
CORE MENTORING SKILLS

Mentoring is, undoubtedly, stretching and challenging. No mentor, however long they've been doing it, ever feels that they know it all when it comes to mentoring someone. But, there are some key skills which stand us in good stead and provide the basis for developing and incorporating other skills:

- Supporting goal setting
- Questioning
- Listening
- Reflecting back
- Suspending judgement
- Feedback
- Monitoring progress.

SUPPORTING GOAL SETTING

Remember it is always the mentee who sets the goals for their mentoring.

The following '**Five Key Questions**' format will help them to think these through. These are not a script but give you a check list for a conversation.

Q *What's the goal / issue / opportunity?*

e.g. What, in broad terms, are you trying to change / achieve? What's the driving force?

Q *Where do you want to get to?*

e.g. What is your desired outcome? How do you want or need to be different to now?

Q *Where are you now?*

e.g. Identify the *detail* of how things are today in relation to the goal. What positive things do you need to keep? How would others describe you today?

Q *How will you know when you've got there?*

e.g. What would you get out of it? What would be the result / benefits of this change?

Q *Where does this fit with your 'big picture'?*

e.g. How does it fit with any broader career / life plans, motivation, job satisfaction, interest, enjoyment, job security etc?

Remember, of course, that as goals turn into objectives, you should encourage your mentee to make them SMART.

- **S**pecific
- **M**easurable
- **A**chievable
- **R**elevant
- **T**ime-bound.

QUESTIONING SKILLS

The ability to ask questions is fundamental to supporting someone to manage their own development. Most of us possess the skill but it's often overpowered by our desire to give the answers!

You may be familiar with open and closed questions but let's recap.

<p>Open questions are questions which cannot be answered with yes or no e.g.</p>	<p>Closed questions are questions that can be answered by a "yes" or a "no" e.g.</p>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • What? • Why? • Where? • When? • Who? • How? 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Can / could • Will / would • Do / did • Are / is / were • Has / have.

Open questions are invitations to speak about an area of interest.

Other words to invite someone to speak include **Tell me... Explain... Describe...**
e.g.

'What might be the benefits of this particular approach?'

'Tell me about your career aspirations?'

Closed questions are most useful for confirming actions or decisions e.g.

"Did you do it?"

"Are you committing to that?"

A kitbag of open mentoring questions

Exploring and facilitating new perspectives:

Tell me...

In what way would things be different if this happened...?

What in particular...?

How familiar is this situation?

What might make a difference?

How regularly do you experience this...?

What other options do you have?

What are you already doing that you could do more of?

How does / did [that] make you feel?

How do / did you think the other person feels / felt?

What do you think was happening for them?

How might that have been perceived...?

How important is that to you?

What might be the consequences of...?

What are the issues...?

What are you focusing on?

Planning for action:

What do you want to do...?

What might get in the way – and how will you overcome this?

Who can support you in that?

What feedback / support do you want from me?

What else do you need?

What else?

How committed are you?

When will you do it by?

Reflecting on learning

What was the outcome?

What would you do differently next time?

How did that affect you?

What got in the way?

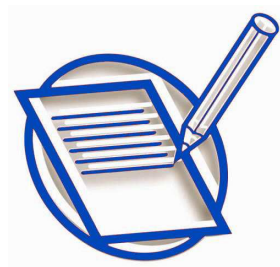
What is working well...?

What did you learn from this (about yourself / the situation)?

What changes have you seen...?

What next?

<p>What comes to mind...?</p> <p>What's your gut feel?</p> <p>How do you see it?</p> <p>How could you overcome this...?</p> <p>How would you feel if...?</p> <p>How does this relate to...?</p> <p>What opportunities / challenges does this present...?</p>	
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One of the biggest challenges many mentors recognise is the temptation to phrase advice or direction in the form of a question! These are to be avoided!

Below are some leading questions that have been phrased this way. In the next column write a suitable open question you could ask instead. The first one has been completed as an example.

Leading question	Alternative question
Why don't you speak to the person involved and try to solve the problem with them?	How important is it to you that you solve the problem with this person?
Wouldn't it be a good idea to put a plan in place?	
Don't you think it's a bit risky to do that?	
Couldn't you have a go and see what happens?	

LISTENING SKILLS

Listening has been described as ‘what we do while we’re waiting for our turn to speak’! It’s very important, as a mentor, to really listen to what the mentee is saying without immediately jumping to your own conclusions and judgements – try to hear what they are saying from their perspective.

