



# IxDA Sydney Mentoring Program Podcast

## 01 - Introduction to Mentoring

### Audio Transcript

#### **Vinita Israni:**

Hello, and welcome to the introductory episode of The IxDA Sydney MP pod. In today's episode, we're chatting to Sam, Molly's myself, Vinita, about this podcast and what we're covering. An introduction to all of us as designers and hosts and a bit of the structure of our mentoring program through IxDA. Sydney. There's a lot of giggling in this episode since we have no guests, so hang on for some fodder and great design talk. We're going to start with some intros. And while I'm hogging the mic, I can start my name is Vinita Israni, and I'm a user experience designer. I've had the chance to work in a lot of different domains, including mobility, voice design, and currently aviation. I've recently been more focused on user research and translating those insights to interfaces, services and systems. In a digital data-driven environment. I have a background in interaction design, studio art and psychology. And my current interests lie between the intersections of design leadership, mental health and civic design. I'll hand off to the other two local leaders as part of the IxDA Sydney chapter, Molly and Sam.

#### **Molly Lewis:**

Awesome. Thank you Vinita. So as mentioned, my name is Molly Lewis. I'm a product designer with years of experience solving business problems, designing for a range of different brands and touchpoints. I originally started out more in branding world, digital design moved through UX and landed more in product design. I've worked across a range of different disciplines, both in house and agencies in our consultancy, so I'm super passionate about human behavior, ethics and solving complex problem spaces for businesses. And I'll hand over to Sam

#### **Sam Hancock:**

Christ, Sam. Get your head together!

#### **Vinita Israni:**

Sam talks to himself in third person.

#### **Sam Hancock**

Hi, guys, on Sam, I am traditionally trained in industrial and product design, and the love of websites really brought me to web design. Initially within UI development working for Microsoft Enterprise technologies. Then, seven years ago, I came to Australia and I dug deep into UX UI and service design across both product and data. The majority of my experience comes in FinTech. So love the banking.

#### **Vinita Israni:**

So we bring quite a diverse set of perspectives to the table. So I have been trained in the states and have worked in the States before coming to Australia. Molly, it sounds like you have a kiwi accent. Can you tell us a little bit more about that?

#### **Molly Lewis:**

Yep, I still haven't shaken my thick Kiwi accent while I've been living in and certainly for the last six years. But yeah, I studied at Massey University. So I did a Bachelor of visual communication there. So that was four years. And then I worked up an Auckland at DNA. That was my first internship up there. Before heading over to Sydney.



**Vinita Israni:**

That's really cool. It's really nice to hear perspectives, obviously from Australia and from Sydney, but then also from different places. And I think we have Sam, as well, who has done some work in the UK from his very thick British accent.

**Sam Hancock:**

Very thick, very thick. But my parents tell me that I do have a tinge of Australian in me in Australia. Yeah, I used to pronounce my T's like I used to say, water, now I say water, water mate.

**Vinita Israni:**

Progress, real progress.

**Sam Hancock:**

So from the UK, from London.

**Vinita Israni:**

Cool just bringing his perspectives from the UK. Cool. Our podcast clearly talks a lot about mentorship, right? And mentorship and specifically a design user experience. There's a lot of synonyms and a lot of domains that are actually quite tangential to what we're considering kind of core of design. And obviously, because this is part of IxDA. There's a focus on interaction design as well. So maybe we start off with a question that we actually ask all our hostesses, how do you define mentorship? And maybe talk a little bit about what are some of the mentorship experiences you've had?

**Molly Lewis:**

Yeah, I'm happy to jump in for Vinita. So I think mentoring is super important, especially in the design industry, because it can often, you know, people come into it from a lot of different perspectives, and not always traditionally designers. So I think having a mentor actually within the field is super important. And there's a real desire within that industry to pass on knowledge. So those that are just starting out, which I think is really important. I think I've had really good mentorship experience, not always from seeking mentors within my own company, but within the industry. Everyone seems really open to give feedback and to offer their expertise and how

**Sam Hancock:**

from, from a design perspective, I would say the experience I've had being mentored and mostly being within other organizations that I've worked out. So I've been really lucky to have people to look up to, from that perspective. As a mentor, I love to be with different kinds of people from different backgrounds. So I know you guys are across ADP less than especially IxDA as we are from by IxDA, the kind of variety of different backgrounds, from different types of roles and skill sets is incredible. So you see people coming from design, not just from a graphic designers are a key background where a lot of people come from, but you see people come from marketing, other areas as well. So to actually help them understand that, okay, it's not just a design skill set, you need in terms of how do I work on figma? How do I build out wireframes and workflows, it's kind of soft key skills that we need to go with that which is important than the frameworks that are behind what you're actually creating is vital.

