

Episode 09 – The Value of Mentoring

Ashleigh King: Welcome to this podcast created by Newcastle University Business School or 'NUBS' for short. The Oxford Dictionary states that the nub of something is the central or essential point of a situation or problem. So we hope that in this series, we can help you to get to the NUBS of it. This podcast series looks at a key theme of value: the value of our creative economy, the value of our student experience, the value of our research, the value of our collaborative networks. In this series, you will meet academics, alumni, students, graduates, and professional staff of Newcastle University Business School, as they talk about what value means to them.

In this episode, join your host Ashleigh King, as she speaks with Tony Okonkwo, Laura Martinez and Thomas Peggs about the value of mentoring and mentoring relationships. Tony is a current Master's in Business Administration MBA student at Newcastle University Business School, and currently taking part in a mentoring program. Laura is a devoted alumni volunteer and dedicates many of her hours to supporting current students at Newcastle University Business School. Thomas Peggs is Laura's mentee and he is studying a Master's in Banking and Finance.

Hi, Laura. I'm so excited to talk to you today about mentoring. It's one of my favourite topics. I love mentoring. I've been a mentor. I have also been a mentee and I know you have been the same, so I'm really delighted that you are here today with us in Newcastle upon Tyne. You've come all the way from London to join us on this podcast and, uh, video. And I'm just curious to know more about you, as I'm sure our listeners are. So could you share a little bit about yourself and background?

Laura Martinez: Of course, and first of all, thank you for having me, it's really an honour. Um so for everyone listening, my name's Laura. Um, I live in London currently and I've done my MBA degree in Newcastle University Business School, graduating in 2017. So it's been a few years. And uh currently living in London, working for an asset manager. I- I support a team of investors, fundamental equity researchers, who in essence, are stock pickers and manage client money. And that's what I do at the firm as a business manager.

Ashleigh King: It's a- it's amazing, it's an amazing, uh, work that you do, and I've been fortunate myself as a recent MBA graduate, um, while I was a student, we had the opportunity to go to London and be hosted by your firm, um, and actually experience, uh, you know, what, uh, what the offices are like, which are beautiful, and also hear more about what it's really like to be, um, uh, in, in that market. And it's really uh- it was a really valuable experience for all of us.

One of the things I wanted to say is, did you ever imagine yourself working in the financial services sector? Was that always the plan, or did you fall into it or, how did that happen?

Laura Martinez: I... I've always said that I sort of grew into it. I followed my, in my mother's footsteps, really. Uh, she worked in, in finance, in banking and specifically in investments, uh, in Finland. And I always just really admired her and the way that she managed to sort of coordinate between that, that high drive career and managing family life. So it's sort of just came naturally to me. And then when it, at some point came time to choosing my, my field of study, I decided that business management, uh, accounting, that will come naturally for me, which is then what led me to my current career in the finance and like, asset management sector. So yeah, really just following my mother's footsteps here.

Ashleigh King: I like that. So in a sense, your mother was perhaps one of your first early mentors?

Laura Martinez: That's, that's absolutely true. Yes. I haven't thought of it actually.

Ashleigh King: Yeah! Um so on the topic of mentoring, um, how, how do you feel about the word "mentoring" or the concept of mentoring? What does it mean to you?

Laura Martinez: Um, if I'm being completely honest, I actually really didn't even think about mentoring a few years back the way that I think about it today. For me, it was always something that was really hyped up. Something that everyone just needs to have a mentor, you know like, go and get one, uh, easy as that. And I never really thought that that would be something that I'd be able to leverage myself.

Not until I did my MBA Newcastle, and I sort of pivoted my career. I left my, um, permanent role in Finland and decided to pursue something else. Which is then how I found myself, um, in London. And so it was only until... only until recently, really, because when I started working in London, I found that the culture and the career life here is much different to what I had experienced previously and having a mentoring relationship, really, not only like opened doors, but opened my perception about what could be, where my career's going. And, therefore, it hasn't been that long, um, that I actually learned to appreciate what it means to have a mentor, to be a mentor, and how that can have an impact in your career.