Active listening check list

- Focus all attention on the speaker and ignore external distractions.
Don't be side-tracked mentally
- Avoid forming judgements and immediate responses
- Demonstrate attention through non-verbal behaviour (especially eye contact and facial expressions)
- Listen for the overall intent of the speaker: what are they really saying?
Read between the lines
- Pay attention to their body language, facial expressions and tone of voice
- Listen for the speaker's viewpoint: attitudes, prejudices, blind spots, assumptions etc – and be aware of your own
- Notice the difference between fact and opinion
- Don't judge or be led by your own assumptions, personal views and prejudices
- Let them finish speaking and don't immediately respond with the answer!



Pay attention to your own listening skills and how others listen to you. Think about the following:

- What skills am I using consistently?
- What challenges do I face in listening actively and non-judgementally?
- What bad habits have I developed e.g. frequently interrupting, doing emails while on the phone etc?
- What signs do I have that others are / are not listening actively to me – and how do these behaviours make me feel?

REFLECTING BACK

Reflecting back or reflecting skills means holding up a mirror to the person to repeat back to them or to reframe (reword or re-contextualise) what they have said.

For example

Mentee: 'I should hand over that project but I can't because I'm the one that has the relationship with the team'

Mentor: 'And the relationship is important...' (reflecting back the implied opinion)

Mentee: 'Well, yes of course – relationships are always important'

The mentee is now thinking about relationships as a priority so the mentor can now ask e.g.

Mentor: 'What else is important to this project...?' or 'how do you feel your focus on relationships compares with that of your colleagues?'

Both give a lead into a conversation that opens up the possibility for the mentee to gain new insights into their working values and how that influences their choices.

Reflecting back is important because it:

- Demonstrates active listening
- Ensures mentor has understood
- Helps build empathy
- Reframes the situation to assist the mentee in gaining clarity / new perspective.

A kitbag of questions and interventions to reflect back what you've heard

I am getting the sense that...?

Are you suggesting that...?

From what you are saying, it seems that...

Am I right in understanding that...?

I notice that you...?

How does this relate to...?

I get the impression that ...

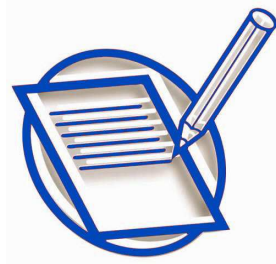
As you talk about this, you seem to be...

I notice that your body language changed when...?

It seems that...

There seems to be a pattern here...

You appear to be favouring this approach. Is that the case?



Read the mentee statements below and write down one way that you might reflect back to the mentee and ask them a question to help them think deeper or gain a different perspective.

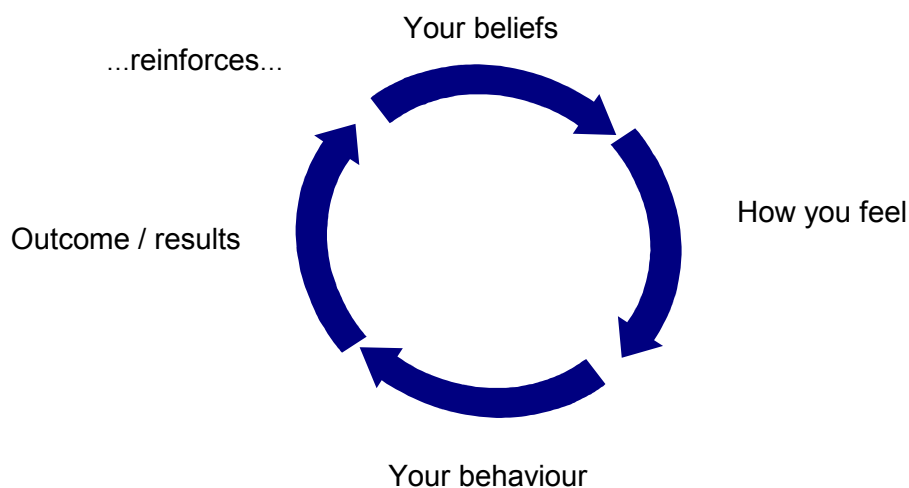
Refer back to the example given above and the kit bag of questions if you need some guidance.

Mentee says:	You respond:
<p>“I think I’m in a bit of a rut but I enjoy my job and it’s not too challenging either” (said in an upbeat tone of voice).</p>	
<p>“I’m getting so fed up with the fact I can’t rely on anyone else to get things done, I feel like I want to leave” (said in a tense, irritated tone of voice)</p>	
<p>“I’d like to have a bit more of a career plan and I think I’m ready for promotion but I’ve worked in the same department for a long time – I don’t know if I’d be any good in another role” (said in a resigned tone of voice)</p>	

SUSPENDING JUDGEMENT

Suspending judgement is the ability to remain objective and see things as they are, rather than from our own viewpoint or moral framework.

