



Difficult Issues
for *Mentors*
and *Mentees*

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The Problem - *Mentees* believe:

- ⌘ Their supervisor is their mentor.
- ⌘ They will be given frequent, positive and honest feedback.
- ⌘ Their mentor will guide their careers and ensure that it is successful.
- ⌘ Their expectation of the ideal work and environment will be fulfilled - yet, this ideal is different for every person.

Researchers further believe:



- ⌘ They will have, or be given, a successful project.
- ⌘ They will be first author on manuscripts so that they will advance (preferably in Nature or Cell).

The Problem - *Mentors* believe:



- ⌘ People can be mentored with little effort.
- ⌘ They are responsible for the people who work for them (but this term is ill-defined and may not include mentorship).
- ⌘ That mentees' deliverables will enhance their own efforts (last author).

Mentors further believe:



- ⌘ Avoiding people problems is the best way to respond.
- ⌘ Their expectations of the ideal work and environment will be fulfilled (yet rarely share their vision with others).

So...



⌘ There is often a disconnect between the expectations of a mentee and a mentor.

⌘ This is a problem for the individual, mentor/boss, the work unit, and the institution.

Why?



⌘ We behave in accordance with:

- ☑ our perceptions, interpretations and values (the meaning we give to the facts).
- ☑ our assumptions about the intentions of the other (often negative).
- ☑ what the conversation will mean to our identity - our worth and value.

Then...



- ⌘ Disillusionment with reality can break down trust relationships.
- ⌘ People feel betrayed, abandoned, used, confused and UPSET.
- ⌘ Upset people find it hard to be productive.

Like it or not...



- ⌘ As the mentor/supervisor, you may need to become involved as a problem-solver, not be a problem avoider.
- ⌘ In the long run, it is in your own best interest to do this.

Like it or not...



- ⌘ As a mentee, you may need to look toward others to help with problems or career decisions (in addition to your supervisor).
- ⌘ It may be in your own best interest to do so.

Like it or not...



- ⌘ As a mentor, you may need to become involved as a trusted advisor or a confidant.
- ⌘ If you are both a supervisor and a mentor, is it possible for you to distinguish between being a supervisor/evaluator and being a mentor?

Like it or not...



- ⌘ As a mentee you may need to make decisions as to whether your supervisor can also be your mentor.
- ⌘ If your supervisor is both, is it possible for you to distinguish between being a “worker” versus being a mentee?

Avoiding the worst problems:

- ⌘ Discuss expectations prior to hiring - is this a good fit?
- ⌘ If there are changes in the environment or resources available - talk about them or admit uncertainty.
- ⌘ Accept legitimacy of people having different expectations.

Avoiding the worst problems:



- ⌘ When deciding on a course of action, try to foresee unintended consequences and consider several ways to address the situation before announcing the action.
- ⌘ If possible, frame changes in a way that will account for individual's expectations.

When involved in a difficult personal conflict, remember:



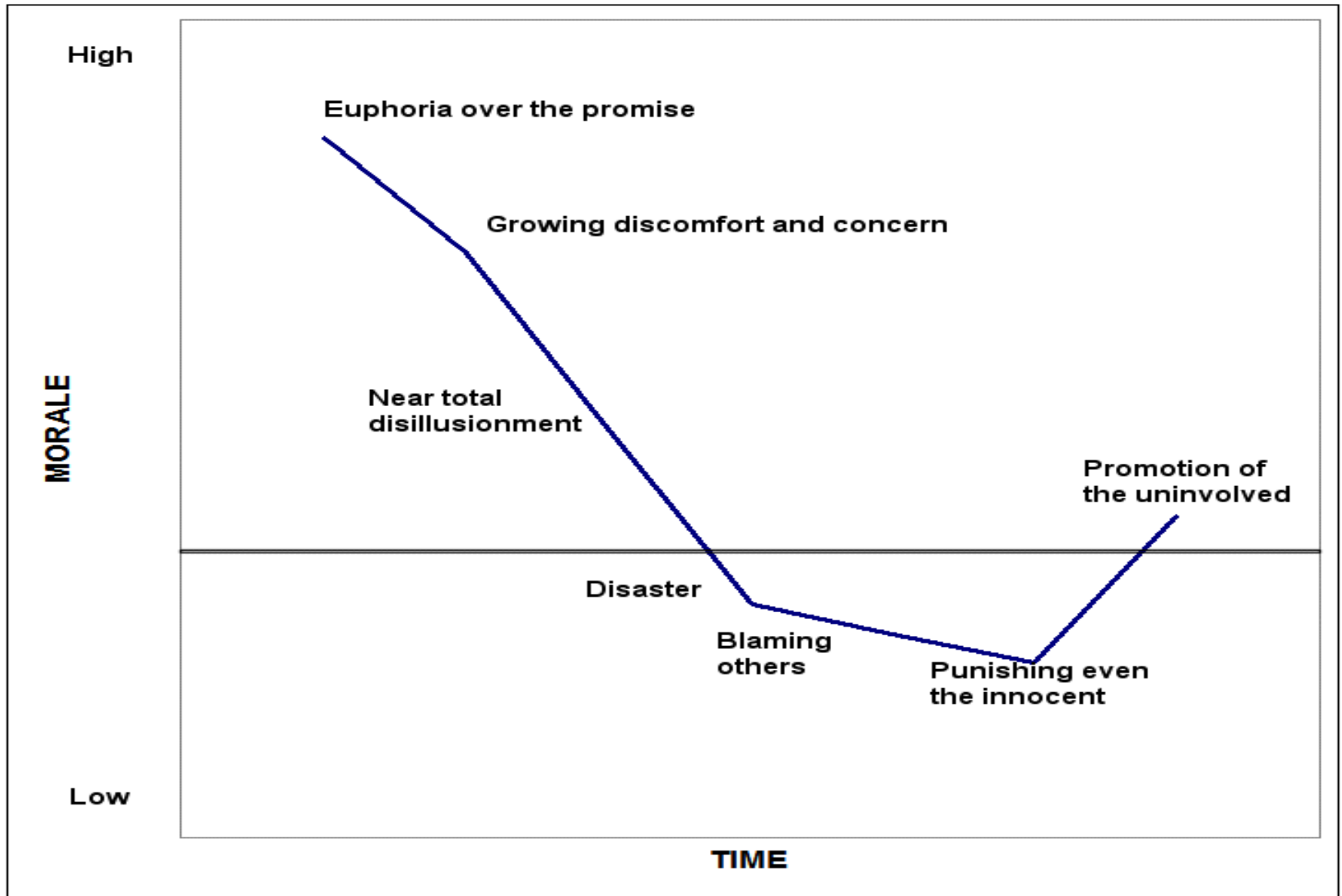
- ⌘ Respect the feelings of the other person; it is usually better to understand than it is to voice agreement or disagreement with what you are hearing.
- ⌘ You are hearing only one side of a story; avoid jumping to conclusions.

When involved in a difficult personal conflict, remember:



- ⌘ If you think the problem may have a legal ramification, write a personal note to yourself describing what you were told and what you did as a response.
- ⌘ If you are uncertain about the seriousness of the problem, don't hesitate to ask for advice or help, explicit or confidential.

The Impact of the Mismanagement of Mentor/Mentee Relationships



Adapted from a presentation by Kenneth Cloke, Director of the Center for Dispute Resolution, Santa Monica, CA.