

Mentor Program Renovation Framework *Plus 18 Tools (1-page mentoring worksheets)*

- Add this simple **4-point framework** to any existing mentoring program. It will strengthen connections and impact.
- Use these **18 conversation-starting tools** to launch a new program. Or, share them as worksheets for self-reflection.

This document outlines a simplified 4-point framework¹ that any organization can use as an overlay to improve any existing mentoring program. It can also be used to launch a new one. The approach is grounded in the theoretical frame of *nonformal teaching and adult learning theory*, bridging formal and informal mentoring².

These 18 conversation-starting tools can be used with no training. There are 40 conversations-starters in total available. Free non-commercial use is permitted. Videos and downloads are here: encouragingmentor.com

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Renovate Your Mentoring Program *(or Launch a New One)*

Regardless of your sector (nonprofit, government, business, education), the research literature, books, and popular press articles tell us most mentoring programs need a make-over. Mentoring is a show of faith (and an investment) in your most valuable resources: people.

But sometimes *formal* mentoring programs feel forced, particularly if there are required checklists. Conversely, *informal* mentoring's casual coffee or lunch rarely incorporates goal-setting or evaluation, and it can perpetuate inequity in who actually gets mentored. These approaches to mentoring often result in little-to-no substantial advancement in either personal or professional growth.

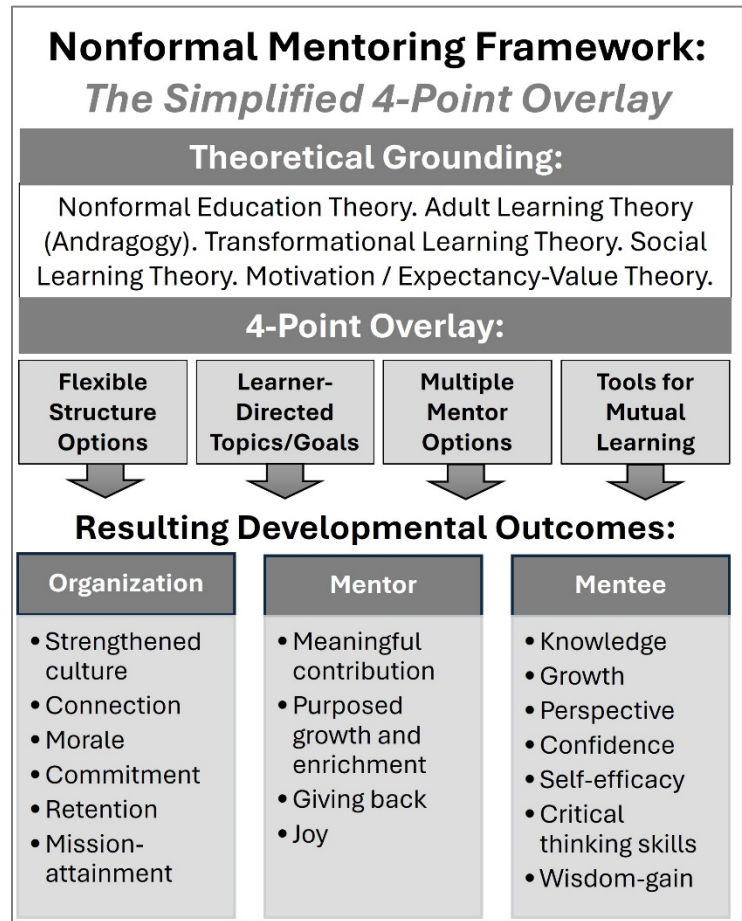
Is there an alternative? Yes. → *Nonformal* mentoring.

Nonformal mentoring is grounded in adult learning theory and nonformal teaching practice (Coombs & Ahmed, 1974). It also draws upon established methodologies in adult development and transformation (Kegan, 1994; Mezirow, 2000) and adult learning literature (Knowles, 1968, 1980, 1984). It includes a component of motivation theory as applied to education (Wigfield & Eccles, 2000) as well.

The key idea to renovating your mentoring program is to ground it in nonformal education and adult learning. This will allow the shift to an engaging, *nonformal* framework^{2,3}. Here is a simplified model¹:

Simplified 4-Point Overlay for Nonformal Mentoring

1. **Flexible Structure:** Remove obligatory checklists, scripts, and required content, but suggest timelines and participation metrics.
2. **Learner-Directed Topics and Goals:** Allow mentees to help determine topics based on current (timely) needs, interests, or challenges. Talk through short and long-term career goals. Explore personal goals as well, i.e., who they are becoming versus simply what they are doing.
3. **Multiple Mentor Options:** Match participants to launch. Then encourage multiple mentors diversifying across expertise, race, gender, ethnicity, and generation (age) to provide varied worldviews and culturally meaningful engagement.
4. **Tools for Mutual Learning:** Replace training manuals with short, easy-to-use conversation-starting prompts and reflection questions. Participants (mentees and mentors) co-construct understanding and experience mutual growth.



The last item (tools) is critical. You may already have a set of great questions or curriculum guides for your mentoring program. If so, use them. But rewrite them to be one page or less to make mentor preparation easy, and to allow mentee choice in topics.

These flexibilities will transform your mentoring program, fundamentally shifting the historic approach of an overly-structured formal system. The nonformal adoption will lead to better engagement and positive impacts in the work and personal lives of both mentee and mentor.

¹ [currently in peer review] Raison, B., Baker, E., Herpy, D. (2026). Mentor Program Renovation Via Nonformal Teaching: A Simplified 4-Point Overlay.

² Raison, B. (2026): Nonformal mentoring: A theoretically grounded conceptual model leveraging Land-Grant Extension and community development expertise, *Community Development*. <https://doi.org/10.1080/15575330.2026.2661183>

³ Raison, B. (2024). *The Encouraging Mentor: Your Guide to 40 Conversations that Matter*. Westbow Press.