The belief cycle offers a useful framework for understanding and managing our subjective reactions. If we can understand our own prejudices, generalisations and beliefs about other people and situations we can start to change our attitude, our emotional reactions and our subsequent behaviour.



Our beliefs impact the outcomes and experiences we have. For instance:

Beliefs: We believe that the mentee is not ambitious enough.

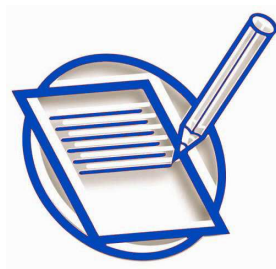
Feelings: This belief makes us feel frustrated that they are not living up to their potential.

Behaviour: As a result we are more likely to 'push' them to go for more challenging opportunities for development.

Result: The mentee feels challenged and unequipped for such a big step and pushes back saying they are not ready for it.

All of which reinforces our belief that they are not ambitious and using their talents... and reinforces their belief next time that you will push them and that they need to counter this upfront.

If we recognise our beliefs, then we can make more conscious and informed decisions about how to support our mentee.



Re-run the example above, but this time start the belief with 'My mentee has a lot of untapped talent which I can help them to recognise'. Write below how the cycle might play out from this start point.

Phase	What happens
My belief	'My mentee has a lot of untapped talent which I can help them to recognise'
My feelings towards the mentee?	
My behaviour towards the mentee?	
Result <i>How does the mentee behave in response?</i>	

Positive intent

It is helpful to use a technique called 'positive intent' which means that we choose to believe that other people act in good faith – most of us choose courses of action that we believe to be the best option (or the only option) open to us at the time. We don't intentionally cause upset or problems for other people or ourselves for the sake of it. We act positively in our own best interests given the situation we find ourselves in. If we believe that, however challenging or frustrating we find someone's views or actions, they are acting in the best way they know how, then it becomes easier to act as if their intentions are positive.

If we choose to 'act as if' the other person is behaving with 'positive intent', we change the way that we feel about the situation (we are feeling at least positive about trying a new approach) and the person (we believe that they are not TRYING to be difficult). Then we can change our behaviour which gives them something different to respond to which, in turn, changes their behaviour.

FEEDBACK

Feedback in mentoring is a two way process and both mentor and mentee should encourage each other to give feedback regularly. Remember that feedback can be a facilitative process – it's about giving someone the information to make their own choices.

Feedback framework in a mentoring context

Positive Feedback

1. Identify the specific example that you want to give feedback on and offer feedback
2. Specify what made 'it' so effective *e.g. skills &/or qualities used, challenges overcome*

3. Describe what the benefits were *e.g. contribution to achieving the goal*
4. Ask the other person what they observed for themselves and how they want to go forward from here. Agree what future feedback / support they want from you.

Constructive Feedback

1. Identify the specific example and offer feedback
2. Check the individual's view of the situation and how they feel *e.g. What went well? What did not go well? How do you feel about it?*
3. Offer your feedback / observations *e.g. give specific examples and draw attention to any trends / patterns / outcomes etc that the individual may not see themselves*
4. Ask the individual to compare your feedback with their own view
5. Use questioning and reflection skills to facilitate the individual to analyse the situation and what they want to do about it
6. Support the individual to develop an action or learning plan with timelines, if appropriate. Agree what future feedback / support they want from you.

Feedback tips

Giving feedback	Receiving feedback
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Be specific and descriptive – stick to what you can observe, not your interpretation of what that means • State how what you hear and see makes you feel, if relevant, but be clear that it is your personal response • DON'T be judgemental (i.e. this was right or wrong!) or make assumptions. Believe they are acting with 'positive intent' • Time your feedback appropriately – as soon as practical is usually most helpful • Be positive, constructive, honest and fair • Take the other person's feelings into account but don't play down or dilute the message such that it loses its importance. Make feedback constructive i.e. something to learn from and change • Make sure your feedback is about something they CAN change • Offer your feedback, don't impose it. Don't be disappointed if it is turned down or not acted on. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Ask for feedback from others to help you to identify how to improve and how you are progressing • Be clear about what feedback you want. To avoid fuzzy answers ask 'what did I do well?' and 'what could I improve?' • Don't see feedback as personal criticism or a threat – see it as a useful observation to learn from • Listen actively and ask questions • Check that you understand what's being said to you where necessary • Be open to acknowledging your faults / weaknesses – after all, we all have them! • Don't try to defend your actions: the other person's view is their perception and true for them • Accept positive feedback without talking yourself down • Thank the person for their feedback • You have ultimate ownership of if and how you respond to the feedback you are given.