



IxDA Sydney Mentoring Program Podcast

06 - Erin Turner

Audio Transcript

Sam Hancock

Hello, and welcome to IxDA Sydney MP pod, a show that guides you through the stages of design mentorship, whether you're just starting out and looking at getting into the industry, or you're a seasoned designer. I'm Hancock and in this episode, Molly and Vinita are talking to Erin Turner about the power of feedback. And when the right rituals are put in place, it can really drive the feedback culture of that organization. Erin is a UX leader and organizational psychologist with over 15 years experience. Erin started her career consulting in UX research and design across a range of industries before moving client side to set up and lead various UX and service design teams. Erin's passion is in delivering impactful and purposeful design for human centered and empathetic innovation, and helping practitioners build confidence and skill for our coaching and mentoring. Let's jump straight in.

Molly Lewis

Hey, Erin, how are you going?

Erin Turner

I'm very well. Thank you. How are you?

Molly Lewis

Good. Thank you. We're super excited to have you on the podcast today. So Erin, a question we asked all I guess, when they joined the podcast is what was some key learnings from 2021? And what are some habits that you want to roll into this new year?

Erin Turner

Yeah, it's a great question causing me to reflect on last year. First key learning is take a holiday when you get the opportunity. I think with borders, closing and whatnot, you just got to jump on that opportunity when it presents itself. Secondly, change doesn't have to be that scary, I made quite a quite a change in my career. And you know, it's quite daunting at first, but it has really opened my eyes to trying different things taking on new challenges and the energy that you can get from new challenges.

Molly Lewis

And since we're talking about I say, mentoring, we'd love to start off with what does mentoring mean to you?

Erin Turner

It's a it's a great question. Mentoring, to me means a relationship where you can seek guidance and counsel on various issues that are related to you know, whatever aspects that the mentor is covering. And likewise for the mentor. It's a relationship where you can provide guidance to somebody who could learn from your experience or be encouraged to think differently about certain topics, and you can provide that guidance to think differently.

Molly Lewis

Yeah, that's a great answer. And do you have any memorable mentoring experiences of your own?

Erin Turner

Yeah, I have a few. And I guess I'm in a different situation where I don't see myself as having one particular mentor, I have quite a few different mentors. And sometimes people probably don't even

realize that I see them as a mentor. But, you know, having worked in this space, for quite a few years, now, I've come across some really great, you know, peers, and managers and practitioners. And I think we can learn a lot from everyone. It doesn't have to be, you know, kind of a more experienced versus less experienced kind of dynamic, I think we learn a lot from each other. And sometimes just chatting through your thoughts or your problems with somebody else can really help prompt you to think differently about things. So the one that stands out to me the most is when I was on a training session, we were practicing some reflective supervision practices. And the person I'd buddied up with, for this particular exercise, it was a five minute exercise. And I presented a problem that it was on my mind at the time. And they just played the problem back to me with a different, slightly different slant on it. And it opened up a whole new way of thinking about the problem, which really impacted me and I don't think that person in that training course realized how impactful it was. But yeah, it doesn't have to be a formal relationship, you can get mentoring from lots of different places.

Vinita Israni

So on that, as you're getting mentoring from lots of different places, how do you recommend finding kind of specific mentors for different aspects or different skill sets?

Erin Turner

I think it comes down to putting yourself out there broadening your network, I think something really important about the mentoring relationship is that it has to be a good fit. You have to, you know, understand where your mentors coming from, have some kind of synergy with their way of thinking into their values. And likewise, a mentor needs to be able to gel and work with the person they're mentoring and have that synergy with values. So, you know, they're great mentoring programs like the ISDA program. I think that's a fantastic tool, but sometimes you might find mentoring relationships. In the places you don't necessarily expect to find them. So, you know, that synergy almost needs to be organic. And whilst you know, you can go out and explicitly look for a mentor and ask for a mentor, it doesn't just have to be the only way.

Vinita Israni

So to that point, have you ever walked away from a mentor mentee? Or do you have any recommendations to do so?

Erin Turner

Yeah, again, I mean, this has been a situation where I haven't explicitly gone out and looked for mentors. But you know, in certain work situations where working with various different managers, I've realized that that just wasn't a synergy. There are different value sets different way of thinking about things. Whilst it's really good to understand different ways of working, and different ways of thinking about certain topics. Sometimes you get to the point where you're like, I just don't think I can act on that point of view. So for me, in particular, I'm quite a humanistic person. I do tend to think empathetically about situations and put other people in perspective, but I have worked with other people who you could consider to be a mentor, who don't take that point of view, and it was quite at odds with my value sets. So at that point, I decided I wasn't going to pursue a mentor and more formal mentoring process with that particular person. So I think it's really good that both the mentor and the mentee should reflect on what they're getting out of the relationship and whether it's going to work or is it going to be a case where you're just going to be at odds the whole time. And whilst there is value in being challenged that fundamental value level, I think that would probably set up quite a bit of tension rather than success.