**Vinita Israni:**

So Sam, it sounds like a little bit more of the thought process rather than I mean, what we've considered hard skills, right, like you mentioned, figma, and maybe the technical skills is the right term.

**Sam Hancock:**

Yeah, yeah, exactly. Yeah,



**Vinita Israni:**

I'll speak a little bit about my maybe definition of mentorship in a lot of ways. In there's a lot of POC out there between the difference between guidance and advice and coaching versus mentoring. I think there are differences, and everyone does define them differently, especially you know, if you are a design coach, or you are formally a design mentor, so pick what flavor works for you. Honestly, I think it is, again, a two way street both for the mentor and mentee. I've been in kind of a strange situation where I've never really had super formal design mentors in particular, because I've also worked in a lot of different industries. I have had mentors from those specific domains, which has been really cool. So I've had pilots that have been mentors, I've had product managers, which really opens up your mind in terms of looking at a different perspective. And coming to the table with a different skill set. Sam mentioned for IxDA, we do a one on one mentoring program. But ADPlist is a great place. And also just during COVID. I know that a lot of leaders actually set up office hours and advertised it through their Twitter's. So because we were all going virtual, it was actually a really interesting way of people giving back time to mentor guide coach, other people and just have time slots where it could be social or be oriented professionally. But I thought that was a really good first step to opening up

**Molly Lewis:**

100% I think, you know, listening to each other as a soft skill that we all need to practice. And that can be taught from anyone, not just within the design community as well as developing a learning mindset.

**Vinita Israni:**

So curious there. When we start off, maybe we're talking a little bit more about a formal mentor mentee relationship, what are the expectations you have of each party.

**Sam Hancock:**

So as a mentor, I would expect for that mentor, helping guide the mentee to identify what goals that they want to focus on in particular timeframe. So that could be a 90 day timeframe like the IxDA program that we're running. It could be a short, two weeks timeframe, depending on if you want to get say a new role or build out your CV or portfolio. So that's the initial step to actually identify what goals that mentee wants to do next is to motivate and inspire the ways to actually build strategies around that. Thirdly, to look at how you can broaden the mentees perspective and potential way of thinking. So, from my experiences when speaking to mentees, they can sometimes have tunnel vision to say okay, I want to achieve this so that more ask them okay, what why, why do you want to achieve this? And what are the different strategies and ways to actually achieving that because if you're focusing just solely on that one thing, and you don't get it, it can be quite heartbreaking for that particular mentee. And then I guess Lastly, you need to be there as a mentor to help support in achieving their goals. They fail at achieving those goals from time to time, and that you can be there to kind of put your arm around their shoulder and provide them with that extra support that you get.

**Vinita Israni:**

I think you make a really good point there, Sam about kind of the lens of some of these mentor mentee relationships as well. Like you mentioned, some mentee might come to the table with a specific tunnel vision of what they want. And that honestly might be developed over months and years, right? Like they might identify something that they really want to work on. And sometimes you need that length of relationship with a mentor for them to understand where you're coming from, to want that kind of skill set, right, or to want that kind of perspective. So it's, it's a bit of a balance, but then there are things that are a bit more tangible, like you mentioned, where it's potential, like two weeks sprint saying I want to focus on my portfolio or my CV, in particular. So it's interesting to think about that in terms of also our IxDA. Mentoring Program, because we hold a 12 week program, so about three months, and what are goals that are realistic, right? And what kind of expectations can we set up in three months, you cannot birth a child in three months, but you could birth a portfolio. So to consider when you're setting up some of these expectations in these goals.

**Sam Hancock:**

Elephants can birth a child in three months.

**Vinita Israni**

But elephants have the longest gestational period of any animal in the world, which I believe is two or three years. But

**Sam Hancock**

two years, not three months, maybe it's dolphins.

**Vinita Israni**

Okay, dolphins, so if you want to be a dolphin and not a unicorn, you may birth the portfolio in three months.

**Sam Hancock**

All right, very good link there.

**Molly Lewis**

I think as long as you bring something to the table and it for especially for your initial conversation, you know, that's a good starting point. But it's definitely a two-way street and don't expect either the mentee make all the effort each time or the mentor, you know, to expect them to lead the conversation needs to be equal. And I think it's good to sit up structure in terms of, you know, the agenda and priorities that you want to potentially achieve.