Launching this resource:

Use these conversation-starting tools to improve your existing mentor/mentee pairings, or use it to launch a new or renovated 12-month program. Remember to give participants permission to be flexible, and shift conversations / topics to meet timely interests or needs that may arise. Agency and control are key components.

Use your existing pairing process to start, but Invite people expand organically with multiple mentors. Have them try a conversation. If it works, continue. If not, shift and try a different topic, or connect with a different mentor. Each person brings knowledge and experience and culture and concepts that others do not have. That's part of the beautiful diversity of nonformal mentoring.

I suggest printing each conversation as a 1-page handout for *both* mentor and mentee. Then use it to guide the conversation. It's literally that simple. I hope you'll give it a try.

The Free License:

These materials are available at no cost for nonprofit, government, and educational organizations. (This does not include for-profit educational entities.) If you have a moment, please let us know about your use of the materials. We would love to hear your ideas for improvement. We want to make these materials better, add new topics, and ultimately meet the needs of organizations and people who are doing this important, life-changing work in mentoring.

Thank you.

The 18 Conversations:

- *12 for 1 year of nonformal mentoring*
- *6 bonus conversations to meet timely needs*

1. The Launch Conversation and "Who you are vs what you do." (2 parts)
2. Being Remembered
3. Five Things to Have, Do, Help, and Be
4. Your Personal Mission
5. Leveraging Gratitude
6. From Why? to What?
7. What Motivates You?
8. Handling Critics and Criticism
9. Remembering to Listen
10. Hidden Diversity
11. Perspective Shifting
12. Leading with Humility

Bonus Conversations:

13. Financial Health: Two Keys for Success (Live and Give)
14. Spirituality & Faith Traditions: Honoring Diverse Perspectives
15. The Bucket List
16. The Values Review
17. Time vs. Energy: Which will you manage?
18. Twenty Anytime Questions

Final: The Wrap-Up

#1a - Conversation 1: The Launch

Complete these worksheets with a mentor, or use this resource on your own for personal and professional growth. Engaging in self-reflection and metacognition (thinking about how you think) is invaluable.

Question 1

If you were meeting someone for the first time, what would you want them to know about you?

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Now, follow trails of your interests. *Be curious.* Ask yourself why you wrote some of the items above. Then proceed to the next question.

Question 2

What are your goals for this time invested in personal and professional growth?

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Remember, goals will shift and change over time. That's okay. For now, jot ideas about what you want to achieve during this journey. (*Examples might include gaining insight and wisdom on your career, or finding new approaches for life issues.*)

Personal History & Futuring Questions: Here are additional prompts for sharing or reflection.

What are some favorite memories from your childhood?

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The question above aims to start an appreciative inquiry in your brain. Imagine how you might let favorite memories help direct a positive path forward. That idea might be furthered by considering the next question.

What do you hope the future holds for you?

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These introductory prompts are to jump-start your thinking about the foundations of your life *so far*. From here, you will begin diving into questions that will challenge you to go deeper, considering possibility and potential. Investing time to reflect starts you on a path that will help you clarify your purpose, advance your career, and identify potential to create the future you want.

#1b - Who You Are vs. What You Do

Purpose: To help you think about who you are or who you want to become instead of the classic question which asks what you want to do.

Background: What is the one thing people almost always asked you when you were young? For many, we heard the repeated question, “What do you want to be when you grow up?” Some of us imagined firefighting, others considered becoming a nurse, farmer, or teacher.

Asking “Who do you want to become?” is qualitatively different from the normal inquiries we get as children about what we want to be. Many of us were never encouraged to really think through what we enjoy doing, what we are good at (natural gifts), and where we want to learn more. When coupled with what is needed (in business, society, the home, etc.), this is a trifecta that can point to future career satisfaction.

The question below is one many people have never been asked. It is the opposite of what we’ve been trained to expect. (i.e., What is your next career move? What position are you hoping to attain?) The question may take a moment to sink in. Give yourself time in responding.

Who do you want to become? Think deeply here. Jot some ideas or points.

Summary: You do not need to fully answer this question right now, on the spot. Jot some ideas down. Then ponder it over the coming days and weeks. Then expand your writing. Also, look back and reflect on the Personal Mission and Five Things exercises.

Challenge question: This is a way to think about how to achieve the who you want to become.

What are some things you could begin doing to get there (to become the person you want to be)? Write some detail. Get specific. Set some target dates.

Note: This is a question that you may wish to return to over time. Feel free to do that with any of the questions. Your answers will change, and that’s normal. This is a journey.

#2 – Being-Remembered

Background: *How do you want to be remembered?* This is a rephrase of the classic Steven Covey question from *The 7 Habits of Highly Effective People*. It is one of the most powerful questions one can ever ponder. (Note: Versions of it will show up in the *Bucket List* and *Personal Mission* conversations later in this series. This is intentional.) Throughout recorded history, people have pondered the question of life’s purpose.

Look at the question below. Spend some time with it. It is a definite brain engager because we are often too busy to pause and reflect in this way. So for most, the question will linger for a while.

What do you want people to say about you when you’re gone from this earth?

(That is, how do you want to be remembered?)

Jot down a few phrases or ideas.

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Let these ideas ruminate a bit. If able, go outside or take a walk or roll. Be curious about what you’ve written. Consider questions that might come to mind, including, “*What else?*” You may even let your responses sit for a week. But then, go deeper. Think about how to boil it down to the basics:

Look at your responses above. Are there some items you could group together or summarize? Jot down a few summary ideas.

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Challenge: Can you boil this down to one or two words?

