

The **CRAFT** of **MENTORING** with **Sayed Sadjady**



To Help Build Resilience, Focus on What You Can Control

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Sayed Sadjady, former Partner at Odgers Berndtson, and a mentor and coach at The ExCo Group, shared sharp insights with Adam Bryant. Key themes include building trust as the foundation of effective mentoring, mapping interdependencies to navigate complex organizations, and why the most successful leaders must evolve their style as their responsibilities grow.

Bryant: What do you consider to be X-factors of effective mentoring?

Sadjady: The absolute prerequisite for a successful mentoring relationship is building trust. And that includes not just privacy and confidentiality. The client has to know that you can bring value to the conversations because of your experiences. And it's a two-way-street-I have to trust that the mentee will be an active participant in the discussions and that they are committed to the process.

I also don't draw a hard line between business objectives and personal objectives, because they are so intertwined. I want to understand the context of their work and also what they are dealing with in their personal lives. Once you establish that psychological safety zone, people drop their guards, and they are more willing to try different approaches and share their hopes and fears.

Bryant: Is there a particular tool that tends to lead to meaningful unlocks in your conversations?

Sadjady: One of the tools I use focuses on interdependencies within the business environment. Most organizations have a matrix structure, and you have to be able to navigate that environment by eliminating friction so that you don't lose speed.

The tool includes clarifying who my client relies on for their success, and also who relies on my client for their success. Then we talk about the level of communication and alignment they have with those colleagues. Are they healthy, trusted relationships, or are they more transactional? That is quite often an insightful and revealing session.

Bryant: What are some of the more challenging conversations you've had to have with clients?

Sadjady: As mentors, we need to hold up a mirror to our clients, and part of that is helping them understand how they come across to other people, which may not be aligned with what they want their personal brand to be.

The challenging part is making them understand that they have to change their behavior to create more alignment, rather than always expecting others to change. And that can be hard, because these are deeply embedded behaviors. These are very successful people, but they need to realize that when you get to these top jobs, you have a broader set of responsibilities and your leadership style has to evolve to be more strategic, with less command-and-control.

Bryant: What is the best lesson you learned from someone who mentored you?

Sadjady: About 18 years ago, I learned from a mentor about the importance of context-that you have to listen very closely to fully understand someone's unique situation and circumstance. It's not just about mentoring or coaching; one should use this approach in all interactions. If you listen carefully and ask good questions, then you can customize your approach or solution to their context. That had a big impact on me.

Bryant: What is the wisest thing you've read, heard or said about leadership?

Sadjady: You have to just focus on what you can control. I learned this lesson many years ago when I worked in Consulting. I was running a large, national practice out of New York, and I put forward a strategy proposal for a major step change in the market that required significant investment. My proposal went to the firm's leadership for approval, and I waited anxiously for several weeks for their answer. At one point, somebody said to me, "Look, just focus on the dimensions that you can control."

In our careers and personal lives, it's easy to get distracted and anxious around the totality of our environment. But we only have control over part of it, and so you have to remain grounded and focus on what you can actually control and influence. That approach also helps build resilience and reduce the risk of burnout.