

## MENTORING SKILLS

**MCI mentors** are committed guides who listen, answer questions, give feedback, motivate, give practical tips, point out opportunities, self-critically share their own mistakes and successes and open up professional networks. They are neither mediators of internships or jobs, nor guarantors for a direct entry to the executive floor.

Mentors are not professional trainers or coaches, but they do need a set of skills to be effective in their role. Some of these skills are outlined below.

### 1 **active listening**

Important because: ...it helps you recognise your mentee's perspectives and feelings, and appreciate them. It fosters a culture of trust and respect, and a positive atmosphere that encourages open and effective communication – a key pillar of every mentoring relationship.

#### Basic strategies:

**Pay attention.** Show your mentee that he/she has your undivided attention. If you are meeting online, limit background noise and interruptions. Use the video camera so your mentee can see your facial expressions. Take notes during your discussion (you can use your Mentoring Diary for this).

**Acknowledge what they say.** For example, you can paraphrase his/her message, ask for clarification if there are any muddy points, use body language (nodding head, leaning forward, eye contact, etc.) to show that you are listening.

**Listen for central ideas.** Make sure you understand what the real meaning behind your mentee's message is. Listen for trigger words and restate your understanding of what was said.

**Ask questions.** Move the discussion forward by asking salient questions that require the mentee to open up and make them think more deeply about his/her message. Useful question types include open, probing, and provoking questions.

**Give feedback.** Try to find a good balance between candid feedback and being judgemental too early in the process. Don't dominate the discussion with your advice and own experience, but give the mentee a chance to express his/her questions and concerns.

## 2 building trust

Important because: ... trust is the basis for your mentee to open up to you and discuss delicate matters. On the other hand, it is also important for you to feel safe to share your own – sometimes very personal – experiences with your mentee.

### Basic strategies:

**Be available and responsive.** Even though you are busy, try to maintain contact with your mentee on a regular basis. Don't wait too long before you reply to an email, and make sure you have enough time for your meetings.

**Create a positive environment.** Ask your mentee how they are and what is happening in his/her life at the beginning of each meeting. Share your own state of mind with them, as well.

**Discuss confidentiality and privacy.** Make sure you specifically discuss how you both agree to maintain confidentiality: what you discuss in your meetings is between you and your mentee, both during and after the mentoring relationship.

**Discuss your values.** Trust develops over time. However, having a discussion about what you both value (including what you value about having this mentoring relationship) can be a good basis.

**Be sensitive to differences.** At the beginning of your relationship, it might be tempting to focus on common ground and shared values only. Note that the differences you have are just as enriching and positive, and can lead to new learnings and different perspectives.

**Keep your promises and commitments.** Honouring your scheduled meetings, calls and agreements is a vital aspect in establishing a trustful relationship.

### 3 help determining goals

Important because: ... without specific goals, it is difficult (or impossible) to determine progress and success. By helping your mentee establish a set of goals, you encourage him/her to articulate what they want, focus on achievement and critical self-reflection.

#### Some examples:

**Share your own goals.** As a mentor, you are also a role model. By sharing your own goals, you set a good example and help your mentee understand the importance of regular reflection and direction setting.

**Recommend resources.** You are part of a community of practice and have access to resources, including people, that might be helpful for your mentee. Be generous in sharing these!

**Use a Goal-Setting Tool.** There are plenty of well-established models and tools you can use with your mentee to help him/her determine goals, milestones and accomplishments. Check out the MCI Mentoring Toolkit for some ideas.

**Follow up.** Make sure that goals are documented, and that you review what was agreed before each meeting. Follow up on progress with your mentee and help them identify any issues or stumbling blocks.

## 4 encouraging & inspiring

Important because: ... in your role as mentor, your mentee looks to you for encouragement and inspiration. This is one of the major reasons why students choose to participate in mentoring programs.

### Some examples:

**Notice and comment on accomplishments.** Your mentee will appreciate your feedback when they report on their progress and success. Make sure your comments are honest and authentic.

**Show that you believe in your mentee.** Be constant in communicating your belief in your mentee's ability to grow, develop and reach the goals set.

**Be supportive.** There will be times when your mentee needs moral support from you. Let him/her vent any frustrations and talk about fears and challenges. Point out the opportunities that might arise from these experiences and show you are there to help.

**Encourage independence.** You are only on your mentee's side for a set period of time, and your mentee will have to go his/her own way. Assist him/her in developing the skills needed for independent growth and self-reflection, also after your mentoring relationship ends.

**Share your heroes.** Talk to your mentee about people and events that have given you inspiration, encouragement and confidence.