Homework: Return to this after completing the *Personal Mission* challenge. Compare your responses. Chat with a mentor or good friend about this reflection. *Then pose the first question to them!*

General Reflections: One thing that struck me about this topic was: _____

I’m still pondering (*and may seek more information on*): _____

As a result of this reflection, I plan to: _____

#3 – Five Things: A Personal Futuring Exercise

This exercise can help you envision and create the future you desire. Everyone... every company, every non-profit, etc., has two options for the future. These are: The one that **will** be if we do nothing... (continue the status quo), or the one that **could** be if we work to achieve it... (plan and act to reach desired ends, goals, dreams, mission).

Most people are asked at a very early age, “What do you want to be when you grow up?” We often prompt young minds with examples: “Do you want to be a firefighter? A teacher? A farmer?” But what if there is a more important question: “**Who do you want to become?**” This is qualitatively different. This is perhaps the best question to ask to prompt future thinking, focus, and goal setting.

Use the chart below and fill in the responses. Carry this around, think, reflect, and update it over the next few weeks. Reflection over time is powerful. Discuss insights with a friend or mentor.

What are 5 things you want...

<p>...to have: (These can be tangible or intangible.)</p>	<p>...to do: (This is about “what” you might do: jobs career, things for fun, “Bucket List” items, etc.)</p>
<p>...to help: (These can be big and small. Think broadly.)</p>	<p>...to be: (Not “what” you might do, but “who” you might become.)</p> <p>Challenge: (actions to move you toward your “who”):</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. 2.

Analysis: Look at the things you want to **have** and to **help**. Really consider them. Now, will the things you want to **do** move you in the right direction to accomplish them in the future?

Challenge Activity: The “to be” category will likely reflect how people remember you, now or when you’re gone. (i.e., When someone thinks of you, what pops into their mind?) So consider 2 action items that will help you accomplish “**who**” you want to be and how you want to be remembered. Some may be short-term actions, some long-range. *For example:* If you want to be remembered as someone who was/is kind, what do you need to start doing?

#4 – Your Personal Mission

A personal mission is a statement about your “why.” It describes what you believe is most important in life, and how you want to be remembered. [Here’s a related video - <https://youtu.be/alizLWcnpic> (3:17)]

Being missional gives you priorities which let you say “no” to non-essentials, increasing capacity. Capacity provides options that can enhance living. **Consider keeping this paper.** When you apply for a job, school, etc., having (*and referencing*) a personal mission can help you stand out from other candidates. It is a powerful tool.

The 4 Steps:

1. Think about your Core Beliefs and Values. Write down 4 or 5 key words or phrases under each.

Core beliefs: What are some key things you believe? _____

Core values: What are some key things you value? _____

Overall, what really matters in life? What’s most important? _____

2. Think about your Hopes, Dreams, Desires, Goals. Do not limit these based on current circumstances. Jot down 2 or 3 items under each category. These are not commitments, but *possibilities*.

Personal: _____

School/Career: _____

Community/World: _____

Family/Friends: _____

Spiritual: _____

3. Leaving a Legacy: (*These questions are to help focus your thinking.*)

How would you like to be remembered? What do you want people to say about you (now or after you’re gone (from this world, or simply from a meeting!)? _____

What do you dream of contributing in the future? _____

4. Draft Your Personal Mission Statement: Review the above. Underline words that stand out. Then write your Mission using the key words / ideas. Don’t worry about getting it perfect. It will evolve over time.

My mission in life is to... _____

2 Word Challenge: What two words could summarize your personal mission?

1. _____ 2. _____

Final Step: Do your friends, co-workers, and family members know some of these things about you? How might you begin to let them see what is most important in your life? Jot some ideas. *Then share.*

#5 – Leveraging Gratitude

If you have time, watch this video brief on gratitude - (2:31) <https://youtu.be/npboMBY-hJE>

Can increasing gratitude improve your brain chemistry and help you feel better? Can it help your career? The science of gratitude has expanded greatly in the past twenty years. Studies increasingly show that regularly practicing gratitude contributes to better relationships, decreased anxiety, and increased internal satisfaction. These bolster what Daniel Goleman labels emotional and social intelligence, key items for success in our careers and lives. When we pause to focus on things we're grateful for, we shift our thinking from negative to positive. This can energize and reinvigorate us even on a bad day.

What are you grateful for? Jot a few items.

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The Challenge: Could you increase your practice of gratitude? This may sound simple, but if you write down three things you are grateful for each day for twenty-one days, former Harvard researcher, Shawn Achor, says you will train your brain to look at the world differently. Once the habit is formed, you will start scanning the world for positives instead of threats. It's a game changer.

Researcher Robert Emmons, likewise, said that even though we do not have total control over our emotions, "being grateful is a choice that can sustain us through the ups and downs of our lives." When we become more grateful, we are more stress resistant and our self-worth increases. This often shows outwardly. When that is noticed, it can result in career progression and success.

Are you willing to take the 21-day gratitude test? (i.e., Will you write three things per day for which you're grateful?) ___ Yes? ___ No?

How might increasing gratitude help your career? (Make a list of ideas here.)

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Here are some additional thoughts around gratitude, along with some ideas to try at the office:

1. Start your next meeting with a gratitude question. For example, ask attendees (or your teammates) to:
 - a. Name a project you're thankful to be working on.
 - b. Name a work colleague and tell how you're grateful for them.
 - c. Describe a recent lesson you have learned, and how you are thankful for it.
2. In work or at home, think about how you can be grateful for the person, not just their output.
3. Gratitude and appreciation go hand-in-hand. Review Dr. Gary Chapman's *5 Languages of Appreciation* (<https://www.appreciationatwork.com/>). Consider how people prefer to receive gratitude. How might you show gratitude and appreciation this week.

#6 – From Why? to What?

When bad news hits (whether cancer or criticism), can you change the question in your head from, “*Why* is this happening?” to “*What* can I learn?” ___ Yes? ___ No? ___ Maybe?

