

The **CRAFT** of **MENTORING** with **Robby Swinnen**



You Are the CEO of Your Energy Battery. Learn How to Manage It.

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Robby Swinnen, former President of Intel Asia, and a mentor and coach at The ExCo Group, shared candid insights with Adam Bryant. Key themes include unlocking unrealized potential by holding a safe space for clients, using tools like silence and the Lifescan Wheel to drive transformational change, and managing your personal energy like the CEO of your own battery.

Bryant: What do you consider to be the secret sauce of effective mentoring?

Swinnen: If I start at the highest level, it really comes down to unlocking unrealized potential and exploring what is possible for my clients. My role is to help them see what is inside them, unlock it, and help them fill any gaps.

The biggest gift I can give my client is holding a safe space for us to do the work, and for the client to go as deep as he or she wants to go or can go. And I say both can and want because sometimes the client can go deeper, but they don't want to.

It's really understanding where that boundary is and pushing slightly on it, because that's when you can unlock the unrealized potential. That's the journey we're on. I'm a fellow traveler. I'm walking next to my client. I'm not a travel planner or a travel agency.

My role is also to be a mirror to them, this is how the world perceives you, which creates a choice for them. Is this what they want? And if the answer is yes, double down on it. If the answer is no, what's the delta between how you want to show up and how the world perceives you, and what can you do to close that gap?

Bryant: What are the most important tools and frameworks that you use?

Swinnen: The first is listening, and it's not just listening to what my client is saying. I'm also listening for what is not said, and what their energy and body language are telling me. For someone who is looking for transformational coaching, the real issues are not at the surface. They are usually three, four, or five layers deeper, and they are often what is holding them back from unlocking unrealized potential.

Silence is also a wonderful tool. There is that saying, "let the silence do the heavy lifting." It's about holding that safe space for us to do the work. Silence allows the client to reflect on what was just said and then connect that to what is inside their heart. Because when you do transformational change, you need to be able to connect head and heart.

I'll also mention the Lifescan Wheel, which I use to start conversations about how my client is doing in six different aspects of their life. The first one is self, how am I doing physically, mentally, and psychologically?

The second one is your partner. To what extent is the relationship I have with the closest person in my life nurturing me or depleting me? And what can I do about it? The third is family, and that can include kids, siblings, parents, and in-laws. Work is the fourth. The next one is friends, and the last one is community.

I'll ask my client to rate how they feel about each of these six aspects of their life and then tell me what they want to the score to be at the end of our six months of working together. Because the mentoring work we do is not just about making people better at work. It's about making them better as a whole person, however they define that. When people are happy outside of work, their performance at work improves, as well.

Bryant: What are some important lessons you learned over your career?

Swinnen: During my career, a big part of my personal brand was that people could give me the hardest problem, and I would always figure it out and get it done. That was wonderful, but it had its limitations. You need to have a broader brand that speaks to human connection. Can you build followership and galvanize the enterprise?

Ultimately, if you want to be in these most senior roles, functional expertise is table stakes. You also need to have social capital, and you build that by developing your stakeholder network.

Another important lesson for me is that I'm the CEO of my battery, to use a metaphor. You have to know what gives you energy and what drains your energy and then manage that. It's about agency.