**Vinita Israni**

I really like that Molly, that kind of, I'm gonna call it an egalitarian model. I just took an ethics class, I've learned all these big words I now have to use. But I like that perspective that the onus is both on the mentor and the mentee, especially because I think traditionally we have been told that the onus is on the mentee. And I do think there are some relationships where that might make more sense. I think we live in a society where it's a bit of civic duty coming from the mentor to say, hey, I want to pass on this information, but also from the mentee who's actually motivated to act on that. And you know, set up those meetings and have an open mind to listen. So I really like that perspective. I think the end of the day, the question just becomes who sets up the agenda invite because that seems to be the sticking point to which how we set up a cadence and stay on a schedule to actually keep communicating?

**Molly Lewis**

Yeah, that's a really good point. And I think, obviously something to discuss, in your initial conversation when you first meet your mentee or mentor is yet to really establish a clear cadence on when you want to meet and what date and day and whether that's in person now or in a virtual city.

**Vinita Israni**

What is this in person you speak of?

**Molly Lewis**

How to be human, I don't know

**Vinita Israni**

how to adult and look like a human outside of your home quite difficult. One, one thing I will say that I've noticed from previous mentoring relationships is that your style of mentorship may not be the receiving style of your mentee. And I'll give an example. I've mentored a designer previously, who I think I'm someone who lays out a lot of plans, everything is a bit more by the schedule schedules can totally slip,

there's leeway in there. But there was a sense of kind of getting things done too, that clearly had value to show progression and a particular skill set. And at the end of the day, the mentee wanted it to be a bit more freeform. And even though we had that cadence of meeting and you know I was pushing certain design exercises and stuff like that, I realized that that's not the best way that that relationship actually worked. And that relationship in particular was actually more about inspiring rather than, you know, pushing down design exercises down someone's throat design exercises are quite hard to swallow. You have to chew really difficultly so don't recommend that but it is something that I've learned is that you may have to over a couple of initial meetings, figure out the style that you want the relationship to follow. And that's part of setting up expectations too. And it's perfectly okay if you want it just to be a chat, if you want your mentorship experience just to be coffee chats where you're bouncing ideas off of each other, or using that person for motivation or inspiration doesn't always have to be guidance or advice as well. But it's nice to be upfront about it. I think it helps both the mentor and mentee in that way.

### **Molly Lewis**

Yeah, I think that's a great point, for lack of a better term sort of ground rules to begin with, there's definitely helpful, especially you don't want either side of the party to feel like bed, or not want to turn up if they haven't completed their homework or haven't done a certain task that they thought that they needed to. But just having that clear communication at all times, I think is super important.

### **Sam Hancock**

And I guess that kind of lends itself nicely on to setting up those initial goals before you meet with the mentor. For the first time. I would I would say the first meeting, I'd say the last time I did IxDA, I was paired with a great mentee called Alice. And she came to our first meeting with about 100, post it notes. And we were sat in a coffee shop, had a couple of drinks. And she was just putting up all of these different post it notes in terms of like the series essentially like UX in the process with us catch up asking question after question about what do you think about this? Where do you think I should go with these particular goals and outcomes. And she was essentially doing a live affinity map in terms of where she would expect to go within the next 90 days. I'm not expecting that to be done by everyone because Alice's she knows she's a super prepared person almost too prepared. But to have those ideas within within your within your head or jotted down as a as a few notes that you can take into your first meeting is a really good idea to showcase what you actually want to get out of your free month mentorship.

### **Molly Lewis**

Yeah, love that don't hold back, I think Go for it, try and get as much out of it as possible, right? It's only three months. And even though that may sound long, it goes pretty fast. So be ambitious.

### **Vinita Israni**

Is there really such a thing as too prepared, because I'm that person. And I appreciate you, Alice, so call out to you. But also, while our structure is set up as three months, the relationship can also go on for longer, right? So that's also something to keep in mind is that if you have some goals that are maybe shorter, maybe longer, what is actually actionable? And if y'all really click and yes, I used to all I grew up in Texas, then that relationship can actually continue and blossom into something.

### **Sam Hancock**

Yeah, if both parties agree, yeah, especially when you're actually looking to set up that initial cadence with your mentor mentee, we started off with probably to weekly catch ups, just to check in, see how everything was going. And then after about six weeks, we then reduced the cadence down to every three weeks or every four weeks, depending on where we're at. And we still catch up every couple of months just to see how things are going. So that communication is still there. And yeah, it's good. More of a friend and a mentor, mentor mentee relationship now, thank you. Actually, I

### **Molly Lewis**



I think that's really rewarding when you can still stay in contact with your mentees or with your mentors. Because, yes, I got a note a few months ago saying the person a mentee actually got their first job and design. So that was super exciting. And just hearing that message was really rewarding to know that, you know, she accomplished her goal and got her foot into the industry, which is super exciting.