Why might that be difficult? Jot some ideas / thoughts.

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My story: “*I am sorry Dr. Raison. You have cancer.*” I heard nothing after that. No doctor ever just walks in the room, sits down, looks you in the eye, and says, “*You have cancer.*” That’s not how it works. There are supposed to be lab tests and evaluations.

In an instant, you picture those you love, your hopes, and dreams. And you have so many questions. One lingers: “***Why is this happening to me?***” This is natural to ask, but it does nothing helpful because *there is no answer*. Cancer happens. Job loss happens. So does stress, trauma, pain, death. Or how about criticism? That can be extraordinarily painful. But what if you could reframe the question... and your thinking?

The Switch: When faced with a major life challenge or pain-point, here is one of the most powerful things a person can do: Instead of asking, “*Why* is this happening?” ask, “***What can I learn?***”

How might that feel? Would that help? Jot a few thoughts here.

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What might change if you could do that?

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If you can shift your response from *why* to *what*, you can improve both your mental and physical health. They are intertwined.

The Final Challenge: The next time you experience a significant pain or stress point, and *after* you have changed the question from “*Why* is this happening?” to “*What* can I learn?” ask yourself this: ***What can I do?***

Think about some options you might pursue. What action or strategy might help?

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Take some time with this. After my cancer diagnosis, I asked myself this, and then moved into action (innovative surgery) that today, finds me cancer-free after twelve years. That gratitude is with me every single day.

Homework: The next time you encounter a trigger-event (at work, home, or play), ***try to change the question in your head from Why to What.*** Then consider sharing your burden, talking with friends, or making an appointment with a counselor. They can help. In my case, we took additional action to lower our mental stress by leaning into our family’s faith tradition. Here, we found different, but significant comfort.

Shifting our thinking from *why* to *what*, though not an easy task, can change everything.

#7 – What Motivates You?

Purpose: This reflection is designed to help you understand the basic premise of motivation. It begins by asking a simple question:

What are some things that motivate you? - - -
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At the most basic level, humans are driven by two forms of motivation: *intrinsic* and *extrinsic*. Extrinsic motivators come from things like money, power and prestige, and your work. Here, people pursue the goal simply because of the visible, external reward or punishment. Intrinsic motivators (such as gaining knowledge, mastery, curiosity, autonomy, or fulfillment) come from within. People pursue these because they enjoy the work and find some kind of inherent satisfaction that feeds their life purpose or mission.

Author Susan Fowler outlines four components that *intrinsic* motivation has in the workplace:

- **Competence:** you have the necessary skills to perform work / activities
- **Meaning:** your work goal or purpose aligns with your personal ideals or standards
- **Autonomy:** you have some level of control over your choices or behaviors
- **Impact:** you can influence the strategy, administration, or outcomes

How might you activate these intrinsic motivators in your work, especially if you're feeling bored or stuck? - - -

Here are two strategies that might help.

1. Find ways to make tasks more interesting. Ask your supervisor if you could try different projects to add variety to your work.
2. Think about how your work has meaning. Consider the positive impact on the lives and work of other people. Make a mental link between your specific job tasks and your organization's mission.

Challenge: Jot down a few items over the next week or so that come to mind about your motivations. Separate them by category. Which ones feel stronger? Which ones resonate with your soul?

Intrinsic:
Extrinsic:

Homework: Return to this list on occasion. Pick out one or two motivators. Then set a goal to try and increase your focus on those meaningful items.

#8 – Handling Critics and Criticism: *Growth Mindset*

Background: Have you ever felt the gut-punch of a poor annual evaluation? Or have you had so much red ink on a paper it was hard to see what you originally wrote? How might you reframe this kind of feedback from critiques and critics without giving up? Could you leverage the input to help you grow? Consider this:

How do you currently handle input (feedback, criticism, red ink) from critiques and critics? What is your initial reaction?

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Many people hear feedback as outright criticism that is pointing directly at them as a person. But *meaningful* evaluation or feedback is aimed at the work, not the person. Here are two-steps to receive a critique:

1. Remove yourself from the equation. Even if the criticism appears (or is) aimed directly at you. Change the words in your head from, “I’m no good at this,” to, “This is something I still need to learn,” or, “This is a critique aimed at helping improve this work.”
2. Dispassionately use the input to find areas for improvement. Look at each suggestion (critique), evaluate how it might help, and then begin making changes for improvement.

Adopt a Growth Mindset: Carol Dweck (2008) identified a *fixed mindset* as only focusing on the outcome, and telling yourself you cannot change anything. Conversely, with a *growth mindset*, you realize the *critiques or criticisms are data that can help you* tackle problems, chart a new course, and continue working for success.

4 keys to Growth Mindset:

1. Believe that your *effort* leads to achievements. It’s not just inherent talent.
2. Be willing to learn from mistakes. Leverage criticism as input to improve.
3. Know that intelligence and ability can be developed (again, through effort, grit, determination).
4. Embrace asking questions. Ask for help when needed. And admit when you don't know something.

Look at the 4 Keys. Which resonates? (It might resonate by making you feel positive, or one of them might make you feel angry.)

What might you do to improve in this area? Key #: _____

Action:

Important Postscript: There are critics who may attack *you* personally. You do not owe them your attention. Every single person has value and worth, regardless of skills (or ability to do some specific task). So if someone belittles you, take leave. Find an encourager who can help you get back on track and make the improvements you want to make. Then, pass it along and encourage someone else.

#9 – Remembering to Listen (*to yourself*)

Background: As we improve how we listen to others, we also need to consider how we listen to ourselves, particularly in the areas of wellness. Consider each dimension and definition below. Jot a few ideas in the boxes.

