

The **CRAFT** of **MENTORING** with **Dr. Iris Good**



The Best Way to Predict the Future is to Create It

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Dr. Iris Good, Board Chair at Good Relations India, and a mentor and coach at The ExCo Group, shared a bold philosophy on shaping outcomes rather than waiting for them, in a conversation with Adam Bryant. Key themes include aligning personal ambitions with genuine purpose, breaking overwhelming goals into manageable steps, and reframing mentoring as the art of asking better questions instead of supplying answers.

Bryant: What to you is the secret sauce of effective mentoring?

Good: I look at the relationship holistically. It's not just about ensuring there is professional strategic alignment between my client and their company. Instead, the person needs to align their goals to the company and to their dreams.

I find that people often don't really know what they want, or they think they want a certain thing, but for the wrong reasons. I once mentored someone who said from the outset that she wanted to be in a C-suite role. I said, "Okay, let's talk about it. Why do you want it? Describe to me what you think a typical day in that role would be."

At some point during the conversation, she said, "You know what? For 20 years, I wanted this job. But I'm not sure now that it's what I should want, because I actually don't think I would enjoy it." It opened up a

productive conversation about how she should align her aspirations with her life. It was a reminder that sometimes people don't always dream the right dream.

Bryant: What other themes come up often during your mentoring?

Good: I find that executives are often overwhelmed and feel that their goals are unachievable because they're too big and there are too many of them. They find it hard to prioritize. So I help them break down their goals into more bite-sized steps and achievable targets.

If you are standing in front of Everest, you can get overwhelmed by the size of the mountain. But you start at base camp and then move up to first camp and second camp. You have to create manageable steps.

Bryant: Is there a difficult conversation that you had with a client that ultimately landed in a good place?

Good: I've had many, and the common denominator is that they need to work on their soft skills. They typically are really talented and they don't necessarily need to be to improve professionally, but they've hit a ceiling in their career because people don't like working with them.

With one client in particular, I heard during my interviews about her that everyone thought she was amazing and really talented. People appreciated her capabilities, but they didn't want to talk to her, and they felt apprehensive when they needed to sit next to her.

When I dug into this a little more, people told me that she was always talking about work during events that were intended to be more social. When I brought this up with my client, she shared that she felt imposter syndrome in those settings, that she didn't belong there and didn't know what to talk about.

So we started practicing the art of making small talk, and the transition was amazing. I heard great feedback from her colleagues that people considered her much more fun to spend time with during events.

Bryant: What's the best lesson you learned from one of your mentors?

Good: I learned that mentoring is not about giving people answers. It's about asking good questions. I always say that we're like fishermen, and we need to fish for the right answers, which are within our clients.

I also learned this lesson when I first became a board director. My job was not to come up with the answers, but to ask questions of the CEO and to listen and be open. Because it's not about you. You want to empower others.

Bryant: What is the wisest thing that you've ever read, heard, or said in the context of leadership?

Good: I am an entrepreneur. I've set up several companies, and I help people set up companies, so I am always operating in uncertainty. As an investor and as a founder, you need to really look into the future, because it doesn't matter what's happening today.

So I always think being a futurist is an important part of what we do in business. How do you see the future? If you see it very negatively, you will act in a certain way. If you see it very positively, or too positively, you will act in another way.

I've always liked the saying that the best way to predict the future is to create it. That requires having a vision for the future, an understanding of the tools you have now to help create that future, and an understanding of the risks and opportunities.

It's true with everything you do, and I encourage this approach with my teams. I don't like passivity. Some people may wonder, what difference can I really make? But one person can better their own life, the lives of many other people, and sometimes the whole world. I am a great believer that reality happens first in our thoughts.