Ashleigh King: Absolutely. I think it's, it's really interesting to hear, uh what you said there were about perhaps not valuing mentoring, or knowing enough about it, or seeing it as over-hyped, because we do hear certain phrases used in business communities, used in networking events. And it can be very easy to feel that way, for sure. So it's, it's interesting to hear that perspective.

Um, you actually have a mentee. So how are you finding being a mentor yourself?

Laura Martinez: I've uh, always found, um, that sort of chara- characteristic in myself that I like to pass on knowledge. And, um, even in my past roles, and even

in my current role as a business manager, that is sort of what I do, it's just on a different industry, on a different level. I am the person who people turn to when they are looking for guidance or for advice, or just basically someone who knows a bit of everything about everything. So, I honestly it, um, I don't know. It's really, really hard to describe if I'm completely honest. Um, me being a mentor is way different from me being a mentee and, um, having a mentor myself to then passing on that knowledge that I've acquired from someone else to then again, putting it forward... it happens naturally. And I feel quite a lot of comfort in knowing that someone who actually finds my advice useful is able to use that and add it, like, make it valuable, valuable. Turn it into value. And I feel like that's, that's whatever, what I need to know, to actually be in that role and how I can contribute forward.

Ashleigh King: Absolutely. And mentoring can happen informally and formally. So for instance, you can have a formal mentoring relationship, but you can also mentor people at work and help them to move forward with a problem, almost as in coaching, but, you know, helping them move forward with certain steps, and being a guide.

One of the things I'd like to ask you is, um, about boundaries actually. So one of the challenges with some mentoring relationships is that it can be, uh, there are two people, um, who are getting something out of the experience, you know, um, a mentor has maybe different motives than a mentee. And my, my question there is about, um, how do you, uh, find, when you are a mentor, one of the challenges and the themes I always read about is, you know, uh, mismatched expectations or boundaries, and I'm just curious about how you protect yourself as a mentor and as a mentee, uh, your experience of that?

Laura Martinez: Yeah. Um, that that's a really, really good question. And I, I always, whenever I start a new mentor relationship, whether it's my own or me as a mentor for someone else, I always start by saying, let's ha- let's have an informal catch-up, and let's see what you are after, and if I can add value. And if you feel like I can add value and I can help you out, the person who I'm mentoring, my mentee, they need to come up with a plan that is suited for what they are after. And they need to narrow down what they are after, how can I contribute to their plan? That way they take the ownership. It's really the mentee who's driving the process. I am there to contribute to, to share my ideas, my, my thoughts. But at the end of the day, it is the mentee who is driving the process. And when I make that clear from day one, I think that's a very, very easy way for someone doing a mentoring role to set the guidelines from the get-go.

Ashleigh King: I think that's a really helpful way to do it because that makes it mentor, sorry, mentee-centric, where they take the leadership, rather than some of the research I've read, and some of the themes that I've found, is that sometimes it can be more about the mentor wanting to be, uh, you know, passing on their knowledge, which, it can be a case of that, and that can be very valuable, but sometimes actually what we think our mentees need is not what they actually need. And I really like your approach. I think that's a very good way

to manage expectations, protect yourself, and also add value. That's such a key part of what you've said, is about giving back to, to make that something more worthwhile and fruitful.

Laura Martinez: A hundred percent. And I always also say it's a two-way street. I mean, me being a mentor, I do get something out of that relationship, but my needs come second. So me being a mentor, I get value insights into, I don't know, uh, up-and-coming talent or, um, different processes in- through their experiences. I, I do get some value from that relationship, but at the end of the day, for me, it is the role that the mentee wants, and what they want to get out of the relationship.

Ashleigh King: Absolutely. I love that. Thank you so much.

Um, I would like to ask you if you could sum up for me in one word, what the word, sorry, what the, the phrase or the Newcastle University Business School means to you?