Listening to Yourself: 8 Dimensions of Wellness	
Dimension Category:	How are you doing in this dimension right now? (What is your internal voice saying?)
Career – You gain personal satisfaction in work consistent with your values, goals, and lifestyle.	
Digital – You consider the impact of your virtual presence and use of tech on your overall well-being.	
Emotional – You can identify, express, and manage the range of feelings (e.g., coping with stress).	
Financial – You know your financial state. You budget, save, and manage finances to achieve goals.	
Intellectual – You value lifelong learning and seek to foster critical thinking.	
Physical – The physically well person gets adequate sleep, eats a nutritious diet, engages in exercise.	
Social – You have a network of support based on interdependence, mutual trust, respect.	
Spiritual – You seek harmony and balance by openly exploring the depth of human purpose.	

Internal Listening Challenge: Look at your responses above. Now jot down some ideas on two of them.

What advice would you give a friend who had questions or was struggling in some of the above 8 Dimensions? What could you tell them to help?	
Dimension:	Advice:

Summary: You may, of course, realize that the advice you offer a friend in the box above is likely applicable in your own life. That’s the beauty of reflection. Now, look back at your initial responses to the eight dimensions. Which ones might be a struggle for you? What advice would a friend offer you? Changing our perspective allows us to help ourselves.

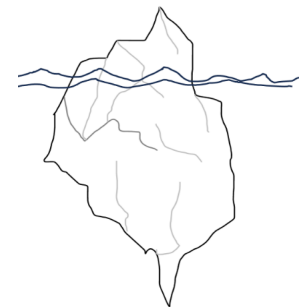
#10 – Hidden Diversity

This is a reminder that most aspects of diversity are not outwardly visible, but recognizing hidden variables can be of great value to your personal and professional life. Let's jump in.

When you think about diversity among people, what things do you notice?	
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Now, consider what aspects may <i>not</i> be visible?	
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The Discussion: How well do we really know people? Few can set aside their first visual impression (or their one-hundredth time seeing someone), look beneath the surface, and remind themselves that this person may have sadness or joy of which we know nothing. They may have recently experienced loss or gain, an acute mental health crisis, an ongoing battle with any number of afflictions (or prosperity). We may observe signs, but we simply do not know.

If we do not pause and remind ourselves of these hidden differences, it is easy to interact on the surface in an "I - It" transaction. In *Social Intelligence*, Daniel Goleman describes this as treating others as objects, not persons. The inverse is the "I - You" relationship in which others' feelings not only matter to us but change us. This is a picture of empathy. So how might focusing on *hidden diversity* improve our relationships? Let's review hidden aspects of diversity using the ice berg model.



What people see (above the water line):

- Outward appearance
- Physical behaviors
- Sound of voice (including accents)

What's hidden (beneath the waves):

- Values
- Beliefs, worldviews, faith traditions
- Socioeconomic status
- Intelligence, ability
- Mental and physical health
- Pronoun/gender identity, sexual orientations
- Ethnicity
- DNA / physical variation
- History, geography, and more

Here is a closing question to consider for more personal reflection.

List some aspects of hidden diversity that others may not know about you.
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Homework: This week, casually observe someone with whom you interact and wish to know better or improve the relationship. Become curious about hidden diversity, and initiate a conversation.

#11 – Perspective Shifting

Background: *Shifting* perspective can be one of the most powerful devices in anyone’s personal or professional tool kit. True perspective shifting opens our eyes to more diverse, unique, and creative solutions to problems. It unlocks doors and identifies sometimes hidden possibility. This works both personally and professionally.

Below are three questions designed to help you think about shifting your perspective. But first, try this brief experiment.

Stand if you are able. (Seriously. Do this. Standing or moving provides an immediate perspective change.) Now, fold your hands, interlocking fingers. Look down at your hands. Which thumb is on top? (Some will find their right, others the left.)

Now unfold your hands and refold them, this time *with your other thumb on top*. It may feel weird.

Okay. Now, fold your arms in front of your chest. You have done this a million times. It’s natural. Look down. Which arm is on top? (Again, some will find their right, others the left.)

Now for the challenge: Try *folding your arms the other way* with the “wrong” arm on top. You may have to focus to find success. For most people, this feels very awkward.

What does perspective shifting really mean? We are creatures of habit. Getting out of our comfort zone helps us discover a different way of thinking, a new approach that might move us toward our goal. Crossing our arms the “wrong” way might be uncomfortable. But when we challenge ourselves to be open, new possibilities arise.

Use the questions below as an exercise to try to change or expand your perspective. Think of a problem you are facing, or a difficult decision you need to make.

Problem or decision: _____

Is my thinking about this a *fact*, or is it my *opinion*? (How might someone else look at it?)

Challenge Q: Humility plays a role in most perspective scenarios. What are two ways to increase humility or to be open to other ideas or approaches?

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Here’s another perspective exercise.

Problem or decision: _____

If I could be five years in the future looking back at this issue, what might I see?

Challenge Q: Projecting your vision into the future is pure perspective. Do you think you could deploy this approach during a stressful event? How might you do that?

Summary: Perspective shifting is a powerful tool. But it takes practice. The best time to start is now.

#12 – Leading with Humility

It is reported that Frank Lloyd Wright defined an expert as “someone who has stopped thinking because he knows.” We all know that person. If they are leading a team, organization, or (this might be uncomfortable) your family, they could likely improve outcomes if they’d simply stop talking and invite others to provide input.

The painful question we all must ask ourselves is this: *How often do I think I’m the expert?* (Ouch.)

Can an attitude of humility help a leader expand potential and positive outcomes? Describe how that might work.

The Discussion: In 2013, Former MIT professor Edgar Schein published *Humble Inquiry*. Schein asked how an organization can get all the bosses (leaders) to create a climate where those under them feel free to engage. He said upward communication is often lacking in business, but leaders could make strides if they did three things:

- 1.) Do less telling.
- 2.) Learn to do more asking.
- 3.) Do a better job of listening and acknowledging.

