

Below is an extract from one of Julie Hay's conference sessions.

Don't be put off by the title of John Gray's book; he really doesn't insist on a male/female split!

Mars and Venus in the Mentoring Room
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In case you haven't yet read John Gray's book *Men are from Mars, Women are from Venus*, the key idea within it is that men and women are different because they originally came from different planets. Obviously such a view is a metaphor and is not meant to be politically incorrect - it's more accurate to say that we have Martians (many of whom but not all are men) and Venusians (many of whom but not all are women).

So what does this have to do with mentoring? Well, we have Martian mentors and Venusian mentors (and, of course, some who are at varying distances between these extremes). It's the extremes that are significant in terms of mentoring effectiveness.

Martians are typically fairly direct at problem solving. They go alone into their cave to think through the problem - then, if they cannot resolve it they ask someone they respect about it, expecting to be given a solution. Venusians, on the other hand, like to gather around the well and talk it over with the other Venusians, with much empathising - until they solve their own problem or decide they can live with it.

Think of this at home. The Martian complains about work and expects to be offered a solution; the Venusian proceeds to empathise; the Martian complains that the Venusian is making things seem worse! If it's the Venusian who complains about work, they want the Martian to sympathise - but the Martian simply points out that a good solution would be to leave the job if it is that bad! In either case, the 'complainer' feels totally misunderstood.

We can transfer this into the mentoring relationship. A Martian mentor/Martian mentee pair will both expect to identify options based on the previous experience of the mentor - and may miss other possibilities. A Venusian mentor/Venusian mentee pair will create a counselling format where the mentee feels genuinely listened to and valued - and may never get around to any action.

Even more problematic in some ways are the mixed pairs. The Martian mentor seems horribly macho to a Venusian mentee, and believes the mentee is a wimp. The Venusian mentor seems weak and indecisive to a Martian mentee, and believes their mentee is abrasive and impatient.

Much traditional mentoring operates on the premise that mentors will be Martians. The mentor advises the mentee on what to do to succeed within the organisation. Developmental mentoring approaches are based on Venusian mentors, who listen and reflect while the mentee comes to their own conclusions about their future development. Mentoring schemes fit the organisations they operate within - hierarchies tend towards Martian and teamworking cultures are more Venusian.

Many organisations that seek culture change unwittingly maintain the old culture through the style of mentoring. Mentors are so often senior people, who just happen also so often to be the ones who got to the top through behaving appropriately in the old culture.

Selected as mentors, they dutifully pass on the management styles that worked for them in the past.

This has major implications, especially in the light of trends such as the impact of vigilante consumers, megatrends for women, and the way that gold collar workers are dealing with career snakes and ladders