**Vinita Israni**

That's awesome. I love hearing these success stories. While we hear success stories, we also know nine out of 10 startups fail. So can you talk a bit about some mentoring experiences that may not have gone well, but maybe parts of things that you could do differently or change to improve on them in the future? I can start I think my example of the differences in styles is was quite a significant one for me. When I left that relationship that kind of more formal mentor mentee relationship. We're still friends. I felt like I was a failure as a mentor. cuz I couldn't show decisively at the end of that, that there were these metrics that we didn't meet. One, don't be hard on yourself, but to also just recognize that there's different styles and that as a mentor or a mentee, you might have to adjust.

**Sam Hancock**

And sometimes gills down properly aligned. So someone may be looking at going deep within user research and myself while I'm skilled within user research, but I don't say I'm a UX researcher, per se. So that has been one of the mentoring relationships that I did have. And I unfortunately, couldn't cater to give advice, which she really needed.

**Vinita Israni**

That's a great call out. And I think one of the best things of even being matched up with a mentor is that maybe they can direct you towards other people, that you can have a chat with that have those skill sets or have some advice or guidance in a specific sphere that the mentor may not.

**Molly Lewis**

Yeah, that's a great point, I think one of my main challenges was probably a bit of a communication breakdown. And I think an example I can think of was when I was a mentee. And I had a lot of pressure on myself to complete the homework and tasks that I felt I couldn't attend the session, because I hadn't completed it yet. You know, not having that regular cadence just meant that the mentoring relationship fell off the checks a little bit. So it was even a bit more intimidating to meet up again, and kind of go through the goals and go back to the drawing board.

**Sam Hancock**

That sometimes isn't the end of the world, right? If he can't complete certain action items and tasks, but as a mentee don't feel pressured, or down, because you're not actually in those particular goals. Because your your path may change on that 90 days where you are working towards a certain goal. Or again, you can pivot and run through with the mentor about those particular areas. And if it is a UI task that you you're working towards, then and you don't finish those UI tasks, then that can be just addressed within their catch ups and meetings.

**Molly Lewis**

100% Yeah, I think that's a really good point. And I think that was why it was challenging for me, because I kind of put the weight of the world on my shoulders. And, you know, you need to realize life happens all the time. We all have jobs as well. So this is an extra curricular thing, and there's no pressure or no reason to be super hard on yourself, to not make their meeting

**Vinita Israni**

100% I think we're we've all realized over the last two years that mental health is also a very important and significant part of our lives. So let's keep that in mind. And, obviously be respectful of each other's time. We're all being gracious with our time here, both from a mentee and mentor perspective. So thank



you so much, Sam, and Molly, for having this little chat with me today, kind of introducing the IxDA Sydney mentoring program, but also just talking about design mentoring, in general, it was awesome to just kind of have a little bit of a a chit chat, as I know, you're gonna hear our voices moving forward,

**Sam Hancock**

and Vinita where can I find all of the great resources and materials for mentoring? And I IxDA?

**Vinita Israni**

What a great question, Sam. Let me let me put in my plug. So I IxDA [sydney.org/mentoring](http://sydney.org/mentoring) actually has some really, really great resources including guidelines for mentors, mentees, mentoring canvas, as well as some resources from a mentoring one on one workshop that's been done in the past and even A skills matrix a template essentially to start to hone in on certain skills that you want to improve. Again, these are just resources, they're at your disposal, you can use them to get an idea or use them as inspiration and feel free to change them to match your situation and your skill set. The other thing I want to put out a call for is Dear Abby letters so about halfway through our program, which will be mid April, we are going to have a podcast episode where we are going to be answering your questions in the states this is called Dear Abby I don't know if it's called it's going to be called Dear Vinita in na ta Django vocal vocalizing it to oh gosh, well,

**Sam Hancock**

A bit of autotune on there and it would be grand.

**Vinita Israni:**

Please do not put Auto-Tune in your emails to us asking for this either. Feel free to send in your questions to mentoring at [www.IxDASydney.org](http://www.IxDASydney.org) and we will answer them in our podcast episode in mid April. And if you would like to be kept anonymous on those we can do that as Well, that's all for now. Thanks, folks.

**Sam Hancock:**

Hey, I'm Sam Hancock.

**Molly Lewis:**

I'm Molly Lewis.

**Vinita Israni:**

And I'm the Vinita Israni, and you're listening to the IxDA Sydney mentoring program podcast.

Transcribed by <https://otter.ai>