Laura Martinez: Networks? Yeah, it, for me, it was a chance to build my network and really, really step out of my comfort zone, really. I, I came from a smaller country, had never been in the UK, had never really experienced any type of learning opportunities or career opportunities outside of my country of origin. So for me, being able to make those connections and broaden my horizons, build my network. I think that was the biggest, like crucial piece of my time at the Business School.

Ashleigh King: Beautiful. Thank you so much. Thank you so much for joining us today, Laura, it's been great to chat to you.

Laura Martinez: Happy to be here, thank you so much for having me.

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Ashleigh King: So Thomas it's so lovely to have you here with me in the studio. I'm really excited to speak to you because you're a current student, a current postgraduate MSc Banking and Finance, is that correct?

Thomas Peggs: That is correct, yes.

Ashleigh King: Great. And you know, uh, I just graduated myself, so I feel very, uh, it's very nice to meet other postgraduate students. And I would love to know a little bit about how you ended up doing a Master's? Um, and what brought you to decide to do that at this time in your life?

Thomas Peggs: So, um, obviously I spent the last three years previously before my postgraduate also in Newcastle, um, studying an undergraduate BSc Mathematics with Finance. Obviously COVID happened, changed a lot of plans for a lot of people and I decided it was a great opportunity to go back to Newcastle and do my postgraduate because I thought the, the job, job searching wouldn't have been fantastic during COVID. So I thought it was the perfect opportunity to go and refine my knowledge about finance and banking.

So obviously during my undergraduate studies, it was a lot more mathematical instead of the finance aspect. And towards the end of it I decided the finance was something I was interested in and something that I could see a career in. So I thought it'd be fantastic go back to, um, do my postgraduate studies. And there was no better place than Newcastle. Uh, I knew the city and I thought that the Business School was the perfect place to go.

Ashleigh King: Wonderful. I love hearing that. It's great to hear glowing feedback about the city and the School and, um, the university.

And one of the things that I'm wondering is, so you, you made the decision to invest in yourself to, you know, further your education even further. So is this a two-year programme that you're going to be doing? Or a one-year?

Thomas Peggs: It's just a one-year programme. So I started in September, uh, straight after my undergraduate and, um, it's currently ending in August, so I've just finished my exams. And then I've got my dissertation, which is due in at the end of August.

Ashleigh King: So it's possibly quite a high pressure time in terms of working on that and getting to the final, through the final bits?

Thomas Peggs: It is quite high pressured. Obviously different things going on, um, so my dissertation's due in soon, obviously a lot of job applications for graduates are opening up. And then also through the Business School, I'm doing, um, some professional qualifications. So studying for that as well. So a lot of hard work, but, um, hopefully it'll be rewarding in the end.

Ashleigh King: Absolutely! I want to ask, you know, one of the things we're talking about here today is about mentoring. As a recent graduate yourself, uh, but also now doing another course, um, how do you feel about, you know, um, having had a mentor, uh, what has that mean for you in terms of a competitive job market, and you're already so invested in your personal development and growth, um, but has, has that helped to provoke anything for you even further or help to clarify particular understanding on an industry? Um, how has it helped you, especially in the change from an undergrad mathematics and, uh, um, finance degree to the, the more um, complex, or not more complex sorry, a bit of a shift into banking with a different focus? Um, how has that been for you having a mentor in that area?

Thomas Peggs: I think it's been fantastic. Um, like since I connected with the Laura in March the guidance and the advice regarding not just the industry that I'm interested in, but also away from that, the career development, CV development, and all the little things that... pieces of the puzzle that you need to add up to be able to be competitive in the graduate employment market. Obviously it's getting more competitive and everything. I think Laura's offered so much that hopefully, hopefully it'll just give that little edge moving into the market. Um, and ev- um, the assisting goal setting has been vital as well. And Laura mentioned about obviously setting up a framework. And within the framework, setting different goals has been fantastic. And then, but not only setting just sorta long-term goals, but short-term goals to build up to the long-term goals.

Um, so yeah, so Laura has been fantastic offering advice and everything, but also the insights that she's offered through different, different people. So she's introduced me to traders, um, portfolio managers, data scientists that she knows. Has offered different perspectives of an industry that I'm interested in.

