

Mentoring Skills for Mentors*

Following are important skills that will help you empower your mentee to think, reflect, and take the necessary action steps to realize his or her goals. Your objective should be to provide guidance and support; you are not expected to solve problems for your mentee.

Actively listen

Active listening is a communication technique that requires the listener to paraphrase what he or she has heard the speaker say to confirm understanding. At the same time, the listener is also paying attention to non-verbal cues such as silence, facial expression, body language, and overall comfort. For example, you may notice that every time you bring up the topic of career development your mentee grows quiet and withdraws. You may address these cues with an open-ended question such as, "I notice that every time I bring up career development you seem uncomfortable. What are your feelings about this?" 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 your attention on the speaker.
- Avoid distractions like cell phones, email, etc.
- Find 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.
- Resist the urge to provide solutions.
- Listen for feeling and tone in speech and watch for non-verbal cues.
- Ask thought-provoking questions. Your main goal as a mentor is to help your mentee take the steps needed to pursue his or her goals.
- Use open-ended questions that provoke deep thought and reflection. Your questions should create a space for open discussion and allow your mentee to reflect on his or her opinions, thoughts, and feelings. Open-ended questions encourage participation, stimulate discussion, and help you establish rapport. For example, instead of asking, "Are you enjoying your job?" ask, "What is it that you enjoy most about your job?" You can follow up with a, "Why?" or, "Why not?"

Sample questions

- What would you like to accomplish (before we meet next time)?
- What has happened since we last met? Where are you now?
- What did you learn (from an experience, about yourself, about others, about a situation)?
- What will you do with this knowledge?
- What steps do you plan to take to accomplish those goals? How are you going to get there?

Clinical and Translational Science Institute

- What resources will you need?
- What barriers or challenges can you anticipate?
- What is the situation/problem/issue?
- What do you think is the cause?
- What have you done so far to address it?
- What has worked so far? What has not worked?
- What could you do (differently) to get your desired result?
- How can I help you to be successful?
- What went well? What needs work?

Role model behavior

As a mentor you are a role model and should be aware of your word choice, your demeanor, and how you react to people and situations. Keep in mind that your mentee looks to you for advice and guidance so make sure that you practice what you preach. Ask yourself, “Would I want my mentee to see me behaving this way?” or, “Would I want my mentee to emulate these actions?”

Tips to practice role modeling with your mentee

- Use examples from your own experiences to demonstrate how to receive feedback, take ownership, build effective partnerships, provide constructive criticism, etc.
- Model how to effectively receive and respond to feedback when receiving it from your mentee.
- Model active listening when your mentee is speaking.
- Be present, prepared, engaged, and on time to meetings with your mentee. Provide objective feedback and guidance. It is important that you take the opportunity to provide feedback and guide your mentee through this type of conversation.

Tips for providing feedback

- Ask your mentee how he or she best receives feedback in your first meeting (refer to the mentoring agreement). When you are ready to provide feedback, check for a willingness to listen by asking for permission to deliver feedback. Make sure the other person is in the frame of mind to receive it.
- Check for understanding. Make sure that you accurately understand the situation before jumping to a conclusion. Utilize your active listening skills.
- Check for positive intent. Make sure that your intentions are to help with the other person’s growth and development and are not related to any personal bias or feelings you may have about the person.
- Focus on behaviors and results. Frame your message around concrete behaviors and results of those behaviors.
- Demonstrate critical thinking. When you provide feedback to your mentee you model your ability to think critically about the situation. A critical thinker clearly articulates a question or problem, gathers and assesses relevant information, tests solutions against relevant criteria, has an open mind to alternative solutions, and communicates the decision effectively to others. Your mentee is honing these skills every day in the workplace and your job as a mentor is to help him/her learn to apply these skills to his/her life.

Steps to critical thinking

- Identify the problem
- Identify possible solutions to the problem
- Analyze/evaluate possible solutions
- Decide what to do and how to implement the solution
- Reflect on what happened and why