corporations are paying mindfulness gurus to come in. They've even got an employee at Google who is Chief of Mindfulness. Isn't that amazing? I'd do that for \$750,000 a year, too. [audience laughter] Think mindful about that one.

Okay, here's the cheaper version. When you are in a conversation with somebody, we try to be in the moment. I remember years ago, I went to Arizona to do a mindfulness course. I was told it's the best mindfulness course in the world. And every now and then I like to treat myself, so I said, okay, let's find the best training. So I headed to Arizona, and I found myself sitting on the floor – I'm not good for sitting on the floor – sitting on the floor in a hotel room in Arizona, looking out over the desert, on cushions. And we were given a raisin, and I had to hold the raisin with my tongue against the roof of my mouth, and become one with the raisin. [audience laughter] And nobody was kidding.

Anyway, I tried to get a couple of things out of the program, and to be fair, it was a very good course, and I probably sounded sarcastic, but I was there with a guy from Scotland called Paul, and the two of us got on really well because Paul would come up to me at the coffee break and say, "Michael, what time is it?" And I said, "Paul, it is now." [audience laughter] And he said, "Michael, where are we?" And I said, "Paul, we are here." [audience laughter] So I'm having a little bit of a tease at mindfulness, but you know what? There's actually some really good stuff in this if you're a mentor. Because when you get the person right into the here and now, it's such a short window of opportunity, but it's incredibly valuable. So it's worth the effort.

So where are they if they're not in the moment? They can be in something called 'future negative'. I'll jump over here for a second and put myself in 'future negative'. Where's my head? What am I thinking?

AUDIENCE What's going to happen?

COMYN Exactly. And when I'm in that space it's okay. It's not a bad idea for a little bit of planning, but it's not a good place to run your life from.

Now I could be in 'future positive'. I want to be over here. One of these days I'm going there. One of these days I'm going to do this. One of these days I'm going to do that. And then boom, along comes a tram, and that's the end of that one. [audience laughter]

'Past negative' people: Oh, I did that once before. Now I'm not doing that again. That could happen to me anytime.

And then 'past positive' people: Ah, do you remember the old days? [audience laughter] You know what it used to be like in the business? It's not like that anymore.

So you get the idea. If your client, if your protege is not in the moment, it's very likely that they're in one of the other four places. And what the mindfulness movement tells us is that those are less than useful places to be. It's handy to go into for a moment, but it's generally not where we make good decisions. So your role again as a good mentor is to check for and validate where the person is having the conversation from. And if it's from one of the less than useful places, bring it back into the moment.

AUDIENCE Can you elaborate where the person gets the information from?

COMYN So if the person is in 'past negative': "Oh, yeah, I did some work before, and that particular guy let me down. I'm really afraid to do that again." So what you need to do now is say: "Okay, that was then. What's the situation now? Do you have to do that?" Has anything changed for that particular person? You would ask a series of questions to calibrate the person back into the moment. It's a very important difference, and I want to make this very clear. There is nothing wrong whatsoever in visiting the four corners, but don't stay there. So if your client is stuck in one of those, your job is to try to pull them into – by questioning – a more useful state.

AUDIENCE Do the clients have to get over these things?

COMYN It's not imperative so we're not going to explore it too much. What we're going to do is simply validate what they've said and check if they stick to the same situation. "I wasn't able to get something before. They didn't like me." Okay. Where is that statement coming from?

AUDIENCE Past negative.

COMYN It's past negative. Now what we could do is we could spend a little bit of time exploring what the results of the current state are.

AUDIENCE It's not making sense to me, the 'past negative' and the 'future positive'. You will get it next time.

COMYN Well, you could do that if you wanted to, but that's still aspirational. That's still not telling us how we're going to do it, and it's kind of putting it out to one place. I would be more along the lines, okay, I'll give you an example. It's a rather strange one, but I had a guy who runs his own business. He rang me one evening. In fact, his wife rang me. He was having a panic attack. He received a letter from the VAT people, and they told him that he now owed €17,000, and he had no idea he owed this money. And the guy is melting down. He already told me on the phone: "But I'm going to lose my house. Then I'm going to lose my family, and my wife will divorce me, and then I'll never see my kids." And this is in once sentence. [audience laughter] What had happened was he had got a letter from the revenue. Okay, so what do you think we need to do really quickly in that particular case, and what plan did I set out for him? Get a really good accountant. Call the tax people on Monday morning. And what did we discover? An error. Because this guy was really good at stuff. So you see what happens? It's the spiral. It's recognising the spiral and bringing him back to a safe point. Now another approach would be: Okay, when you lose your house and when your family leave you, you'll be free to live a whole new life. [audience laughter] But that's not where we want to go. So that's this idea of being in the moment.