Of the three items above, where are some places you might:

1. Do less telling. _____

2. Learn to do more asking. _____

3. Do a better job of listening and acknowledging. _____

What do you think about Schein’s approach? Here are two more questions to ponder:

How can you use *humble inquiry* to expand potential and positive outcomes?

Could inviting diverse input lead to the discovery of opportunity? (Describe an example.)

Homework: Think about approaching your own leadership with humility. During this upcoming week, look for an example of a time when you might have a choice to *inquire and listen*, or to *talk*. How will you respond?

#13a – Financial Health: Part 1, *Living*

The first thing anyone can do that will enhance future financial security is *to decide* how they're going to live. This works at almost any salary level. [Note: There are folks who are not paid a living wage. We must be mindful of that, and advocate for improvements while still helping them plan and budget.]

Here's how living decisively works. First, consider your finances and future. How do you think about and use money now? *Living and retiring well is not only about math.* It's psychology and how we *think* about money. It's about discipline. We must learn to live *below* our financial means. That's an attitude. That's a decision.

Action: Live (and pay attention to the details)

1. Write a spending plan (a.k.a., a budget).
2. Reduce eating out (which is the number one expense for many).
3. Check your subscriptions (cable, streaming services, magazines, music online, and your kids' expenses).
4. Compare car and home insurance rates. Switch if you can get similar coverage at a better rate.
5. Do an Internet search for: "Biggest unnecessary expenses." (Think about your *wants vs. needs*.)
6. Do a "debt snowball" (See Dave Ramsey's approach of paying off your debt from smallest-to-largest).
7. Start a Roth IRA (now).

Look at the seven items above.

1. Which could you begin doing now? Seriously. Today.
2. Which could you begin next week?
3. Imagine your life in five years: What might it look like if you have followed these concepts? How might you feel inside?

How much will you need in retirement? When you live on less than you make, you are automatically set up to survive a lower retirement income. Experts mention needing 70-80% of your pre-retirement income to live comfortably in retirement. These questions will help you plan:

1. If you have a house/land, will it be paid off?
2. What are the ongoing taxes, insurance, and upkeep each year?
3. If you plan to rent, what's your ongoing monthly cost (with inflation)?
4. Are you the *new car type*?
5. Do you want to help kids/grandkids pay for college?
6. Do you want to travel?
7. Do you want to work part time?
8. Do you want to do volunteer work?

Challenge to achieve retirement freedom: Look at the eight items above. Which is most important? # _____
Which is not necessary, but perhaps desired? # _____, # _____

Imagine your life in your retirement years: *How great will it feel if you follow these concepts?!*

For additional reading: Ramsey, Dave. (2007). *The Total Money Makeover: A Proven Plan for Financial Fitness*.

#13b – Financial Health: Part 2, *Giving*

The Discussion: Again, living and retiring well is not only about math. It's how we *think* about money. There is a tremendous amount of ancient wisdom on giving. In Judaism (the Mosaic Law), they stipulated a *tithe* which meant giving 10% of your wealth. In Christianity, Jesus extended the meaning to make tithing less legalistic and more heartfelt. In Islam, the Zakat (alms giving) is one of the *Five Pillars*. Sikhism encourages the Dasvandh (giving one tenth). And outside of religious tenets, there is the wonderful idea of *Giving What We Can* (GWWC) for altruistic associations in which members pledge at least 10% of their income to charities. Wow.

In *The Book of Joy*, His Holiness the Dalai Lama, Archbishop Desmond Tutu, and Doug Abrams say, “*It seems money can buy happiness, if we spend it on other people.*” They cite research that shows how generosity is one of the four fundamental brain circuits that track with long-term well-being. Consider these giving questions:

1. How do you feel about giving?
2. Has it been a partial or consistent action / philosophy in your life? Why or why not?

Take Action: Give to causes or needs of others. Giving changes your thinking. When you freely give away money or things or your time (with no strings attached) several things happen:

1. You help others (a cause, a person, etc.).
2. You focus on others and become less self-centric (which research shows is a positive path for joy and satisfaction in life).
3. You learn self-discipline. (Again, read the research on the benefits of this.)
4. You train your brain to recognize and remember your good fortune (e.g., of having a job). This increases internal gratitude and improves health according to research studies.

Here are some key questions. Look at the four items above, then respond:

1. Which two sound important to you? #_____, #_____ Why?
2. If you could learn more about one of the items, which would it be? How might that help you?

Summary: We can train our brains on living and giving. When we tell ourselves we can live on 80% or 90%, we begin to change how we think and feel and act with money. The actions of living and giving can provide financial peace and security for our future.

Homework: Make a retirement bucket list. Whether you're 20 or 60 years of age, make a list of what you want to retire *to*. That is, don't retire *from* something, but retire *to* something new. Then ponder how adopting *living and giving* now can make it happen.

#14 – Spirituality & Faith Traditions

Purpose: This conversation asks us to consider a topic some find difficult or perhaps not apropos for the workplace, but it aims to increase acknowledgement of, and honor for, diverse traditions among those with whom we live and work. Conversations like these may also challenge us to reflect and introspect.

Background: Psychologists, medical doctors, leadership researchers, wisdom writers, philosophers, rabbis, pastors, imams, gurus, and others have long observed that people inherently yearn for a purpose-driven life. We want to do or serve something beyond our personal goals and economic self-interest. We want to be remembered for doing something good during our lifetime. For many, faith traditions help fill this void.

Multiple research studies have shown positive mental and physical health benefits for people who practice some sort of faith tradition. People have better physical and mental health and recover more quickly from health problems, including a lower risk of premature death. In addition, faith traditions bring beauty and diversity to our workplaces. Here's an introductory question:

Do you have and/or practice spirituality or a faith tradition? _____

Why or why not?

