

Mentoring Skills for Mentees*

While your mentor will not provide you with all the answers, he/she will facilitate self-reflection and self-development so that you are able to think critically and resolve challenges on your own. To help you achieve this, mentors utilize several skills including:

- Active listening
- Asking thought-provoking questions
- Role-modeling behavior
- Providing objective feedback and guidance
- Demonstrating critical thinking

With the guidance of your mentor, you will develop a similar set of skills outlined below that will empower you to think, reflect, and take the necessary action steps to realize your goals.

Set goals

To focus your mentoring relationship, it is important to take a moment to reflect on what you want to achieve during the relationship and where you want to be at the end of 6 weeks, 6 months, and in one year. Once you have identified goals you will be able to begin your mentoring relationship with the end in mind and work towards making concrete progress.

Actively listen

Active listening is a communication technique that requires the listener to really listen for the underlying message and not just hear the words being spoken. A common technique used to ensure that the listener understood the message is to paraphrase what he/she has heard the speaker say to confirm understanding. As an active listener, you should also pay attention to your non-verbal cues such as your facial expressions, body language, and eye contact to make sure that you are communicating to the speaker that you are engaged. Be aware, however, that non-verbal cues can also indicate a cultural difference. For example, in some countries it is considered impolite to look someone in the eye when speaking to them.

Tips for active listening

- Focus all your attention on the speaker.
- Avoid distractions like cell phones, email, etc.
- Go to a quiet place to speak.
- Do not interrupt the speaker or assume a conclusion before the speaker has finished.
- Do not react with judgment. Instead, summarize main points once the speaker is finished using phrases like, "What I heard you say is" or, "Let me summarize your points to make sure that I heard you correctly."
- Use "I" statements instead of "you" statements when going over what you heard. For example, "I felt uncomfortable by your statement" instead of, "You made me feel uncomfortable when you said . . ."
- Take notes to capture important thoughts and concepts.
- Listen for feeling and tone in speech and watch for non-verbal cues.

Receiving and responding to feedback

Feedback, no matter how much we ask for it, can be very difficult to receive. Even when delivered thoughtfully and candidly, it can be hard to hear how we may improve or that others' perceptions of our behavior do not match our own. However, constructive feedback can be an effective tool for personal and professional growth. So before dismissing feedback as invalid or becoming overly defensive, take a step back and consider what is being said. Feedback is not about your worth as a person, but about how to achieve your goals.

Tips for receiving and responding to feedback

- Refrain from reacting and responding immediately. If the feedback is particularly difficult to hear, remove yourself from the situation until you can objectively assess the message without focusing on the delivery and how it felt. Consider saying, "Thank you for the feedback. I need some time to think about what you shared before responding."
- Ask questions for clarification and summarize in your own words what you heard before you respond. Consider saying, "I would like to be clear that I understood you correctly. What I heard you say was..."
- Reflect on your own reaction as you process the feedback. Write down your reactions. Are you reacting to the content or the delivery? While it is instinct to react to the delivery, focus on the content of the message: what is really being said?
- Ask for suggestions, from your mentor or from others, on specific steps you could take to address the feedback. For example, "I hear that you are saying I need to work on managing priorities. Can you provide me with some examples of how I might approach that?"
- Be proactive and solicit feedback regarding ways you would like to improve. For example, "I am struggling with time management and I notice that you do a good job of managing the priorities in your life. Can you give me some advice on how to do this better?"

Take initiative and ownership of your own development

In your mentoring relationship, you will be expected to own your developmental progress. You should not wait for your mentor to tell you what to do and how to do it. For example, your mentor should not have to seek you out. You are responsible for regularly scheduling meetings with your mentor.

Build effective relationships

As with any new relationship, building the trust and respect that is crucial to its success will take time and is demonstrated through action. Honoring your commitments, being on time for your meetings, and being respectful and open to suggestions are actions that will be crucial to building trust with your mentor. While you may not be the best of friends, your relationship will still require strong interpersonal skills, open communication, and a willingness to be honest with the other person.

Reflect on key learning moments

Your mentor will ask you a lot of questions that are meant to provoke deep and critical thought, reflection, and discussion. You will be required to reflect on your past and present to develop a roadmap for your future. As part of your reflection process, consider keeping a journal to write down your thoughts and feelings on what was discussed and agreed upon after every meeting. Your journal does not need to be shared with your mentor, though it may reveal topics to explore in future meetings.