



May 2007

Masterful Mentoring

▼ TIP

Tip of the Month

Don't be afraid of conversations that seem to veer off course; use the natural flow of dialogue to explore new ideas and build a better understanding of your partner.

▼ PRODUCTIVE MENTORING CONVERSATIONS

In a mentoring relationship, there are many forms of communication that people employ in order to transfer knowledge. Routine conversations are the most ideal for creating interpersonal understanding. If you really want to get to know your mentoring partner and increase the likelihood that you will generate new awareness and learning, then you will want to conduct productive conversations. In this newsletter, we will explore the characteristics of productive conversations.

Understanding Productive Conversations

Two essential elements exist in conversations that directly impact how productive they are: the balance of the dialogue flow and the quality of connection.

Balance

A balanced dialogue flow occurs when there are equal parts of telling and asking behaviors. Telling behaviors are open and honest expressions of feelings, facts, and guesses in an attempt to share your point of view or understanding. Asking behaviors are active solicitations by you to gain more understanding and insight into your perceptions and awareness. In a mentoring relationship, it is important to keep in mind that you are in charge of ensuring that the dialogue flow is balanced.

Everyone has interpersonal communication styles that depend on telling or asking behaviors. When out of balance, you can tell or ask too much or too little. Unfortunately, when you ask too much or tell too much, or even if you ask and tell too little, this can put forth a skewed view of who you are and cause unproductive conversations.

- When telling too much, a person can come across as being disinterested in the opinions and thoughts of others, and may appear overly confident in their own opinions; in short, they seem like a know-it-all. This can cause others to have feelings of insecurity or resentment.
- When asking too much, a person can appear to be hiding behind their questioning, gathering information without the willingness to share their personal insight; in short, they seem



RESOURCES

Triple Creek offers many free resources on our web site, including booklets, research papers, and an archive of past newsletters.

Visit www.3creek.com for access to these additional mentoring resources.

PRODUCTIVE MENTORING CONVERSATIONS (cont.)

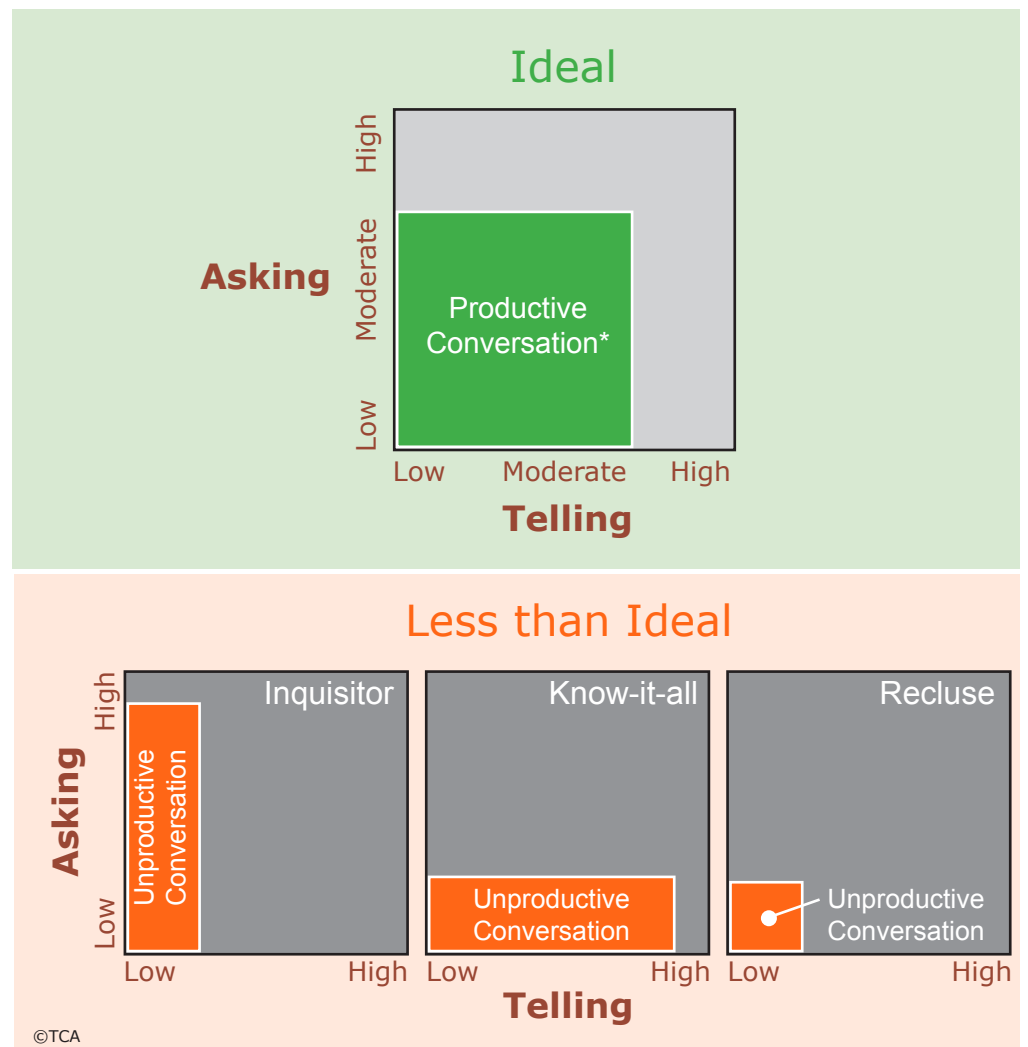
like inquisitors. This can cause mistrust and suspicion in others.