Do you feel there are things beyond what we see and observe in our everyday world? Jot some ideas here.

Discussion: What does it mean to have faith in a spiritual sense? Some people see faith or religion as another way of knowing, empirically tested and verified by the observable fruits of love and action. There are changed lives that attest to something unseen. These are powerful arguments and evidence. On the other hand, some contend there is no need or room for the spiritual.

Seventeenth century philosopher and mathematician Blaise Pascal posited the idea of a wager, "betting" that there is a God. He reasoned that if we live as if there is a God, we will have a better life while alive *here on Earth* (by following the general moral conventions of caring for others, respecting life and property, etc.). These ideals are repeated in numerous belief systems. It's a fascinating idea. In early 1971, John Lennon essentially intoned this same general concept when he sang, "Imagine all the people, living life in peace."

Please take a few minutes to think about these questions:

How might learning about (and acknowledging) various faith traditions enrich your workplace?

Whether you have a strong faith tradition, or none, could you be open to discussing topics (such as the purpose of life) that are very meaningful to many? How might these discussions strengthen your work culture and objectives?

Summary questions for pondering: Regardless of your faith tradition, spiritual practice, or contentment with not needing a religious construct, could Pascal's notion of practicing kindness and love and care for others in this world pay benefits (personally and societally) now? If we become more respectful of deep convictions held by others, especially when they are different from ours, might we improve our work culture and outcomes?

#15 - The Bucket List

A bucket list can help you continue and deepen your thinking about what matters most in life.

Do you have a bucket list? What's on it?

Most of us have some things we'd like to do or accomplish in life. Some of us write a formal list on paper. Others have lists in their heads. Often, the bucket list resides in our personal lives, but having one in our professional lives can make us more effective leaders and advance our careers as well.

What's on your professional bucket list?

The Detail: Do you realize that, by definition and logic, if you have a bucket list, you're thinking about dying? That may seem morbid, but it is in fact a good thing to think about what you want to do before you die. In their 2016 publication *The Book of Joy*, the Dalai Lama and Bishop Desmond Tutu instruct us to consider our own mortality. They rightly contend that this will bring a sense of urgency, perspective, and gratitude. Author and pastor Andy Stanley similarly tells us that "priority determines capacity." He points to an ancient Jewish text (Psalm 90) that says, "teach us to number our days" in order to achieve wisdom. Numbering your days is thinking about how long you have to live, just like the bucket list. This can help us focus attention both at home and work. Stanley also challenges us to "compound our minutes" noting (paraphrased):

1. There is a cumulative value to investing small amounts of time in certain activities over an extended period (e.g., exercise, spending time with family, mentoring a new coworker or student).
2. Neglect is also cumulative (e.g., *not* exercising, *not* doing personal finances, *not* spending time with family, *not* sharing your life experiences, *not* fulfilling leadership opportunities when they arise).
3. There is no cumulative value to the random things we opt for over the important things (e.g., surfing the internet, micromanaging instead of delegating).

If we're attentive to the limited time we have, we can use it more effectively. Then we accomplish things that really matter.

Summary: So how does all this come together? If you want to accomplish more and increase your capacity, make a bucket list. Try having one for home (personal life) and one for work (professional life). Write down those items that are most important—ones you really want to accomplish. Then begin.

What item(s) from your bucket lists could you begin to tackle in the next days or weeks?

- Personal Bucket List:
- Professional Bucket List:

How might that help your _____ (career, personal life, studies, family, etc.)? (Choose one aspect and jot a few notes.)

#16 – The Values Review

Introduction: As individuals, we all have varying values and belief systems. We come from differing backgrounds and places. This gives us a rich and beautiful diversity. But how do we incorporate values into our everyday work? How do we ensure our core values are the fundamental beliefs that guide behavior and action? Here’s an exercise that will help.

Instructions: In the table below, put a checkmark by items that you feel are important to you. Check as many as you want.

Career	Respect	Cooperation	Popularity
Happiness	Freedom	Honesty	Fitting in
Service	Justice	Friendship	Pride
Courage	Fairness	Self-discipline	Loyalty
Love	Generosity	Responsibility	Community
Diversity	Compassion	Sharing	Progress
Perseverance	Beauty	Individuality	Spiritual / Faith
Reason	Patience	Prosperity	Wealth
Ambition	Creativity	Education	Family
Intelligence	Play	Belief	Tradition
Inclusion	Kindness	Other: _____	Other: _____

Now, narrow the checked items to your top 10. Underline but do not rank.

Next, look at your underlined words and narrow to your top 5. Circle these.

Lastly, rank circled items from 1 (most important) to 5 (less important). Write them here:

1. _____, 2. _____, 3. _____, 4. _____, 5. _____

Questions to consider about your values: (*Got a few ideas for each.*)

1. Why do we need to know, name, and talk about our core values?
2. Who or what influenced your top values? (Consider family, society, geography, events.)
3. Have your top values changed over your lifetime? Will they? What might cause that?

Questions to consider about other people and their values: (*Got a few ideas for each.*)

1. What happens when you need to work with someone whose values differ from yours?
2. Have you ever suppressed or temporarily ignored your values to fit in? (Or get a job? Etc.)
3. Can you respect someone who holds a fundamentally opposite value from you? How might you do that?

Homework: Look around for something that represents what is important to you. Perhaps it is something in nature, a quote, a sign, a person, or a design. Reflect on how that represents one of your core values this week.

#17 – Time vs. Energy: Which will you manage?

Are you any good at managing your time? Some of you may think, “I’m not bad at it.” But most, like me, are no good at all. So here’s the question: **What if you worked on managing your energy instead of managing your time?**

Time is finite. But energy can appear seemingly out of nowhere. In truth, energy has four sources: **the body, our emotions, our minds, and our spirit**. Tony Schwartz, founder of the Energy Project, says we can learn to harness these dimensions, creating our own energy. The key is that we must embrace qualities such as **openness, vulnerability, self-awareness, accountability, empathy and curiosity**.