Molly Lewis

That makes sense. And I guess, Well, speaking of ways of working and working with other people love to talk to you and about giving and receiving feedback. And the importance of that. Yeah, sure. So what is the importance of gaining feedback as a junior designer?

Erin Turner

Yeah, it's I often say to my junior team members, or my students who come through various programs, getting feedback, and acting on it is one of the best skill sets, you can have to set yourself up for success in your career, just being open to the feedback showing that you take it on board, and you can improve off the back of it really sets up that trusted relationship where the person who's giving you feedback feels like it is contributing to something and it is, you know, you're listening to it, you're valuing it, and you're using it to make yourself a better practitioner. So it's such an important skill set at any point of your career.

Molly Lewis

And I think, especially as a junior designer, it can be a bit daunting to share your work, put your ideas and your thinking out there. Do you have any recommendations for people that, you know, are beginning their career to share work with

Erin Turner

others? Yeah, totally. And I remember back to my early days of my career, where as a junior consultant, and my work wasn't just being reviewed by my peers, but it was being reviewed by my clients, which is a different dynamic altogether, you know, the people who desperately trying to impress and have them have confidence in you to review to for them to review your work can be quite daunting. But my my biggest advice is to separate yourself from your work, like, yes, we need to take pride in our work, we need to put what we can into it. But at the end of the day, your work is a representation of a lot of different processes that are going along on those such as requirements being gathered, research that you've either collected, or other people have collected for you different, you know, constraints from technology and whatnot. So whilst you need to be proud of your craft, and proud of what you deliver, you also need to step back and say, well, this will be better if I open myself to taking feedback on my work, not necessarily on me, but on my work. And that way, you can have a bit more of an open mindset and be a bit more accepting of the feedback that's coming through.

Molly Lewis

Yeah, definitely. And I think especially as designers, we're very critical of ourselves and our own work and also can become very precious of what we put out there.

Erin Turner

Yeah, and it's important to note that you need to be proud of it, you need to, you know, want to put your best foot forward and produce the best thing for your client. But at the same time, if you're going to shut yourself down from feedback at won't be the best thing.

Molly Lewis

For me, what are some, I guess, implications of not sharing feet? Not sharing your work in front of your own teammates or, or peers in a design team?

Erin Turner

Yeah, I think firstly, the most important factor is building that feedback culture. So if you're not going to put your work, you know, objectively criticize my work, not me forward to your team, how can you expect other people to be doing that? So, you know, by putting yourself out there and just making yourself quite vulnerable by you know, putting your work out there to be critiqued by your peers, you're really kind of shutting down any opportunity or you're not sending a signal to other team members that this is what we do, and this is how we make us And our work better. Secondly, you're not going to get that valuable feedback, you're not going to get those things that you know, somebody with a fresh set of eyes can see, but you can't see because you've got your head buried in the detail. So there's nothing more valuable than having somebody who's distanced from the project to come in and say, That doesn't look quite right. Or how does that work? Because it doesn't quite make sense to me. So you know, that objective and

contaminated view can really help you pick up some things that seem quite obvious to other people, but you miss because you're just too involved in the work. And then I think, thirdly, it's building the trusted relationship as well. If you're putting your work out to your colleagues and saying, Can you please give me some advice on what I need to do differently? Or just help me with this problem? Because it doesn't seem quite right to me or, on the other hand, this seems great, can you just check that I'm not, I haven't got my head in the clouds before I go and present it to my clients. It is sending a signal to your teammates that I trust you to do this, and I value your input. And then when they do the same to you in return, you've got this cycle of reciprocity, and building trust and helping investing in developing yourself and your teammates.

Molly Lewis

Yeah, I love that. And I love sort of supporting each other and then creating that safe space. I guess for maybe more introverts within the team. How do you suggest that other team members set up a safe space for those other designers to speak up?