Ashleigh King: Wow so you've actually had the opportunity to, through Laura, your mentor's network, actually find out about other contacts you could work with or, um, different types of industries you could do outside of, um, maybe options you didn't even, or hadn't even considered yet.

Thomas Peggs: Exactly. And I think that's one of the great things about a mentoring relationship is not only are you connecting with someone who's an industry leader. They also have contacts that they can introduce you to and your network can grow through it and everything. A lot of career development is about networking. And I think having a mentoring relationship is key to help you build a network, a network of contacts.

Ashleigh King: Absolutely. I love these ideas and I love how much you already know about yourself, your self-awareness, um, so early in career is really inspiring.

One of the things that I would like to know is, if anyone else were asking you today about mentoring, or getting a mentor, or being a mentee, what top tip would you give to them about being a good mentee or getting the most out of being a mentee?

Thomas Peggs: I think that you need to be driven to actually enter the, like a being a mentee and entering that relationship because if you're not driven and want to gain something from the experience, it's just not worthwhile for you to go into it because the mentor will be trying to give you options and advice, and you just won't be there. And you won't take as, take as much from the relationship as possible. So being driven. But also like I've said before, setting, setting a framework from the outset is key because both the mentor and the mentee will

know what they want from the, from the relationship. And I think that's where the relationship can flourish, if you've set this framework from the outset.

Ashleigh King: Absolutely. Thank you so much.

There's just one question I want to ask. So if you could describe Newcastle University Business School in one word, what would it be?

Thomas Peggs: Um, I'd probably say opportunities. I think the opportunities that you can get from Newcastle Business School has just been fantastic. Obviously I would never have connected with Laura, but also different opportunities, such as scholarships, to professional qualifications, and the list goes on and on for the opportunities, but it's all about what you make out of the opportunities that they present.

Ashleigh King: Perfect. Thank you so much. It's wonderful to have had you in the studio today.

Thomas Peggs: Thanks for having me.

Laura Martinez: Hi, Thomas.

Thomas Peggs: Hi, Laura. How are you?

Laura Martinez: I'm well, how are you?

Thomas Peggs: I'm very well thank you.

Laura Martinez: As a mentor, I'm always inspired by my mentee's stories and how they are moving ahead in their career. Um, our relationship, uh, as a mentor/mentee hasn't lasted that long. Um, when did we start?

Thomas Peggs: I want to say it was the beginning of March this year? So March 2021.

Laura Martinez: Yeah. So it's just been a handful of months, but I'd say that the relationship so far has been quite fruitful. So, um, would you mind just maybe telling me a bit about your experience so far and what you have maybe found most valuable?

Thomas Peggs: I think like as soon as we started, we obviously laid the groundwork, which was key to be able to move forward in our relationship as a mentor/mentee. I think the opportunities that you've offered through your insights and your expertise within a field that I'm interested in to move into in a career has been fantastic. But also the opportunities that you've offered me

through different contract- contacts within your network have been key to offer different perspectives within the industry and also different, different industries, have been very, very helpful.

Laura Martinez: Okay. And, um, you mentioned, um, us laying the groundwork. Um, did you expect that from the men- mentoring relationship? Did you expect to drive the process?

Thomas Peggs: I thought it would be more even, when I first started, I thought it would be very 50:50. But I think it's actually better that the mentee is actually driving the relationship and going in the direction that they want to push it, because otherwise it could just be that they're sitting back and letting the mentor drive the, drive the relationship, and I don't think that the mentee would be able to gain as much experience and they wouldn't gain as, gain as much from the relationship if they weren't driving it.

Laura Martinez: Yeah, no, I agree. I think it's really important that you, yourself, as a mentee, you need to drive your own career. No one else will do it for you. The mentor is there to support you along the way, help you make those connections, so whether it's, um, talking to other people in the industry, like you said, or just like fine-tuning your CV, the mentor is there, literally mentoring you. Not telling you what to do. So I think that is a very, very crucial part of the role.

And then you also mentioned about like, um, us, uh, connecting around March time. Um, how, how did you find me again and why, why did you choose me as a mentor?

