

## How to explore feelings in a mentoring conversation

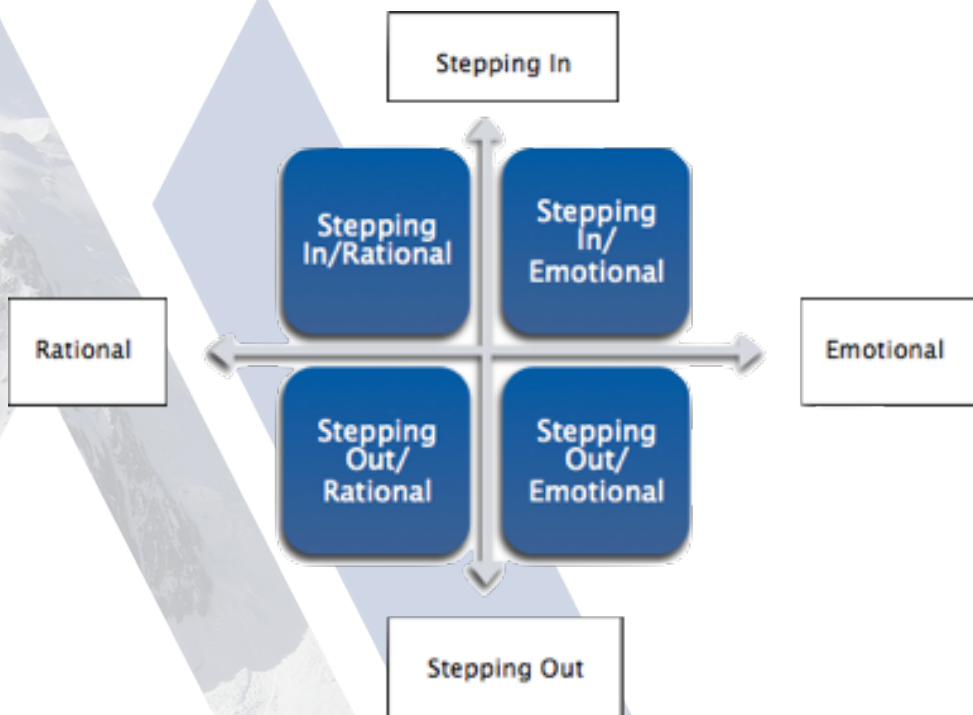
Helping your mentee to understand what emotions they are currently experiencing can be difficult, but it is important to do so. Often whilst living through turbulent times we tend to lock down as individuals and ‘put a lid’ on our emotions. What a mentor can do, with care, is to help their mentee surface and explore some of these emotions.

Mentors are not counsellors or therapists, so they must not dig deeply into areas where they could do harm. Quite simply, supporting their mentees to be able to name the emotions they are feeling and to understand them is often the first step to helping a mentee to process and regulate some of the emotions they are feeling.

Here is a technique called ‘Stepping in and Stepping out’ which uses a mixture of rational and emotional questioning to explore both the mentee’s perspective of the situation they are in, as well as facing up to the thinking and emotions of individuals who are outside of that perspective.

## Questioning from Different Perspectives: Stepping In/Stepping Out

(taken from Techniques for Coaching and Mentoring: Megginson & Clutterbuck)



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Effective mentors have the talent of keeping dialogues moving, primarily through switching perspective: they rarely allow the mentee to remain in the same mental state for long. They constantly shift the nature and style of the questions they ask to identify components of an issue.

A mentee may bring an issue from any of the perspectives shown in the diagram e.g. from what they think or what someone else is thinking/feeling either rationally or emotionally. Helping them to find good solutions depends on using questions to guide them gently from one perspective to another, until they are able to see a different and better way forward. It doesn't matter if you visit all four perspectives several times in the same conversation, or only some of them — what's important is that the mentee finds a more productive way to look at their issue.

To truly understand and deal with an issue, it is frequently necessary to explore it from each of these perspectives. A small insight into one perspective can generate progress in another and a skilled coach/mentor uses frequent shifts of questioning perspective to generate these incremental advances.

### **Stepping In**

*Stepping into* the box is about acknowledging the individual's own perspectives, joining them to try to understand what they are thinking and feeling, and why. Some people may come at an issue from a purely rational viewpoint, not wanting to explore their emotions for fear of what they might discover about themselves. Others may simply be too caught up in the emotion of a situation to think about it rationally.

### **Stepping Out**

*Stepping out* of the box is about helping them to distance themselves from the issue, either to examine it intellectually from other people's or broader perspectives; or to help them empathise with and understand the feelings of other protagonists in the situation under discussion.

### **Using the Model**

When the mentee is stuck in their thinking (or their emotions), it usually takes a shift in perspective for them to find new solutions. Observation of effective mentors tells us that they rarely spend more than four or five questions exploring an issue from the same perspective.

Stepping in is where we help a mentee explore their own thinking and feelings about an issue from either a rational or emotional perspective.

Stepping out involves asking them to take someone else's rational or emotional perspective. For example, a mentee might come to a session in some distress, perhaps having had a disagreement with a colleague. They may have a mixture of emotions, including anger, resentment, some shame

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or guilt at having lost their temper, and so on. Before they can focus on finding a solution to this problem, they will need to adopt a more rational perspective. The mentor should start with questions from the perspective the mentee is already in – for example, stepping in/emotional - **What's the dominant emotion you are feeling right now? How often do you get angry like this?**

As the mentee feels listened to and begins to calm down, the mentor has two choices. They can shift to questions that are still from the mentee's own perspective (stepping in, rational), such as - **Do you sense a pattern of events here? How important is it for you to have a good working relationship with this person?** Or they can move into looking at the other person's feelings (stepping out, emotional), asking questions, such as **How do you think this person is feeling right now?**

From either of these perspectives, it is a relatively easy step to move into stepping out/rational perspective where mentor and mentee can discuss practical ways to rebuild the damaged relationship.

Some suggested questions

<i>Stepping In</i>	
<p>What actual harm has the incident done to your self-esteem?</p> <p>How has the issue affected your ability to do the job?</p> <p>Is this a one-off incident or has it happened before?</p> <p>Are you good at your job?</p> <p>Would you like to rehearse how you are going to open the discussion?</p>	<p>What did you feel when the incident happened?</p> <p>How do you feel about it now?</p> <p>Might your feelings change on the matter?</p> <p>Do you enjoy your job normally?</p> <p>Do you have the courage to tackle the issue?</p>
<i>Rational</i>	<i>Emotional</i>
<p>How likely are colleagues to use the incident against you?</p> <p>Were there wider issues involved with the incident?</p> <p>Do you think you have a responsibility to your colleagues, your manager and yourself to confront and deal with this issue constructively?</p> <p>How could you make it easier for your manager to accept and discuss the impact of his behaviour?</p>	<p>What do you think your boss was feeling that made him behave that way?</p> <p>How do you think he feels about it now?</p> <p>How do you want your relationship between you and your boss to be?</p>
<i>Stepping Out</i>	

In the current pandemic, other questions that might be asked are:

- How does **this** situation make you feel?
- What are your thoughts on the new way of working?
- What do you feel about working from home i.e. isolated from colleagues etc.?
- How are you physically responding to the changes?
- What are you learning about others/ your organisation/ your community?

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For other interesting ways on exploring feelings, read the following blogs:

<https://psychcentral.com/blog/how-to-feel-all-of-your-pandemic-triggered-feelings/>

<https://blogs.psychcentral.com/imperfect/2017/01/how-to-communicate-your-feelings/>