Erin Turner

Yeah, it's a great question. It seems quite topical. At the moment, I've seen quite a few things on LinkedIn. And you know, introverts exploring an extroverted world and whatnot. And as a self confessed, introvert, I've been there, I've done that, particularly when you feel like you've got the weight of the world to impress clients and colleagues, whatnot, I think it comes down to that culture, that feedback culture, one of the things that I have found that has quite helped me along the way, and I still use it when I'm in a situation that I'm not quite 100% Confident in is to ask questions, rather than point out things that may or may not look right, but ask questions about the design or about the process or about a problem that you're trying to solve through the design. So you know, say you're a junior team member, and you're in a peer review, and somebody whose work you were doing somebodies work from a couple of levels above you, or even maybe your managers work, a way to kind of break down that kind of fear factor is to just ask questions, or why did you arrive at that decision? Or what was the problem that you're trying to solve through this solution, or this particular component, and that can be a less confrontational way than saying, that doesn't make sense to me, or that's not the right component to solve that issue. So there are different ways that you can kind of take a softer approach that you might feel more comfortable with, or maybe it's the dynamic maybe, you know, an online forum for peer reviews, such as through teams, maybe setting up the session so that everyone puts their hand up to ask a question, are you putting in comments to ask the question or to provide that feedback? I think, you know, the message that will the question was kind of set up for if you're an introvert that what can you do? But I think there's also a question for if you're not an introvert, or you're a manager of people who are a little bit hesitant to provide feedback, what can you do to set up the environment, so they feel more comfortable? So I think it's incumbent on both sides of the coin, or both sides of the table to make the environment easier for people for everyone to contribute?

Molly Lewis

Yeah, and you touched on a really good point there about, you know, if it's online or offline, how best to ask questions or give feedback, do you think the environment has changed quite a lot with working from home? And that feedback culture?

Erin Turner

Yeah, I think so. I mean, I'm only really drawing on the experiences of the teams I've been in since we've gone to a more remote situation. And I think, you know, depending on the individual, some people, they might feel easier that they can kind of turn the camera off and almost be invisible. Whereas for others, it might be harder to put your hand up, and, you know, interrupt the conversation. We've all had those experiences of accidentally talking over other people in a team's call. So I think that's where it comes down to what works best for you in each of the situations if you're in face to face team environment is using post it notes, and everyone handing their post it notes in at the end of the session, a better way for

the team dynamic. Or if you're on remote, putting your hands up putting your question in the comment field. Is that better for that team dynamic? Again, it doesn't have to be the same rule for everyone. Each person could have a different approach to it. But the important thing is that you're getting the opportunity to ask questions where you need to so that you can learn and be able to provide the feedback for the benefit of your team and everyone has that equal opportunity to do so.

Molly Lewis

Yeah, I guess it's a lot of testing right and learn as you go and iterate within your environments. Yeah. And okay, let's just say, as a designer, you put yourself out there and presented your work to say internal to the client, what happens when you receive bad feedback?

Erin Turner

Yeah. Do you mean like the part after or the blood rushes to your feet? Like you've frozen? Yeah, it's, it's a really interesting opportunity to separate yourself from the feedback. I mean, I've been in that situation where the client has pointed out something really obvious that I just completely missed and you kind of go into that, almost panic stations moment. But the best advice I can give in that situation is to, again, step back from the design like it's not a necessarily then criticizing you, it's, you know, the work. So you know, play the ball, not the player and get curious, like, I have read and listened to quite a few of Brene, Browns podcasts. And I really recommend her learnings, one of my friends and former colleagues got me on to Brene Brown, and you know, she has this concept of getting curious and rumbling in that space. So you know, when you do feel a bit threatened or people you feel like people are critiquing you or giving you feedback that is quite confronting, get curious start to ask, why to start to understand where are they coming from? Why are they saying this? Is that something that I've missed in, you know, think more objectively about what is being told to you, because, you know, if you get defensive, and you start to go into those panic station moments, you're not going to progress, you're not going to do the right thing by your design. So yeah, step back, get curious, ask questions, why? Maybe there was a miscommunication there that has led you down the wrong path that you won't know that if you don't delve into what's actually going on here, where's the feedback coming from?

Molly Lewis

I really like that, you know, stay curious and continue the conversation rather than, I guess, freaking out or freezing, which is can be hard to do. And I guess in those situations where you might not have the answer, what do you think's good advice or tactics to do in that situation?