Thomas Peggs: So, um, one of the great things about Newcastle University's, University Business School is they actually have their own alumni, um, networking, uh, platform called NCL Spark. And I don't think a lot of people are aware of it, but I was made aware of it through a careers advisor called Paul Campbell, with the Business School. And he was fantastic, helping me with different career, um, career and development, such as my LinkedIn profile. And he suggested going on NCL Spark, trying to connect with some past alumni and seeing if they could offer some different advice.

And obviously I signed up and connected with yourself. Um, and you were great. You, uh, got back very quickly and saying, do you want to have a quick, uh, quick informal meeting? Which we did. And then we laid, laid out a framework which was key to like set up the relationship. So we discussed what we both wanted to gain out of the relationship and that's how we connected.

Laura Martinez: Okay. And, uh, just going back to that moment, how did you, I mean, obviously you go to the platform, you see all these faces and all this people willing to mentor. How did you choose me? Was it because I was in the right industry? Was it because of my role? How did you narrow down the selection of people you thought would be valuable to reach out to?

Thomas Peggs: So as a finance student, I thought it would be fantastic to connect with someone within the financial industry, whether that be asset management or investment banking or something totally, totally unrelated to that sort of finance. But someone who had the knowledge and the, the know-how of how the industry operates.

So I obviously found that you work for BlackRock, which is a financial services company and obviously connected with you for that reason.

Laura Martinez: Yeah, no, I, I remember that day very clearly.

Um, can you just maybe describe what has been the most surprising part of our mentoring relationship and by the way, have you had any mentors prior to me, is this your first experience?

Thomas Peggs: This is my first experience of being a mentee. Um, I actually mentored someone, drew my A-levels, just a younger student, um, during their A-levels. But the most probably surprising thing is how... I think some- from my perspective, anyway, I thought it was quite daunting to connect with someone who is so established within, within this industry. I thought it might be a bit daunting, but how down-to-earth and relaxing the relationship was has helped me be like, gain, the maximum that I can out of the relationship.

Laura Martinez: I think coming back to the "laying the groundwork", that is part of it. You need to find a mentor who matches your personality and your, what you're after from your career. So I think that is one of the reasons why you have an introductory meeting so that you can make sure that whoever you're talking to is the right personality match. Because, uh, I said it before, but it's a two-way street. So even though I am the one giving you the ideas and thoughts, um, you are still the person determining whether the relationship is right for you or not.

Thomas Peggs: Exactly. And I think it's crucial that like you can build up a rapport between the mentor and the mentee, because if you don't have that understanding about how, how someone wants to work and communicate, the relationship wouldn't be as fruitful as if you built up that rapport with, with each other.

Laura Martinez: So far. So good. Looking forward to what's coming next.

Thomas Peggs: Fingers crossed it's good.

Ashleigh King: Hi Tony. Thanks so much for coming in today.

Tony Okonkwo: Thank you. Thank you, Ash. Good to be here.

Ashleigh King: Yeah. So we're doing- going to be talking about mentoring and I wanted to, before we get into that, hear a little bit about you and your background.

Tony Okonkwo: Great. Yeah. So, um, uh, my name is Tony, Tony Okonkwo. I'm from Nigeria. Um, so I have a very, kind of, an interesting background. Um, but I'm basically a banking professional, um, of 12 years. Um, and then beyond banking, I've also done some form of entrepreneurship uh, even run some businesses. And leading to an innovation in 2017, um, which entered me in the world, really, as Africa's young entrepreneur.

And then beyond that I also run a mentorship program for young career professionals who are trying to grow in their career. So, um, this is kind of where I give back, you know, for, to the younger ones. So, so that's about me. I'm more or less, um, a value-add guy, who wants to always um, add value to any system I find myself.

Ashleigh King: So that's fantastic Tony, because you're actually as well as being an entrepreneur yourself and being a professional, working in industry, you're actually, um, giving your time back to nurture young minds or not necessarily young minds, but just the next generation of leaders and creators and innovators.

