

# Reveal, Rebalance, Release:

## Thoughts on mentoring young professionals in the industry

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### Abstract

Making the first steps as a medical writer in the pharma and biotech industry can be challenging. Three general principles can help managers foster the growth and development of their team members: **Reveal, Rebalance, and Release.** **Reveal** means that along with providing extensive professional training, a manager needs to reveal the hidden facets of the profession and the job. This includes teaching not only about regulations and writing standards but also about company culture and managing projects and clients. **Rebalance** means viewing the people you supervise as whole people, with personal lives and complex sets of commitments, and helping them maintain a full and productive life outside of work. **Release** means devising a development track for the people you supervise based on their goals rather than your own, maintaining ongoing and open communication, and being aware of how their aspirations and abilities evolve.

### My experience learning to mentor

It is April 2002, and I am standing at the door of my Cambridge, MA, house in the US. This is my first-ever “real” winter. Having spent my entire life in Israel, I have never experienced heavy snow fall before, and I am standing there, astonished at the beauty and the quiet of a cold city covered in a thick layer of snow, shimmering in the cold light of a deceptive sun.

I spend a long moment admiring the view, when suddenly, I start to panic. The profound,

serene quiet all around is due to the lack of any traffic. No cars are on the roads, and how am I going to get to work?

I start walking. The subway station closest to my house is closed, and I continue my trek for 3 more kilometres to the next stop. I am relieved to finally manage to get on the Red Line and ride it to downtown Boston.

I am almost an hour late, and as I arrive panting to the door of the lab in which I am doing my doctoral thesis, I am surprised to find it empty – no one but me has come in that day. Unsure how to start the day’s tasks without any of my colleagues, I am startled out of my reverie by the sharp ring of the lab telephone. On the line is my thesis advisor, and she is furious. “What are you doing there? Why did you risk traveling to work on such a day? Did you really think that I would require you to come to work on a day like this?”

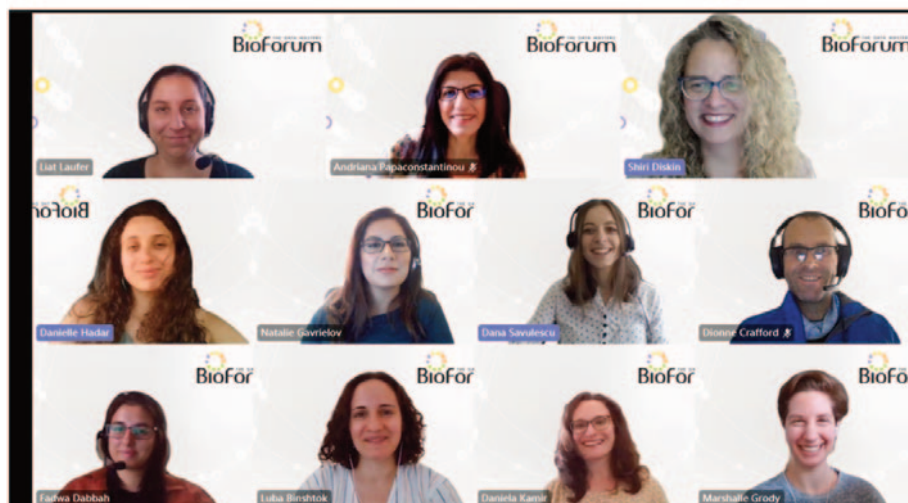
This was an important and instructive moment. It is one of many in which advisors, bosses, and senior colleagues have taught me through their words and by personal example about having the right set of priorities as a supervisor when dealing with people making the first steps on their career paths. It speaks to the notion that an employee should be viewed as a whole person whose life does not start upon entering the workplace at the beginning of the workday and does not end when they

leave at the end of the day.

My advisor “adopted” me into her lab after a previous advisor had left for an academic position in a different city. From the moment I started in her lab, she took on her role as an advisor and her responsibilities within it with profound earnestness. She taught me how to organise my scientific thinking in a structured and logical way, bestowed upon me her profound commitment to scientific ethical principles, and was the first to teach me how to write scientific texts.