Erin Turner

Yeah, deep breath, take a deep breath. And yet, come back with again, exploring where are they coming from, make sure you understand the feedback or the the information before you try to work with it. Because again, you need to make sure that you're working, you're not working off a miscommunication, you're working with the facts. And then there's nothing wrong with saying, right, okay, that's, that's something different that we didn't consider, you might not have the time to figure it out there. And then so you might say, let us come back to you or we need more information, or I need to think about this a little bit more before I can come back with a proper solution. Try not to be rushed into giving advice or a solution. I think one of the things that is quite overlooked in design, UX design, UI design, is the amount of time we need to think through these things like this is, you know, design is the output, but there's a lot of thinking that goes into the process. And we can't be rushed to do that, because you're not going to get a good outcome. So don't be afraid to say, alright, this is new information, or this is different information, we need to think about this is it okay, if we come back to you with more questions to make sure we fully understand the situation here.

Vinita Israni

I think that's great, and especially a chicken Brene. Brown, she also does a lot around sympathy versus empathy. And so to your point, how do we start to build either the sympathy or the empathy? Or if you

could talk a little bit about both for our clients to understand what perspectives they're bringing to the table and potentially putting their feedback in context as well?

Erin Turner

Yeah, sure. So with clients, you know, every, every good design project will, will start with understanding the business needs, the stakeholder needs and what they're trying to understand or what they're trying to achieve through the work you're doing. So hopefully, in that stage of the project, you've got the empathy with your stakeholders, you've spent the time understanding where they're coming from and what they're trying to achieve. And you've got some indication of what else might be at play, you know, what kind of pressures they have on them from above, or below or beside, and all the different things that could be influencing how they are responding to what you're presenting. And I've got an example of a project where, you know, we went and set up this amazing project, it was really well thought through. And in a very first stakeholder interview, we realized that the stakeholders aren't on board, they're on completely different wavelengths to the project team. And we went back we said, we need to stop like we can't go any further and you need to get on the same page with the stakeholders otherwise, this is going to be a really problematic presentation when we come back at the end of the project. So you know, there can't be enough said tip for understanding your stakeholders right at the start before you've you know, done any of the the user empathy or the design work. So I think don't underestimate that but also keep your stakeholders close as well. So have the regular check ins with them. Are we on the right crack? Is this meeting our needs? Has anything else come up with started this project that we need to be aware of? And just make sure that you're you're keeping regular contacts weekly project up? It's great not only for a status report to see how we're tracking against timelines and budget, but also, again, is there anything else we need to be aware of? Or did we get it right? When we interpreted what you said as being x y Zed, on that note, as well, after you've done the stakeholder analysis component of your work, play it back to them. And it's also a good opportunity if you're, you're interviewing different stakeholders, or engaging with different stakeholders separately, to play it back so that everyone's aware of all the different things that you're trying to achieve for the business. So yeah, keep them close, play it back, make sure you understand them before you do anything else with the project.

Vinita Israni

On that note, it sounds like you're recommending that designers hone in on almost like program skills or better stakeholder management skills. Can you talk a little bit about what skill sets you recommend honing in on specifically as a junior designer?

Erin Turner

Yeah, stakeholder management is key, I think it's key to probably any kind of program that you work in, you need to understand or you need to be aware of and understand what your stakeholders want to achieve from what you're working on. And equally, it's important to call out where you're not going to achieve what they're wanting you to. So again, you're trying to avoid that final presentation awkwardness where they're like, Thanks, but that's not what we're after. So yeah, interview skills definitely is in there, you know, we have a lot of interview skills for engaging with and empathizing with our users. Equally, they're important to our stakeholders to understand them. Something else that is good to understand when starting a project and engaging with stakeholders is where where might the pockets of stakeholders sit? Is it better to get all the stakeholders together so that they can understand where the tensions within the business sit? Or is it better to interview them separately so that they can speak more freely, and you can do the analysis to see where the tension points might sit. And on that note, it's quite important to make sure the most influential person is interviewed separately, otherwise, you just, you know that people will defer to the most influential person in the room. So yeah, interview skills, workshopping skills, I think, on the point of stakeholder management as a kind of global bucket of skills, it would come down to communication and keeping them posted, keeping them up to date, making them feel like they are involved in the process, and giving them the confidence that you know what you're doing.

Molly Lewis

That's definitely important that makes you think of kind of stakeholder mapping. And it doesn't necessarily need to be shared, but internally could help, you know, in a great, great deal, especially for a team project. I think that rolls nicely into, you know, we must always take clients or stakeholders on the journey, I guess, how do you accept, as a designer pivots or, or feedback to your designs that you might not have intended? or wanted?