The Energizer Experiment: In each box below, think of four or five things around each “source” that can energize you. (*Note: There are some prompts at the very bottom of this page.*) Your energy “sources” can be related to home or work.

List some ways you reenergize your body physically . ¹
List some ways you reenergize your body emotionally . ²
List some ways you restore your mental energy . ³
List some ways your spirit energy can be increased. ⁴

Now, look over your list. Ponder it a bit. Circle the top two or three items (from all four sources).

Challenge: Could these be motivators for you? For example, if you are super energized by encouraging others, how (and where) could you apply this (at work or home) this week? Imagine the great serotonin boost in your brain when you follow your energizers.

How this helps with time management: When we lean into our energizers, we automatically begin saying “no” to other things (time-stealers) freeing us to increase our output and have more impact at both home and work. So... instead of trying to **manage** your time, invest in **generating** and managing your energy instead. Here’s a related video: (4:24) <https://youtu.be/pZ83Y9UXHxM>

¹**Physical energy** is restored when we eat well, take breaks from work, and move (exercise).

²**Emotionally**, the research shows that we gain energy by practicing gratitude, serving others, and making connections.

³**Mental energy** can be drained by technology; so taking breaks from those distractions, getting outside for a change of scenery, or getting lost in a good story greatly helps.

⁴When we engage in activities that give a sense of meaning and purpose, our **spirit energy** soars.

Reference: Schwartz and McCarthy (2007). *Manage Your Energy, Not Your Time*. Harvard Business Review. Available at: <https://hbr.org/2007/10/manage-your-energy-not-your-time>

#18 – Twenty Anytime Questions: *Mentoring conversations that matter*

Introduction: Whether you have done all, some, or none of the “40 Conversations” with someone you’re mentoring (or as a self-study reflection exercise), I’ve outlined these twenty bonus questions that can lead to additional great conversations, or personal reflections for growth.

Great questions can powerfully move people to act, to get unstuck, and to see potential. They help us shift perspective—a critical component for solution-finding, meaningful communication, and daily living. Choose one or two for consideration. Challenge yourself (or someone you’re mentoring) to go deep on some of these.

Challenge: As you consider these questions, take a moment to also reflect on some aspect of gratitude you might find *in your response*. Jot it down, even if it’s simply for the opportunity to keep learning. This will reinforce your gratitude practice (which the research shows is great for our mental health).

Take your time. Enjoy pondering these questions. You’re on a good journey. You are growing.

The 20 Additional “Anytime” Mentoring Questions:

1. What is the world teaching you right now?
2. When have you made an impact that you felt was significant?
3. What would a close friend say your strengths are? (Do you agree?)
4. How might you further develop your strengths?
5. What does success look like for you? What can you do really well that will help you get there?
6. What obstacles are you facing?
7. What are you not doing that might be keeping you from success?
8. What can you control (versus what can you NOT control?) What options might you deploy?
9. Think about a time when you felt like you failed. How did you bounce back? What did you actually do? (In the short-term, and over time?)
10. Describe a recent setback. How are you recovering?
11. What leadership skills would you like to develop?
12. Who was the best teacher you ever had? Explain why.
13. Is there anything you pretend you understand, but you really don’t? How might you gain understanding?
14. When you were young, what did you really like doing? Can you capture the spirit or essence of that today in your work?
15. If you were NOT here right now (in your job, etc.), what would you be doing? Like right now?
16. If you could have really high skill in one area, what would it be? Why?
17. If you could invite anyone living or dead to dinner, who would it be?
18. What are you reading?
19. Where do you need the most help? Where can you get help?
20. What topic have you not explored? What would you like to explore?

Homework: A lot of these are great *perspective questions*. Reflect on them from time to time. What subjects or areas might you wish to explore further in reading or study? Pick out a few questions that resonate. Circle or highlight them. Set a deadline to prompt yourself to go deeper. Then track your journey as you create the future you want.

Wrapping up your conversations:

The next steps for your journey.

I hope the question prompts have helped mentors and mentees to grow personally and professionally. I hope you will continue to reflect on these ideas (returning to your notes on occasion) as you move to create the future life you want and fulfill your personal mission. This kind of deep thinking and reflection can help you discover positive pathways in life and career trajectories with great possibility... and more importantly, with great *meaning*.

If you enjoyed the process, please explore the entire 40 conversation journey available in “The Encouraging Mentor” book or free online. You’re on your way. Press on with gratitude. Enjoy the journey.

A Challenge:

Whether you have served as the mentor or mentee in this process, you have both thought through some of the most important questions in life. So please consider this: *Who could you mentor now?*

As noted, no formal training is required. You do not need a structured program. The only requirement to become an excellent mentor is your willingness to ask a few prompting questions, *and then to listen*.

Who might you begin encouraging (or mentoring) in the *next two to four weeks?*

1. _____
2. _____

Again, the question prompts can open very powerful and encouraging conversations. If you wish to learn more and be more deliberate in your mentoring, more information is available at <http://encouragingmentor.com>

If you would like to see the theoretical foundation upon which nonformal mentoring is based, please see my journal article published by the *Journal of the Community Development Society*.

Raison, B. (2026): Nonformal mentoring: A theoretically grounded conceptual model leveraging Land-Grant Extension and community development expertise, Community Development.
<https://doi.org/10.1080/15575330.2026.2661183>

One last thought: Encouragement has a dual impact. If you are feeling down or sad or tired or depressed, consider talking with someone. Professional counseling is a wonderful resource. But then, consider *encouraging someone*. If you encourage someone else, it will lift your spirit as you lift theirs. Like love, the more encouragement you give away, the more you receive.

Who needs your encouragement today?