And how, how do you find that is going? How has your mentoring experience developed as you've, you've mentored more and more people?

Tony Okonkwo: Yeah, so basically, um, I have a kind of a principle in life where, um, you, I, I always believe that one has to impact on others positively. And we can have a better society when we give the little hat back. We don't have it all, remember. Uh, but we have something others don't have. Right. So it was that, um, notion that underpin my setting of the, you know, what I call the PD Club really. Um, um, you know, and it's been awesome because seeing people who have struggled previously, uh, becoming more productive at what they do, becoming more ambitious, and then you'll see the smiles on their faces. Um, you see the real value you put on the table for them. Um, that's joy for me, that's really fulfilling.

Um, you know so, I'm really, that's just about me. I like those kinds of moments where people come back and say, oh, I wouldn't have done this if not for the guidance um, yeah, so it's, it's been interesting. And then it has also made me look up to mentors as well. Uh, because I know what, um, what the whole mentorship program looks like. Uh, I know the value that could be gained from it. So it's helped me to also know that, hence I'm giving back to the folks below me. Um, I also need to look up to others to get better re- really. So you know, so it's been interesting otherwise. Yeah.

Ashleigh King: I love that idea because you are engaging in mentoring as a mentor yourself, but it seems that you are also continuously looking up, looking

at the people around you, looking at the people next to you, people above you, how can you learn from them? You know, how can you add value to the people you work with? It's a really lovely way of, of thinking about things.

Um, so you've talked a bit about how you mentor others and have you been a mentor yourself or have you experienced any mentoring?

Tony Okonkwo: Yeah. So, um, you know, coming on the, coming to the MBA, or prior to the MBA, um, I've had work mentors. Um, um, so each time I got into a new office, I try to, um, locate or kind of, um, search for people within the system who I wanted to be like, really. And then, uh, kind of, um, set up a kind of a system with them where they guide me through.

Alright, so I had a, I had a work mentor, who was my boss. Um, and he was really instrumental to my taking the MBA in the UK. Um, he, he, he practic- you know, he set me up for this really, um, you know, he kept on pushing me, uh. And then coming on the MBA I also, uh, got a mentor as well, um, Stuart Bailey, uh, the Head of Strategy in Lloyd's Bank. Um, I just keep imagining each time that I guess I'm very lucky because I'm looking back at both of them, they share a lot of similarities, the people who are high up there, but, you know, still come down here to relate with me.

And in, in both cases, they both believe in me more than I do believe in myself. And sometimes I am wondering what they see that I don't see. Right? So, it's been, it's been amazing, um, you know, transiting from work to the MBA and then having to, um, have the kind of mentor I have, Stuart, who has made life really easy for me. Um, uh, it's been, it's been awesome, all through, honestly.

Ashleigh King: I love that. I love that you've had mentors in work that you've looked up to and found, and they found you. And it seems that, like you said, there's been something about you that they've liked that you don't even see yourself.

So I've got a question there about what are your thoughts on how we view ourselves and self-awareness, and has your mentoring journey, whether you mentoring others or mentoring people yourself, uh, being mentored yourself, how, um, how important is self-awareness in that journey?

Tony Okonkwo: Honestly. Um, I think one of the, one of the basic principles of life is "man know thyself." You need to know yourself, really. Um, even though I keep saying, I don't know what they see in me, um, I guess I'm sort of, to some extent, I'm trying to be modest, really, um, I work very hard, honestly. Um, it's no, it's no, um, it's no, it's no, it's, it's, it's, it's something that, it's a process really, right? Um, so in, in, in, in anything, we need to know what our capabilities are, where our deficiencies lie. And this is something I continuously do. Um, I won- I don't want to use the word "critiquing" myself, but I'm very self-aware of what I do, all the time. I'm always checking and rechecking, um, setting targets for myself.

And then, this is what I do internally, which kind of illuminates outside, right? And kind of attracts people because, to me, uh, those little things I do may not be, they may not be anything big, um, but they are processes that lead to a big thing. And then you see people outside who admire them and then again, are drawn to you, just like you are drawn to them. Right?