Erin Turner

Yeah. It can be hard, it can be hard to have, you know, things change around you that you haven't necessarily accounted for. Or it requires rework, particularly when you put so much into your work. And you think, you know, you nail the solution really cleverly, and it happens, right? Like it, we're working in dynamic environments, we have to, we have to ensure that we're agile enough to change touch when needed. But I think, you know, from my consulting days, and even internally, if things change around you, you need your stakeholder to understand the implications of that. And that's not to say, no, no, it can't be done. I mean, technically, things might be able to be done. But from a design perspective, maybe there's a whole bit of the research you missed that you need to go back, maybe you know, they're trying to tackle a different target audience now, which renders your research only half complete, having that discussion with your stakeholders to ensure they fully understand the implications of the change. And what that means that any change in scope to your work or any change in timeframes is really important. And they might come back saying, Sorry, we can't, we can't do that. And then it's a point of negotiation to say, well, what can we still deliver to you that's going to be useful and practical, and it's not going to kind of render my efforts useless. So again, it comes down to that stakeholder management, open communication and working as a team.

Molly Lewis

It's a fine balance. And I think also, just being aware of your own biases as a designer and your designer, ego is important.

Erin Turner

Yeah, totally. And then, you know, there's the other aspect where you might, it might just be a difference of opinion as to the best way to solve a particular problem. And that's where you bring your data in light. The beautiful thing about UX design is that it's it's empirical. It's based on data. It's, you know, you've got real people hopefully, and to explain their thinking and their behaviors. So you've got that data to go back with so you've got some tools up your sleeve there.

Vinita Israni

On a slightly different note, as we were talking about feedback, culture and team I think especially through COVID, one of the questions that has definitely crossed my mind is, what do you think is the glue that holds a lot of teams together, specifically, maybe design teams, and how that's changed over time?

Erin Turner

Yeah, COVID certainly has changed things. Speaking from experience, when COVID happened, we had quite a good team culture, we had our daily rituals, our weekly rituals that for a few weeks weren't happening, because, you know, we were just working from home for this little bit of time, no one really knew how long would be working remotely from and we all kind of had the expectation that we'll get back in to the office in just a few weeks time. And then when that didn't eventuate, we thought outside the square and thought, Okay, well, how do we, how do we keep this, we miss it, we missing each other daily. So we shifted some of those rituals, online, we used to have daily 3pm Tea Time, obviously, that wasn't, you know, standing around the kitchen bench and having tea together. But we still had, you know, a couple of times a week, the 15 Minute catch up in our calendar, where we could just, you know, sit and chat. And so there was a bit of adjustment to do. But that worked quite well, I think, because we had the basis of a great team culture before COVID hit. I think if the team culture wasn't so great, and then COVID

hitch, then it would have been a bit more of a struggle. But I think it's incumbent on all of us, whether it's the project team, or your design community, your design team to make the effort to catch up regularly. And you know, think about all those times where you just have a chat in the office. And it wasn't work time you weren't chatting about work, but you're chatting about people's weekends and whatnot. We've kind of missed that it has to be purposeful and scheduled now that we're working predominantly remotely. So how can you get that back? Is it the 15 Minute check in twice a week in the mornings, where you just come together is it you know, the half hour game session on Friday afternoon, night, we it's kind of almost like we're working at the one desk for eight hours a day at home, every minute has to be filled with productive work. But you know, think about the times you're in the office and you had those 15 or 10 minute breaks, just chatting to somebody in the hallway or passing somebody in the kitchen, that that productive time because it's connection, it's network building, it's taking a breather, it's clearing your head, all these things are going to make you more productive in the time that you sit at your desk. So I think from a team culture perspective, maintain those ceremonies, get the online alternative going and you know, make it fun, so that people want to join.

Molly Lewis

Yeah, definitely, it's so important to keep the team culture rituals, especially as new joiners joining virtually as well. I did have a question, you know, on the importance of actually carving out time for thinking time, or for being creative.

