



Mirror, Mirror: 6 Development Conversations to Have With Yourself

By Lois J. Zachary

Beth had been a learning and development specialist for two years and accomplished everything she'd set out to do and more.

In addition, she had volunteered to take on extra assignments. Now that these assignments were coming to a close, her job had become routine, and she found herself bored and unchallenged.

Does this scenario sound familiar to you? Are you taking care of everyone else's development and neglecting your own? If so, you are not alone. Some of the most important conversations you will ever have will be the developmental conversations you have with yourself.

Let's look at six of these.

Conversation 1: Where do I see myself in five years? What are the possible paths I might take?

- Spend some reflective time to think about your critical satisfiers.
- Prioritize them.
- Think about where your talents are most valued.
- Look at multiple possibilities.

Beth had been so caught up in the immediacy of the day-to-day that she'd put off working on her own development. She decided to close the door to her office and go to work on Beth. On her whiteboard, she listed her five

critical job satisfiers:

1. having the resources and freedom to make things happen
2. bigger challenges
3. variety in my work
4. the opportunity to experiment and try out new approaches
5. working collaboratively with strategic partners.

None of what she wrote surprised her. Even though she knew it on a gut level, when she laid it all out and took the time to reflect on it, it was unmistakably clear that remaining in her current position and hoping that more interesting assignments would come along was not going to satisfy her much longer. There was no doubt that her talent was valued within the company, especially with mounting industry demand and a new CEO on board who was totally committed to creating a strong learning and development platform.

The more she thought about it, the more convinced she became that she wanted to be sitting at the table at the level of a senior learning director. She considered the possibilities: director of learning and development, director of talent management, director of diversity and inclusion, or learning officer at the one of the Asian offices.

Conversation 2: What do I need to learn to take the next step in my career path?

- Observe successful people who are doing what you want to do.
- Make a list of their behaviors.
- Do a personal gap analysis.
- Identify learning opportunities.

"Wherever I eventually land I am going to need to leverage my skills, enhance my leadership capability, master a potentially new domain of knowledge. Just thinking about the possibilities energizes me."

Beth started observing her boss and co-workers with seats at the executive table in her organization, as well as leaders in her church and professional associations. She decided that what she admired and respected the most about them was that they had presence.

"I can't quite define what it is, but I know it when I see it, and it is really inspiring," she said. "Someone who has charisma is fully attentive and instantly energizes those around them. That is something I need to get better at."

She was also acutely aware that they possessed what she called a strategic mindset: They consistently focused on critical issues and future direction. They created a sense of momentum and were able to build coalitions that drove results. They didn't let organizational politics distract them. They were laser-focused.

She took a hard look at her current skill sets and decided that she needed to connect with people of influence, identify them, and get noticed by them. She needed to build a fan club of advocates and networks of people who were already at the next level.

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Conversation 3: How could mentoring help me?

- Identify what it is you need to learn.
- Think about what you need from a mentor.

Beth wasn't focusing on building her skills or boosting her current performance; she wanted to concentrate on developing herself, her career path, and who she was going to become in the future. She needed to learn the political landscape: how to address the challenges of being a strategic leader, how to build the right relationships with the right people, and how to build coalitions and become a thought leader.

Mentoring seemed like a perfect option for her development needs. What she needed was a safety net and a sounding board—someone who had a good handle on the strategic

direction and capabilities of the organization, could give her direct and candid feedback, and could help her position herself.

Conversation 4: Am I ready for mentoring?

- Look yourself in the mirror and honestly consider if you have the time, willingness, and commitment to mentoring.
- Think about your prior mentoring experiences and how you can actively contribute to the success of your relationship.

Beth knew that mentoring was a commitment and wanted to make sure that she was ready to completely engage in a mentoring relationship. She considered the above questions and answered them all with a resounding "yes." To gauge her commitment, she also asked herself these additional questions:

Am I sincerely interested in learning? Am I willing to commit time to developing and maintaining a mentoring relationship? Am I willing to be open and honest with myself and another person? Can I participate without adversely affecting my other responsibilities?

Conversation 5: What kind of mentoring do I need?

- Be clear about what it is you want to learn.
- Reflect on your own learning style.
- Consider multiple options: peer mentoring, group mentoring, one-on-one mentoring, or formal or informal mentoring.

Beth thought about her mentoring options, and the idea of creating a personal mentoring board of directors (multiple mentors at the same time) seemed like a good option for her. She needed people with different skill sets and experiences in multiple organizational contexts, and people with whom she would feel safe. She was a collaborative learner and naturally thrived in learning groups. Besides, there were so many things she wanted to learn, and she wanted to learn them quickly.

Conversation 6: How do I get started?

The initial conversation when recruiting mentors is important because it sets the tone for the relationship. You will need to

- Reflect on your purpose for creating a mentoring board of directors.
- Be clear about your own goals, objectives, and intention.
- Consider what it is you are willing to contribute to the relationship.
- Identify the characteristics you are looking for in your mentors.

Beth used the same skills that had already taken her far. Instead of wasting time going around in circles, she used her networks to get recommendations of possible mentors who might help her in different ways—people who had "been there and done that."

She needed to make sure that each of them had the knowledge and expertise she needed, that they had the desire, willingness, and time to mentor her, and that she would feel comfortable with them as a mentor. She felt that four of the six people she talked to would make a good "learning fit" for her, and she asked them to participate in her mentoring board of directors. To expedite the process, she brought them all together at the same time and place and convened a meeting to begin the process.

Beth was now taking care of her own development. By making time to engage in her own reflective conversations, she identified an exciting, engaging, and challenging development opportunity that positioned her for growth. Like Beth, having your own reflective conversations will help you move forward on the path toward professional growth.

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