Let me cover three quick levels of communication that I want to talk about. Most people here have been on an airplane recently, yeah. Some of you. Two not. Do you pay any attention to the safety demonstration? You know, when the cabin crew stand there and do the oxygen mask. Do you pay attention? You do?

AUDIENCE Yes.

COMYN Because you're a nice person. [audience laughter] A friend of mine is a cabin manager with Aer Lingus. And he said when he does the safety demonstration, he's actually saying, "I'm saving you, and you, and you, and you." [audience laughter] He's got a really good sense of humour. My point is: Why don't we generally pay attention? Because it's a ritual, and we've seen it many times before, and we think we know it, unless you're generally nervous and concerned about it. But for the most part, I get the idea that human beings spend an enormous amount of time in ritualised conversation. Weirdly enough, in psychology they're referred to as scripts because you can recognise the structure of them, and you can recognise how we use them. When I was learning this, I had a really fun teacher. And he used to try to get us to do some really unusual things. So he'd say: "The next time somebody says, 'How are you?' you say, 'Oh, my leg fell off last night.'" [audience laughter] Because people don't actually listen to the reply that you make in a ritualised conversation. You can say anything you like.

What is the script worldwide for McDonald's? "Would you like fries with that?" But they don't say that. They never actually include it in the script. But we use them all the time. If you start doing this as your job – and this is what I do – you have to be very, very careful that you don't fall into scripted engagement with proteges. Check yourself. Check yourself on stock phrases, stock answers, stock structures. Listen to the language. It's always important to begin your conversation in ritual. You will have to initiate the coaching/mentoring relationship using certain rituals, setting yourself in how the person is, but it doesn't constitute forty-five minutes of the session.

Common ground is actually really effective for communication. This is where we move into an area for both people. Again, if I was to use the aviation comparison to this one, a couple of months back

coming back from Seattle, I was on a Jet Blue aircraft. And the cabin manager came on – and this is one of those red-eye flights that's going to go across the small hours of the morning – and she came on and she picked up the microphone and said, "Good evening, everybody, and welcome aboard our flight to New York. Now looking down at you, I can see that most of you have probably been on an aircraft before, but I've got to tell you this whole story. Are you ready? All flights on Jet Blue start with a simple intelligence test. You take the shiny end of one buckle, and you put it into the shiny end of the other buckle." And she started into this big story. And we were all kind of leaning back like this. I loved the piece where she said, "The cabin is pressurised. If that changes, an oxygen mask will fall from the unit over your head. After initial shock and surprise, insert fifty cents to breathe normally." [audience laughter] "If you're traveling with children this evening, look after your own mask first. If you've got more than one child on board this evening, pick your favourite child." [audience laughter]

Now I'm quite sure she's done that a hundred times. But for us, it was great. We knew that she was doing it for the hundredth time, but she was telling us with her language structure – and again look at my audience, who understand this idea – that by the very structure how she did it, she engaged us. Watch a few sentences now. Don't lose your core skills just simply because you're in a mentoring situation.

And the last one is rapport. Now my teacher, one who influenced me more than anybody else, would say to me: You should give your client their money back if you didn't get to level three. Yeah, that's a tough one. It doesn't always happen. Sometimes you just can't get that magic. You cannot get into sync with the person. You can't build that particular rapport with the person. They're not in the humour and you're not in the humour. And I will be confident enough at this stage, and I will do it with a person, is that the person comes into me and looks completely hassled, and their head is somewhere else. And I'll say to them, "Well, we'll make this another day." Because to continue would just be a ritual. Very often it's such an important conversation that sometimes if you just can't build that rapport – not through your fault, but maybe something else is just not there – sometimes consider to re-schedule or re-book it. It doesn't make for a viable world. Sometimes we can't do it. But if it's not going to happen, you're going to end up defaulting back to that first level.

Okay, there's a couple of things that also need to happen. This is a very quick little model, which is the idea of performing, storming and norming. When you bring two people together who don't know each other, we've already mentioned this hierarchical level. They need to express their expertise. Allow your protege to sell you what they already know. Allow them to establish a couple of successes with you. Extract from them the things that they're particularly good at. Allow them to beat their chest a little bit. If you don't, they're going to do it anyway. But they're going to do it at a time and in a way that might be destructive to the relationship. So get it out there a little bit early if you possibly can. It's a small thing to do. It's a little bit of research into what they've already done before, some of the projects that they've been working on, possibly even looking at something that they've written. It's knowing that, just having a tiny bit of insight will build that relationship.