Erin Turner

It's really important. And as I alluded to earlier, the people who don't do design tend to think that design is the output, when in fact, it's a process. And a lot of that process is spent thinking through quite complex problems. I mean, some of the the problems that our teams deal with, really, you know, new problems or, or things that don't necessarily have a precedent or you know, they've got constraints that haven't necessarily presented in the same way earlier. It's, you know, we have design systems, we have libraries that we can use to actually put the design together, but the process and the bulk of the work is in the thinking, Are we designing the right solution? Are we actually tackling the right problem? Do we know enough about this space? And then, you know, now that we know enough, and we know that we've got the right problem and the right solution? How do we make it work and come to life. So it is quite a challenge. And, you know, one that I've seen throughout most of my career, but I think it comes down to your scoping and your your commitments to your clients and the people you're delivering to, if that you're asked to do a particular project, you need to factor in the time to think and you know, maybe it's time after each research session, you have to just kind of sit and ponder what you learned and what the insights might be. Or maybe it's you know, a week after you've concluded your research, do the analysis and the synthesis properly, to ensure that you're coming up with the right insights. Or maybe it's, you know, blocking out certain amount of time after each meeting in your calendar to sit and think about the implications and what it means for your design. I know some of the calendars of my team. And teams in the past have just been horrific in one meeting to the other. And you know, you don't have any time to do the thinking or the work. But your project team is not going to tell you to do that. They don't know what you do necessarily. So you need to carve it out for yourself and make sure that's accounted for in the planning.

Vinita Israni

Yeah, I think that's a really important point. And I've definitely heard like thinking time as whitespace so just space kind of, you know, as designers where we like to draw and let things go wild. And so obviously that whitespace is pretty unstructured, and you can come back From a range of skill set, so kind of what is that balance between being kind of a generalist and specialist specifically in that whitespace, like when you're strategizing when you're thinking through different concepts, maybe specifically for a junior designer that may not have as much whitespace as they want?

Erin Turner

Yeah, well, it depends on how you work as well. So for example, some people need to just go and lock themselves in a room for a little while to think about and digest what they've learned. Whereas other people need to talk it out, or whiteboard it, or they need to go and get inspiration from other places, or, you know, everyone, there's no one way of doing that. And I think it's quite individual. But and it might change over time as well. I remember, as a junior consultant, the best time I had for digesting things was when I was consulting in a different city and I had the flight home, I'd get off the plane, and I'd have a different way of thinking about something because I just had that time just to think sit and think uninterrupted time. So yeah, it, it changes, sometimes people just need to sleep on it. Like they just need to, you know, have a restful night and then wake up in the morning with a new perspective. So I don't think I would necessarily recommend any particular strategy, because it is quite individual, but just to make sure you've got the resources to provide it to you to accommodate the strategy that works best for you.

Vinita Israni

I think that's really important. And I definitely think for me personally, when I take the time to, to have that whitespace, I realize the value that someone else's feedback brings to me and kind of really marinate, let that marinate in my head. And so can you talk a little bit about kind of giving time to think of valuing feedback and how we actually perceive and think about it?

Erin Turner

Yeah, I think, I think it's not just in percolating on feedback, I think it's starting the process, right. So setting up the relationships with the people you trust, or gaining trust through the process of seeking and receiving feedback, telling the person ahead of time, I'm going to ask for your feedback on this, just letting you know so that that person can go into you know, that workshop or that design review, or whatever it is, knowing that you're going to ask for their feedback on that session. I think as well. There's a really interesting article, I was reading just recently on LinkedIn by Kate McCormack, because she's an organizational psychologist, and she was talking about the difference between feedback and advice. And feedback tends to be quite past centric, so focusing on the past, whereas advice is more future focused. So sometimes just the language you use around, you know, getting ideas for improvement from various people can change the nature of what you're receiving from your feedback provider. And, you know, some of the studies she referenced showed that people who got advice got a lot more tangible things to work on, rather than those who got feedback. So you know, setting up the trusted relationship telling, telling people that you're going to expect this of them and potentially changing what you're asking for, whether it's feedback or advice or making, it's sometimes making it specific as to what you want them to comment on, which is another comment from Kate's article. And then once you've, you've got the feedback, sometimes feedback can be quite hard to hear. Sometimes it's, you know, you completely unaware of something or you know, what you did wrong, was quite detrimental to what you're trying to achieve. And that can be hard to hear. But the important thing is to, you know, be grateful for the feedback you're given, provided, it's given in the right, right tone with the right sentiment and act on it and demonstrate how you're valuing that feedback by trying to improve off the back of it, and then circling back to say, Okay, I've tried differently. Is that kind of what you were thinking? Or did you see an improvement? Or what more can I do here? Because I really value your input, and I really want to improve.

Molly Lewis

I think that's really helpful. Erin, and I like the idea of you coming back to, you know, where you started? And have you made a difference? You touched on how, you know, it can be really hard to hear feedback. But it can also be really hard to give feedback, as well and actually give meaningful feedback. So do you have any tips on that?

