

What makes a good mentor?

In this next section, we will examine what makes a good mentor.

As previously discussed, the mentoring process is not all one-way; the mentoring process can provide opportunities to further enhance existing skills as well as developing new skills.

Mentors aren't picked for any superhuman qualities – though some of them may fall into that category. They do however have common attributes and qualities. These include:

- Interest in developing others
- Experienced in developing others
- Knowledgeable
- Encouraging
- “Go to” person
- Professional
- People Oriented
- Solution Focussed
- Build relationships

Three key skills of an effective mentor include

- Building rapport
- Listening
- Questioning

Let's look at these in more detail

The Oxford English Dictionary defines rapport as “A close and harmonious relationship in which the people or groups concerned understand each other's feelings or ideas and communicate well,” striking a good rapport with your mentee will help to establish an effective and satisfying mentoring relationship.

Rapport is not simply about getting people to like you, but being flexible in the way you behave and interact with others. People who are in rapport typically ‘match’ each other.

This can include:

- adopting the same posture and movements
- talking in the same tone and speed of voice
- using similar language

Listening intently and using effective questioning techniques are also ways of building rapport.

There is a difference between listening with your brain and listening with your ears.

When we listen with our brains, we don't only listen to the words but we are trying to pick up the emotions behind them. This is key when mentoring and also to building rapport.

It may be helpful to consider listening skills in four different levels:

1. Cosmetic Listening is ‘pretending to or appearing to listen’. You are looking at someone and you may be nodding and making noises as if you are listening, however your thoughts are actually somewhere else, you are thinking about something completely different from what the person is actually talking about.
2. Conversational Listening is what we do most of the time. In general communication with others we listen, talk, think, listen, talk, think etc. We are listening to what they are saying and we are also concentrating on what we are saying at the same time. This is fine for every day conversations, however since half of your concentration is on what you are saying, it is not a deep enough listening style for mentoring purposes.

3. Active Listening is where the listener is using more effort to listen and to process information than speaking themselves. The listener is actively seeking to understand what the person is telling them, clarifying via the use of questions, repeating and summarising.
4. Empathetic Listening is the final category. At this level of listening you get a sense of what the person is *not* saying in addition to what they are saying. Through empathetic listening, you listen from the other person's perspective and frame of reference rather than your own.

It is the active and empathic listening skills that should be employed during mentoring.

Another key mentoring skill is questioning.

The following model, referred to as the GROW model can be a useful tool for structuring a mentoring conversation and to inform the questions you ask a mentee. It is also a useful model for sharing your experience with the mentee. An effective mentoring relationship should begin with establishing a goal. It could be a performance goal, a development goal, a problem to solve, decision to make, or a goal for mentoring meeting itself. For clarity of goal setting, encourage your mentee to use a S.M.A.R.T. goal format, meaning that the target is:

Specific
Measurable
Attainable
Realistic
Time-bound

Current Reality:

This step in the GROW model helps you and your mentee gain awareness of the current situation – it establishes a starting point and puts the goal into context.

Options:

Once you both have a clear understanding of the situation, the conversation can turn to what the mentee can do to reach their goal.

Will or Way Forward:

This is the last step in the GROW model. In this step, the mentor checks for commitment and helps the mentee establish a clear action plan for next steps

Another useful way of looking at the GROW model is to consider it in the same way as planning a journey.

The first step is to decide where you are going (the goal)

Next, you establish where you currently are (your current reality)

You then can explore various routes (the options) to your destination.

Before committing to making the journey (will/way forward)