

“The Mentor” Digest 1

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Q: ‘I didn’t meet my targets last year and my relationship with my boss seems to have soured. I’m feeling a bit worthless and stuck in a rut. How can I get my confidence back?’

A: Fundraising is a challenging business, and when setbacks happen, as they inevitably do sometimes, you can end up feeling bad about yourself, and projecting your feelings onto others.

If you haven’t already, do take time to understand what went wrong last year. There will be valuable learning for the future. Equally importantly, evaluate your successes and learn from what went well.

Now focus on you. What are your greatest strengths in fundraising? What do you most enjoy? What keeps you in the job? What values do you share with your organisation? Remember a time when you were meeting targets and feeling good about your progress. All of these will keep you going when things get tough. Write them down and keep them by you.

Look at your new targets. What do you feel confident about? Is there anything you feel daunted by? If so, what will help you to achieve it?

Your question implies that your relationship with your boss has been good, so when you’ve thought about these questions, ask her or him for a meeting. Aim to talk about your learning, your plans for this year, and any concerns you have, and to ask for any help you need to stay on track.

You may be surprised at how much better you feel afterwards. It’s easy to exaggerate someone else’s attitude to you. No boss wants you to fail, and yours will be encouraged by your positive response to last year’s setback.

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Q: ‘One of my team members, ‘Tim’, is really good, but finds it difficult to hear constructive feedback without taking it personally. His typical response is to retreat into his shell for days. I’m tired of walking on eggshells. What can I do?’

A: Start by asking yourself a few questions. Are people’s goals clear? Are you consistent with feedback? Do you look out for chances to catch people doing something right, and thank them for it? How do other team members respond to you? Sometimes, under pressure, it’s easy to shortcut to getting the small mistakes ironed out without acknowledging the 99% that is excellent. Remember to praise publicly and criticise in private.

With this raised awareness, focus on Tim for a moment. What exactly makes him ‘really good’? Have you told him? Get into the habit of giving everyone deserved and unqualified praise at least weekly.

When you meet with Tim formally about his work, plan ahead, and make sure you balance your comments. Ask him to tell you what he thinks has gone well, and what he might want to do differently next time. If the suggestions come from him, he’ll be more committed to them.



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If he is still defensive, ask what he is assuming that prevents him from hearing feedback as constructive. He could be carrying an old and unrealistic assumption that 'less than perfect' is unacceptable. Being aware of this can help him respond more positively in future.

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Q: I work very closely with one other girl and our work feeds into each others' objectives and achievements. Just lately I feel she's lost her motivation, which is starting to have a negative impact on my work. How should I deal with this?

A: Try to avoid making assumptions about how your work partner may be feeling. Start by working out exactly what has changed to make you conclude that she has 'lost her motivation'. How has her work contribution changed? How is her behaviour toward you different? What specifically is making you unhappy? What needs to be different for you to be reassured?

I'm guessing that your work relationship is normally good. I suggest you ask her for an informal chat, away from your desks, perhaps over coffee or lunch. Tell her what you've noticed and how you are feeling. Remind her of some of the good results you've achieved together and reinforce your desire to work together.

Now ask for her response, and listen. Don't interrupt. Really hear what she says. It will determine what you agree to do next. You may need to offer support, to hear things about your style which may be bothering her, to look together at the flow of work to see whether it can be streamlined, or even to change your own approach.

To sum up, start from a position of respect, stick to the facts, be clear, and listen to her response. Then work together to find a solution.

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