Erin Turner

Yeah. And this is where it's really useful for the feedback recipient to tell you ahead of time. I know I've been called out in the past where I've gone along to a playback. And I've just sat and enjoyed the ride. And at the end, my team member said, Do you have any feedback? I was like, oh, no, I was so immersed in the detail, I wasn't necessarily thinking about that, let me come back to you. So giving them a warning that you will be asking for it. And again, asking for advice rather than the feedback could give you some more tangible results. But on the feedback providers side it is it is hard to give feedback. But it's a lot easier where you've got that relationship built in where you know, the person you're giving feedback is confident that it's coming from the right place, that you're not going to be using this to bring them down a peg or two or to hold them back. But you're you are giving it to lift them up. And I think it's important to remember that we've all been in this situation, we've all got hard feedback, we've all been on the receiving end of feedback that we might not have wanted to hear or might have been delivered pretty awfully. So you know, draw on that empathy to understand, Okay, well, what was the best thing is not kind to withhold feedback, it's not going to do anyone any favors. But what is the kindest way to provide the feedback? And how can you set it up? So it's not unexpected? And it's not kind of being met with defensiveness and some hostility if you'd like?

Molly Lewis

Yeah, I guess speaking of hostility, how could you potentially deal with any aggressive feedback or counterproductive?

Erin Turner

Well, I think the first point to make there is if you if you're uncomfortable in a situation, because somebody is being aggressive, you do not have to stay in that situation. So you know, don't don't put yourself in any perceived harm. Hopefully, that that's not happening that you can always call time and say, I'm not comfortable in this situation, do you mind if we hold this and regroup at a later date, because I think we might be both be in a better mindset at that point in time. So you know, that's the first point, then the second point would come back to that whole Brene Brown message of getting curious, like trying to step back, you know, the person shouldn't be attacking you, they should be, you know, talking about the work. And it needs to be feedback that you can work with. So kind of moving maybe more into like an interview setting where you're you're questioning, you're trying to dig for more information, you're trying to work shop, the feedback with the feedback provider, so that you can shift the focus from yourself to the work and show that you're wanting to learn you value the feedback. But you know, you're you're not wanting to be receiving, I guess, aggressively or as intimidating Lee as what might be happening. But yeah, I think the important thing is if for either the feedback provider or the feedback giver, if you get to that point where it is hostile, it is, you know, aggressive, it is high emotions, it's not effective. So stop, pause, come back to it when everyone's much karma.

Molly Lewis

Yeah, really comes back to the theme of safety. I think you also touched on a really good point of giving, receiving feedback and using the practical example of interviewing. So another great way to remove yourself from the actual design, but see it as another tool, I guess.

Vinita Israni

We loved how you talked a lot about the mentor and mentee relationship. And obviously, we've talked a lot about feedback as well. An important part of feedback is actually being able to listen, same way it is in a mentor and mentee relationship. So can you talk a little bit about listening, active listening? And I think especially in a virtual context, how do you how do you still not zone out in some ways?

Erin Turner

Great question, I think yeah, particularly the, the virtual context, active listening in terms of, you know, being attentive to the feedback that is being given and for the feedback provider, listening to what people really need from you. It's quite important. I think, we have the skills in terms of active listening when it

comes to understanding our users and doing the interviews and observations and our stakeholders. So it's the same kind of principles they're, you know, communicating that you get it that you have understood it, the summarizing what people had said, and you know, just just to be clear, this is what I'm hearing is that correct? Asking for that confirmation before you, you know, move on or paraphrasing the body We did course, and that's probably what is a little bit more tricky over a virtual networks. But you know, if you're using your camera, you can position yourself so that you, you know, they can see that they've got your full attention, you're leaning into the screen, you're not distracted by your second screen quite often, I'll take notes in an old fashioned notebook, just because I don't want to be seen, like a robot tapping in or that I'm distracted. Because, you know, you could say, I'm just taking notes, but there's always that little bit of doubt, are you? Or are you, you know, talking to somebody off on the side. So, you know, being quite aware of what else might be in your environment that could lead somebody to think that you're not listening to them. So think of all those things. And I think, you know, if you if you did a bit of a roleplay, with somebody, at your work or colleague, and you know, your role played different kinds of techniques, and whether you're listening or not listening, I think he can quite clearly pick up on somebody who isn't fully attentive and listening. So just be mindful of that, you know, leaning into the screen nodding along and, you know, yeah, playing, repeating what somebody said, or clarifying, paraphrasing, etc, I think they're quite common techniques that we use in the physical environment that you might just need to make it more obvious in a virtual environment. And the biggest, the biggest way to show that you're listening is to actually do something with the feedback that's been given to you show improvement off the back of it. And thank thanks them for it as a result.