So, uh, what I would say is, young folks out there need to know how to, um, uh, what I'll call reflect on themselves, right? Introspect, you know, and be able to know where they have deficiencies, um, and then where their strengths lie as well, um, and be able to harness their strengths. Um, so these are key things around self-awareness and, and then that helps, um, in the whole, um, alignment with your mentor. Being able to find the right mentor um, stems from understanding what you need, where your deficiencies are, and who can help you get there, if you get what I mean.

Ashleigh King: Absolutely. I'm curious about goal setting. So when you have done these journaling exercises, or in your mind thought about your, um, your journey and how s- uh, you know, the things you're critiquing. And then you want to create a plan, an action plan to fix some of those things or to get better or learn more. How do you use goal setting, uh, either with your mentees or even with yourself, um, to achieve, uh, and be the best version of yourself?

Tony Okonkwo: Okay. So let me start with saying, um, I'm someone who, um, I like to set myself up a lot. Um, I usually am not the usual guy, if you will. And why I say that is, um, I always do what people think is not doable, and that's the way I get to incite myself. I like that feeling that you're doing something different. Right. So I set goals that ordinarily look, um, unachievable really.

Um, so, but, but again, I usually bounce them off people. Right? So I come up with... usually I do retreats, um, periodic retreats. And then I have the yearly, um, you know, retreat sessions. But again, I do periodic retreats every year where I go, I recline and then think about, um, family, career and spirituality as well, if you will. And then I try to put down the areas I feel um, I need to work on, right. Um, yeah. And then I look for people who could guide me along those paths, really. Um, so again, it starts from what you want to do, um, what you think you want to do.

And one thing I've found in all of this is that most times those things I want to do are usually scary to anyone who listens. They're usually scary. Um, but I've been lucky to always find mentors who believe in those um, so to say, um, very unachievable dreams, right? And then, uh, we set out action plans, you know, very active ones and then begin to work towards those goals, right. So again, I do retreats, and I put them down and then I look for mentors or people who could help me. And then we'd go through the processes.

Ashleigh King: I love that. And I love how, uh, it's actually much more strategic than other people might think or realise, because although you're taking yourself

away, you're having some space to think, reflect and, you know, give yourself the time not to be disturbed with something else, but you are also then thinking, "okay, gosh, I've got this problem" or "I've got this thing that I need to fix, or I need to work on, but these are the people who can help me." And I think for anyone listening, for myself as well, that's quite an important learning point because we often have goals, but we don't know how to break them down. But also remembering that there are people in your tribe, in your team, in your, uh, you know, your, um, your group, your, uh, school classroom, uh, wherever it is for anyone listening, that can help you and will support you.

Um, your retreats. Do you spend them, do you have them on your own?

Tony Okonkwo: Okay, so it's usually, um, in the group, but organised, um, in a way that you have ample time for yourself. And they're usually the best part of my years because, um, of course working as a banker where you have very tight schedules, um, you barely have time for self. Um, it's become very important that I had this routine of yearly taking out time to go reflect on myself, on my journey so far, and, you know, kind of recalibrate, retool, if you will. Right. Um, so it's in a group, um, but it is also designed in a way that you have ample time to, to reflect on your own with the, um, enabling tools available in the place - very relaxed location, take away time sometimes, usually one week, right? Just take away time, go to very relaxed place, natural setting with a lot of trees, right. Because it aides, um, reflection. And then there are guides and mentors there who you could bounce those things off.

I once had the problem. I won't call it a problem, but kind of a friction with my boss in the office. And then I took time to go on this retreat. And I recall coming back from the retreat and my boss, a few weeks down the line, feels, um, we are, we are going on very well. Um, and she doesn't know what happened. And eight months after she, she, she, you know, she was mentioning it to everyone, to say, "there was a change. What happened?" Nothing really happened from her side. She didn't change, but I changed. Right? Um, I had to recalibrate my approach. And, you know, I became more receptive, more understanding of, of, of different opinions and how to manage them.

