

## From Taking to Making Advice

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Advice is a fickle thing. It can be offensive or helpful. It can be perceived as a waste of time or a just the right thing. Entrepreneurs receive a lot of advice and face the problem of finding advice that is relevant. At the same time, advisors feel like entrepreneurs do not take enough advice. Thinking about advice as something to be made, or co-produced by both entrepreneur and advisor by deepening the engagement in the advice interaction, makes the advice more relevant and impactful.

### Advice is tricky business

We give and receive advice in hopes that it will be relevant and impactful. But giving and receiving advice is tricky business. Advice is one of the few interactions that can be one of extremes. Advice about what you already know can be validating, or it can be offensive. Novel advice can be helpful, or it can be irrelevant. And it is not just the content that is tricky, it is how people give and receive advice. How often has it worked to tell ambitious, independent thinkers what to do? When the advisor does not know the organization, the advice maybe too generic. And when the entrepreneur does not know what they do not know, the advice may be seen as irrelevant.

### It takes two

If we reconsider advice in terms of a communication that is produced by both the advisor and the entrepreneur, it has greater potential to be relevant and impactful. The advisor cannot advise without the entrepreneur and the entrepreneur cannot receive without the advisor. In this respect, it is a co-production. As a co-production the problem shift from the reluctance to take advice and giving relevant advice to how people can work together to make advice.

Recent research on accelerators indicates that the useful part of advice is often not the one-off communication, but the product of the back-and-forth communication between entrepreneur and advisor. Looking at the interactional moves (words exchanged back-and-forth), there are two basic patterns of advice interactions: distanced and engaged. In distanced advice episodes, advisors provide advice too readily and entrepreneurs dissociate themselves from the advice interaction by taking it at face-value and not engaging in back-and-forth dialogue with the advisors. In an engaged advice interaction, both entrepreneurs and advisors actively work to make the advice relevant to the business situation. This engagement happens with at least one of four interactional moves:

1. **Probing questions from advisors:** Advisors ask probing questions to entrepreneurs before offering advice.
2. **Problem-based questions by entrepreneurs:** Entrepreneurs ask advisors for specific help to solve specific issues they perceive instead of waiting for the advisor to provide advice.
3. **Elaboration by entrepreneurs and advisors:** Entrepreneurs or advisors elaborate on answers to broaden and deepen interactive engagement.
4. **Correcting incorrect understandings by entrepreneurs:** When advisors give advice based on a misunderstanding, entrepreneurs take the time to correct the misunderstanding.

These interactional moves encourage more dialogue so as to surface, clarify and test ideas. It

also helps contest standard ideas so as to prompt creative problem solving, resulting in more novel solutions. When people are involved in producing the knowledge, they are more likely to integrate it so that advice uptake increases as well.

### **Learning to make advice**

Research shows that entrepreneurs and advisors can change their interactional patterns and learn to increase engagement in advice to increase its relevance and impact. By adopting even one of the four interactional moves, the usefulness of advice can increase. Entrepreneurial support programs focused on quick, knowledge-transfer interactions, can instead foster the making of advice by educating advisors and entrepreneurs on the four interactional moves and encouraging a deepening of engagement. Small changes in how entrepreneurs and advisors interact can lead to big outcomes in entrepreneurship.

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