Vinita Israni

I definitely gel with that advice. I'm an otter, I not everything, I am actively listening as well. But sometimes I I think I'm just going up now. No, I think that's really, it's really useful to hear that kind of perspective about listening and, and the body language and the feedback that it's actually bringing, what do you think are signs of places where maybe we shouldn't be listening? And I know, that's a bit controversial, but in a, in maybe an environment where we are prescribed to the attention diet? When are we allowed to stop listening? Whether that be for feedback, or advice or guidance? When do you think there are situations where we are not as open or not? It's okay not to,

Erin Turner

it's a really good point, because, you know, there's the old saying Any feedback is a gift. And it comes back to all where is it coming from, sometimes feedback is not a gift, if it is intended to keep you in your box, or you know, pull you down a peg or two, or cut down a Torx, Poppy necessarily, if it's without warrants. So, yeah, there is a time where you have to say, you know, it, maybe that doesn't gel with my values, maybe you're telling me to do something that I'm not ethically able to do, or that's going to impact my feelings of my own integrity, and then it's okay to stop, it's still important to understand, well, where are they coming from? Have I misheard this? Are they really asking me to do this or to change the way I'm doing this here, that if at the end of the day, you understand the feedback, but you can't act on it, because it's going to compromise something within yourself, then yeah, I wouldn't say don't listen to it, but maybe try to think of a different way to achieve the same goal that isn't going to compromise your ethics or integrity. It could also be a great opportunity for a conversation starter with your mentor or your your feedback provider, you know, ask them well, why why is that? Why do you feel that that's the best way to do this particular thing, we'll get to this particular outcome. And you could learn a lot through that process. And I've certainly been in situations where I have been given advice to do something bit differently that just doesn't sit well with me, and you kind of push it as far as you want to. And then you kind of say, okay, that, that's interesting, I'll take that into consideration, that then I walk away thinking there's no way I'm going to do that. Because there are all these other implications that I don't see are going to be the right thing to do. So you've got your own kind of values and your moral judgment and moral compass to play in here as well. But importantly, you need to understand where it's coming from, and whether there's a miscommunication there.

Molly Lewis

Yeah, that's a really great point. I think it's always good to, you know, thank the person, but it's up to you, at the end of the day, whether you're gonna take that advice or feedback on and whether it's actually important to,

Erin Turner

and I think with the mentoring relationship as well, I think most mentors wouldn't be quite prescriptive and telling you what to do, or what you need to do. It should be a process of, again, challenging you to think differently about things and explore the opportunities and think about what are the repercussions or the consequences of certain paths of action. If your mentor is, you know, demanding you go out there and do something that you don't feel comfortable with, then maybe it's time to check on that mentoring relationship.

Molly Lewis

Yeah, definitely. And I think that's a nice thing about you mentioned at the start, different mentors, different spaces, you know, like having one that's maybe a bit removed from your day to day projects, or even company that you work for. So then you can kind of zoom in and zoom out at different types of feedback. And so you mentioned some great articles already today. Do you recommend any other resources?

Erin Turner

Not specifically for feedback. But one of the books that I finished over the recent holidays was Simon Sinek. Start with Why. And it was an incredible readers. It's quite a few years old now. But it just talks to the heart of, you know, UX and design and why we do what we do. And not just those practices, but many other practices is understanding why why are we doing this? What do we need to achieve from this and you know, you can find lots of motivation in that. So that's, that's one at the top of my reading list at the moment. I think something that is more related to feedback is a book on psychological safety called the fearless organization by Amy Edmondson. And that's another great read particularly around how organizations set themselves up for failure when they you know, might hire the smartest people in the field and pay them top dollar, but create an environment where they're too afraid to challenge things or to speak out. And I think you know, that it's at the organization level, but I think it applies in all different layers of the workplace and even outside the workplace. So that's another great read.

Molly Lewis

Yeah, thank you for that. That's definitely be adding to my list. They sound great. So thank you for that. Thank you for your time to air and it was a pleasure speaking to you.

Erin Turner

Likewise, it was it was great to have a chat.

Sam Hancock

And that concludes our latest episode of The IxDA Sydney MP pod. If you want to learn more about by IxDA Sydney's events and mentorship programs, please visit by sta.sydney.org. See you next time guys.

Erin Turner

I'm Erin Turner and you've been listening to the IxDA Sydney MP podcast

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