The knowing part, I did it with you at the beginning of the session today, which was that I made reference to the fact that if at any stage you had questions, to interrupt me. Sometimes you should tell people how you'd like them to behave in a situation or scenario, because that's actually what you'll get back. So it's form, story and norm, and I will bring you to that position.

When your protege is stuck – this is the final part that I want to do for you this evening – check that the goal and the activities that they're doing aren't under the noble category. Remember we already covered this idea that it's noble because it's for other people; they're not necessarily investing in themselves or somebody else has given to them, but they haven't particular ownership in it. Check

to see is the goal too big or check is the goal too small. And the last one is check if the goal is being used as a blocker.

What's this idea of something being too big? What does that do to us? What happens to us?

AUDIENCE We get afraid.

COMYN And procrastination. What a lovely word. I'm going to write a book about that one of these days. I'd like to think that one's a slow burner. The idea of somebody will tell you that they're doing something that becomes too big. I work a lot with young doctors. For part of the examination they have to do in Ireland, they have to study 1500 questions. And they all start off at the beginning of the year with great intentions. What do they do? They take the 1500 questions, they divide it by the number of days between now and the exam, and they say they're going to do three questions every night. That's noble, ladies and gentlemen because what happens? They do that for the first three days. Then something good's on TV or their friends want to talk to them, and then all of a sudden they've got three days till the exam, and they've got 1473 questions to study. [audience laughter] That's what makes us human. That is the joy of being human is that we procrastinate given any opportunity to do so. If you do it yourself, by the way, be careful. You've got to model what you're hoping your protege is going to do. So make sure that your notes are up-to-date, make sure that your assignments are up-to-date, and make sure that your appointments are up-to-date as well. Model the behaviour that you particularly want.

If it's too small, if it's too trivial, people will very often quickly diminish something simply by the way that they express it. Now I've done this in multiple languages. The last one I did was with a group of people in Dubai. So it works in Arabic. I'm wondering if it works in all the other languages that are represented here today. But I'm going to try something in English, and see if you can recognise how you will hear, if you listen carefully to the intonation of the excuse as to where the solution lies. So I'm going to use my best actor's voice here for a moment, and I'm going to say the same sentence several times. See if you can identify where the excuse is coming from.

"I can't do that now. I *can't* do that now. I can't *do* that now. I can't do *that* now. I can't do that *here* now. And I can't do that here *now*" [spoken very quickly].

Okay, anybody spot the intonations? What was the first one? "I can't do that now." What's the answer to that?

AUDIENCE Of course you can.

COMYN No, that's the next one. "I" is identity. It's "I can't do it." So can someone else? If you hear the intonation, and you've got to really listen hard for this, but the person will give it to you in the way they say it. "I can't do that here." "I *can't* do that here now." So what is your job as the mentor or coach? To show them possibly that they can. "I *can't* do that." That's skill. So how do you fix that? Training. "I can't do *that*." It's specific. So what can you do? Or can you do something else? "I can't do that *here* now." Where can you do it? "I can't do that here *now*."

AUDIENCE When?

COMYN Yeah. Sometimes people say that's time. I actually say it's value. I love this one. I don't do this anymore. I used to do just general mentoring of people and coaching of people, and somebody said to me, "Oh, I've no time to go to the gym." So I would get them to replace the word "time" with "value" and say it again: "I have no value in going to the gym." Thank you. We're finished now. Can we move on? "I've no time for the kids at the weekend." "I have no value on the kids at the

weekend." In other words, I'm really fed up with hearing people using time as an excuse. What they're actually telling you is that they value something else instead. Again, one of the things maybe you can do when you're working with them is re-value things for them a little bit.

So that's identity (I), belief (can't), do (skill), that (the task), here (location), and now (the value). And super good coaches, super good mentors start to develop the ability to listen intensely, intently even – more correct English – to *how* the excuse is said rather than what is in the excuse. And there's your clue to how to get along.

You'll have to give feedback to people if you're a good mentor. Please pick your moment. Maybe today is not the day. Maybe the person is not open to what it is you're saying to them. Focus on the task or behaviour, not the person. Be careful how you coach and how you say or coach the phrase of feedback. Try to focus on the task or behaviour that you want to change. Try to avoid the word 'you'. And comment on things that can be changed. If the person doesn't have the resources, if they don't have the ability to change something, don't beat them up with it. Work if you possibly can on the things that can be changed. With all of those in place, you'll certainly be in a better way towards doing that.