Right, so, very clearly what the retreat does for me is it helps me go in and kind of restrata- restrategise and plan a lot more, um, looking to the future.

Ashleigh King: Aw, I really liked that because you didn't change. Sorry. She didn't change, but you changed. So it's that approach you took to recalibrate and reset your path and almost adjust yourself.

So I'm curious about, um... anyone listening, if they were, if they were feeling stuck, if they feel like they don't know how to even get started with looking at themselves, looking at their life and where things are a little bit, um, not working out so right, or they're feeling unsure. How would you suggest that someone can

start some easy steps to recalibrate their, their way of thinking or their relationships?

Tony Okonkwo: Yeah. So one thing I do, um, is every day... because these things, uh, I think you have to have a hold of this in the moment, just so you're able to track where the issues are from. Right? I do reflection every day really, um, just before bedtime. I try to, um, reflect on what has gone right, and what hasn't gone right within the day. Right? Um, and then, um, and making notes, what I feel I need to do. And then I'm, I try to always find out what was the cause of what didn't go right, right? And trace it because it's always good to know where the problem is. Right, okay, you had an altercation in the office. What was the cause? Was it that your mood changed at some point? What led to that? Was it a bad lunch you had? Or was it someone you met on the stairway? What happened? Until you're able to trace what the cause was um, you won't be able to make-

So when you do this over a period, you begin to find a pattern. Right? You begin to find a pattern of what you think you need to start working on. For instance, you find that you become very easily agitated for no cause. I'd- I give you a typical example, uh, there was a time I found that... Cos I watched football a lot. Uh there was a time I found out that each time my team lost, I was always very angry and then, um, I got really upset with the family. And so I stopped watching football. Because I had to do that reflection, right, to see, uh, and I watched the pattern - each time my team lost, I got angry, each time my team lost I got angry. And then I knew it was watching football that was the problem. And so I blocked that out. Because I didn't want that. Because eventually what that could lead to could be more dire than, you know, so I stopped that and then I solved the trouble.

So we need to be able to trace the root cause of things and then draw patterns across to see which are those ones we need real help for, that we feel we can help ourselves. Right. And then begin to seek help. And the help we need to see could be in form of education. It could be in form of mentorship. Right, some, some problems come from um, a lack of, um, knowledge, right. Education. So you may want to go do some, an MBA, right? Or you want to do a further studs-, some further studies, right. Uh, or you want to seek a mentor. So again, that's the process. You could just tap from reflection at the end of every day and begin to take, a kind of a log of your life, and then find the patterns and draw them together.

Ashleigh King: Perfect. Thank you so much. I love that advice and I'm going to make sure that I get back to my reflection and journaling too, cos it's a great, some great tips you've shared there as well.

Thank you so much, Tony. I have one last question for you. If you could describe Newcastle University Business School in one word, what would you say?

Tony Okonkwo: Wow. Um, that's it. Wow. And I'll say why I say "wow" is that, um, I've had a very interesting time, um, studying with my mentor, Stuart Bailey, who

has been, um, awesome, um, to say the least really. And then I've had real support. I think that's one key thing I've found in the Newcastle University, and mostly in the NUBS as well. Real support. Real. This is, this isn't fake support. This is real support, right, from the personal tutor. I've been very privileged as well to have, um, Professor Matthew Brannan. Um, who's gone beyond tutorship to becoming a friend. Right, and then, um, all the supports around academics, the WDC, the, um, INTO, um, it's just one support upon the other. Um, and it's been really interesting. I've really grown in confidence since I got in here. Um, I'm ready to take on the world. A- again, it's Newcastle to the world, so I'm ready to hit the world.

Ashleigh King: I love that. And from this podcast studio we are going from Newcastle to the world. So thank you so much for being here today. And, um, we've really enjoyed chatting with you.

Tony Okonkwo: Thank you Ashleigh, good to be here.

Ashleigh King: Thanks for listening. We'd love to hear your feedback. You can drop us a line at nubspodcast@newcastle.ac.uk, and you can also tag us in any of our Newcastle University Business School social media channels. You can find these links in our show notes.

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