After graduation, I said goodbye to Boston, and goodbye to life at the lab, and with my family, returned home to Israel. Upon starting my job as a medical writer at Teva Pharmaceuticals, I made my official transition from academia to industry. This transition can be overwhelming. Company culture can be quite different from what we get used to in academia. The hierarchy, social codes and – above all – the fast pace of life in clinical development can cause significant stress to newcomers. Add to that the fact that in pharma and biotech, people often start their first job at a stage in life at which they are not as flexible due to significant personal commitments, such as children or ageing parents.

In recent years, I have been managing a medical writing department within a contract research organisation. I consider the responsibility for a team member’s wellbeing, advancement,





and retention to be shared between the employee and the employer. In this article, I share my ideas on how supervisors can support and nurture scientists transitioning from academia to industry and foster their professional development.

### The three Rs of management: Reveal, Rebalance, and Release

Over the years, my supervisors have taught me to take a holistic approach to management and consider each employee's abilities and aspirations, as well as their complex and varied commitments. The principles of this approach can be summarised as the three R's: **Reveal**, **Rebalance**, and **Release**.

#### Reveal

To foster the professional development of an employee, the first and most natural step is to provide professional training. At Teva, I was lucky to work in a very supportive and cooperative medical writing environment. Much like my thesis advisor, my boss at Teva dedicated countless hours to training her employees. I would sit shivering in her freezing office while she taught me about the drug development process, regulations, medical writing standards, how to read clinical study result outputs, and how to manage a writing project. But beyond those highly important professional training sessions, she guided me on how to work at a high level of professionalism and talked openly about the complexities of functioning and growing within a large and ever-changing organisation. The way that my boss mentored me is what I mean by "reveal": she revealed the hidden facets of the profession and the job.

In my present role, I spend many hours training my team members, but, following my

former boss's example, I try to reveal to them what goes on behind the scenes in the company and with clients. I do that without fearing that nurturing a young professional will cause her to grow and develop until she overshadows me or takes my place. On the contrary, I view the development of young professionals in the workplace as a goal in and of itself. I believe that the success of each employee and the success of the whole department are the same, and that the whole is greater than the sum of its parts.

#### Rebalance

I believe that managers have the responsibility of helping their team members reach a balance between their commitments to allow them to grow and develop in all aspects of life. I try to divide their workload and tasks so that they can conduct a fruitful life outside the office. Even before the COVID-19 pandemic, all of my team members knew that they do not have to have "face time" with me – they do not need to sit at the office just for the sake of being present. Rather, team members are given tasks and are responsible for completing them on time, but they can do that on a flexible schedule, which can include working from home as needed. During the pandemic, we have all had to be home-school teachers, cooks, and information technology managers on top of our regular jobs, so flexibility has become crucial. Based on the solid professional expertise that they acquire through training and practice, I feel confident in allowing them to manage their own work.

I practice what I preach. In my personal conduct I try to convey the message that one's personal life and work are of equal importance. Starting even before the COVID-19 pandemic, I have worked a few days a week from home, and

I do not hide when my work schedule is impacted by family constraints. I try to create a nurturing workplace with shared goals that each team member strives for without sacrificing their personal lives.

#### Release

The last and most difficult principle is "release". Charting a career path for a team member that recreates our own or aligns with our aspirations for that person is easy; taking a back seat and helping them to define their own path and attain their goals is more difficult, but it is the principle that I try to implement. This can be achieved through open discourse, continuous listening, and trying to understand where each employee is striving to get to and how their goals develop over time. I believe that providing room for growth to team members will grow the department and the organisation so that all stakeholders will benefit.

### Disclaimers

The opinions expressed in this article are the author's own and not necessarily shared by his employer or EMWA.

### Conflicts of interest

The author declares no conflicts of interest.

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