So, ladies and gentlemen, if my timing has worked out right, I've left three minutes for some intense questions before the time signal at eight o'clock. Are there any questions? Thank you very much for your attention. Questions?

AUDIENCE Is there any situation where you were stuck?

COMYN Yes.

AUDIENCE Can you tell us one?

COMYN It comes back to the regular one that you'll get stuck. If I haven't been careful in identifying whether the goal is noble or not, if I haven't identified whether or not the person has a secondary gain in remaining as they are. Now secondary gain is very useful to exercise and understand for mentors and coaches, and that is: What will happen if the person achieves their goal? Will that mean that they'll lose you, support, all of how people perceive them? Another way to describe it is: What will happen if they're successful? And you'll hear people say they're not afraid of failure, they're afraid of success. So if a person were to achieve their goal, say for example if they were to win an award, what would then happen? Would they now lose the friendship of some of their friends, people who haven't got awards? I'm giving you a simple example here. But sometimes it's worth investigating what would happen when they achieve the goal, and could they live with that, and have they thought that far. And if they haven't, there may be some secondary gains for them to hold onto the status quo and stay in the present. So that's where I usually have a challenge. But at this stage now, I'm very comfortable in listening for and looking for secondary gains.

I'll give you a very small example of one from the other business that I run, which is I had a fifteen-year-old girl who had a fear of flying. And her father and mother brought her to one of our training courses. And there was absolutely no way that she was going to change this fear of flying. Anybody, any parent of a fifteen-year-old figure out why she wasn't going to change?

AUDIENCE So she could stay at home.

COMYN So she could stay at home, yeah. That's as simple as it was. And I asked her that question in the first five minutes, and that kind of spoiled her day. So she hated me, and the thing that was going to happen, and she stormed out and there were tears. But that's a secondary gain.

Watch out for them. I'm sure there are no fully-grown adults that you'll be working with who will do anything like that. Any other questions?

AUDIENCE Do you re-phrase a new goal, for example, if you reach together this thing that you want, do you think about something else that you could then reach so that you don't feel empty?

COMYN Yes. What you're describing there is something that we call 'stretch goal'. A good mentor doesn't simply work to the goals that the protege sets. The good coach or mentor stretches them beyond that space just a little bit, because otherwise you're not getting maximum potential. So it's a bit like a trainer for gymnastics: the person has to be stretched beyond the space that they're working into a safe space. And your skill is bringing them just into that window of opportunity where they will be properly stretched, but not hurt or overstretched or anxious. I do that by using phrases like: "What about...?" and "Have you thought of...?" and "What would happen if...?" And at the same time, you're stretching them into a new place. And in an ideal world – and this is where your ego as a coach and as a mentor has to be small – if they believe it was their idea in the first place, perfect. You don't own the idea. You don't own the goal. It's ideally theirs if you can. Yes?

AUDIENCE What does 'long-term' usually mean?

COMYN That is something that I think will be specific to your industry. I see people four times. That's it. So we have very clear engagement, clear purpose. Obviously, I talk to people afterwards, and we keep in touch, etc., but there will be four formal sessions. The first one is getting to know the person. The two middle ones are the active ones. And the last one is a review and setting strategies for the point ahead. My reason for that is that I trained in something called 'brief therapy'. And 'brief therapy' is, as it suggests, very short. You do not spend a great deal of time looking at the past. You're looking at where we are today, what the implications are, and where you're going to tomorrow. So we don't spend a lot of time talking about the person's relationship with their grandmother or whatever.

AUDIENCE Over how long a period of time would those four sessions be?

COMYN About twelve weeks. And again you need to be very, very careful because the person will get bored. Because of the level I'm working at, I will have cancellations because people will have other things to do. And I kind of allow for one of those in the place. But if that then is continued, then the contract needs to be re-negotiated and needs to be put back into place because the person is indicating to you that your value has changed. I'll give you a small example of that. Every year around May, I will get a phone call from a friend of a friend, who says: "Oh, my daughter is doing her exams in June and she's very anxious. Could you talk with her?" I'll give you an example from this year. And I said to the person on the phone: "Certainly. I can see her next Thursday at 7 o'clock." "Oh, no, she's got hockey then." What have they just told you? You're not important. It comes from having little value yourself, and your time. And don't chase people. If the person has indicated to you that they're not engaging with the process, there has to be a consequence to that. And you'll change the relationship hugely if you're chasing the person all the time. You're a mentor, you're not a coach. That gradient is a little different.

Well, I'm going to be here for the next couple of minutes, and I'm free for the rest of the evening if anybody has any individual questions they want to ask. And other than that, thank you very much indeed for your attention. Thank you.

APPLAUSE