- When asking and telling too little, a person can seem aloof, disconnected, or disinterested; in short, they appear reclusive. This can cause others to feel depersonalized or devalued.

In mentoring relationships, it is important to not allow your role (mentee or mentor) to drive your conversational behavior, meaning that the mentor should not be primarily the teller and the mentee should not be primarily the asker. Rather, both parties should strive to balance their conversational flow.

PRODUCTIVE Mentoring Conversations

How Your Balance of Asking & Telling Affect Conversations



*Productive conversation adheres to the qualities listed in the article.



QUOTE

You must be the change you want to see in the world.

- Mohatma Gandhi

PRODUCTIVE MENTORING CONVERSATIONS (cont.)

Quality

The second element to consider in conversations is the quality of the connection. A conversation is typically either personally engaging or disengaging. An engaged connection can be described as trustworthy, non-defensive, and personally revealing. A disengaged connection can be described as impersonal, defensive, and personally incongruent.

To improve the quality of the connection, conversations should be engaging. To have a personally engaging conversation, you must give voice to your thoughts and opinions. You will need to be personally vulnerable to your mentoring partner, letting your defenses down and exposing your true ideas and opinions. This openness is critical in forming a quality connection.

In the wake of a mentoring conversation, it is important that both parties feel a sense of meaningful sharing has taken place. In a productive conversation that has a quality connection, both parties will have revealed a little more of their true essence and gained a deepening awareness of the strengths and abilities of their partner.

Deconstructing Conversations

All of us have had conversations with varying effects. Some leave us feeling underwhelmed, overwhelmed, anxious, angry, or belittled. Others leave us feeling elated, affirmed, confident, and enlightened. Obviously, most of us would consider the latter to be more productive than the former.

What makes conversations productive? Three distinguishing characteristics stand out: mutual contribution, constructive banter, and generative possibilities.

- Mutual Contribution – Both parties share in a back and forth manner. Either participant has the freedom to initiate or contribute to the direction of the conversation.
- Constructive Banter – There is often an unforeseen destination that is arrived at through a spirited exchange. Both feel a high sense of connection with the topic being discussed.
- Generative Possibilities – A high likelihood exists that new or original understandings or knowledge will be produced.

These three qualities embody the essence of productive conversations. Striving to encourage these characteristics will help you and your partner conduct more meaningful conversations that leave both parties feeling a sense of accomplishment and fulfillment.

The positive value of productive conversations on your mentoring relationship cannot be overestimated. The interpersonal nature of mentoring conversations means different points of view will be shared, effectively incorporating various opinions and thoughts. This leads to enhanced relational understanding, increased trust, and deeper



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PRODUCTIVE MENTORING CONVERSATIONS (cont.)

appreciation for each other, all of which leads to better mentoring relationships.

Practice Exercise

The following exercise can help you and your partner determine how productive your conversations are with one another.

1. Assess how productive your mentoring conversations have been by discussing the following issues.
 - Do your conversations display the following characteristics: mutual contributions, constructive banter, generative possibilities?
 - Do your conversations reflect a balanced dialogue flow? Do either of you have a tendency to tell more than you ask or ask more than you tell? Do either of you do too little asking and telling?
 - Do your conversations possess personally engaging discussions? Do you feel a sense of meaningful sharing in the wake of your conversations?
2. Discuss how satisfied you are with the amount of productivity you are currently experiencing in your mentoring conversations.
 - If you are fully satisfied in the level of productivity in mentoring conversations, discuss how you will ensure that you maintain that commitment.
 - If you are not satisfied or feel there is room for improvement in the level of productivity in your mentoring conversations, discuss areas for development.