

## LISTENING SKILLS FOR MENTEES

The stories your mentor shares with you are treasure troves of advice for you. You have probably prepared some good questions for your mentor (see handout “Good questions for mentees” in your toolkit), but you have to be able to actively listen and detect the information that is helpful to you.

Here are some strategies for successful listening:

### **1 what are the central messages?**

Your mentor may repeat central ideas again and again – these are probably core concepts that are important to him/her. After having identified these, you can ask further and deeper questions.

### **2 relate central ideas to your own context**

Try to apply what your mentor is telling you your own situation. Are there any parallels that you can compare directly? Are there things that don't fit with your experience? Are there aspect that are (ir)relevant to you? Comparing and contrasting your mentor's ideas with your own will give you plenty to talk about. Remember that you don't have to always agree with your mentor – express your own thoughts and points of view, supporting them with good arguments.

### **3 avoid “listening to disagree and to respond”**

In everyday conversation, we often tend to listen to someone else with the only aim to prove them wrong (disagree) or to find opportunities to interrupt and bring in our own – often pre-formulated- ideas. Monitor your own listening practice, try to identify when and how you do this, and instead aim to listen to understand your mentor's points, putting your own agenda on the backburner.

### **4 listen for trigger words or phrases**

When we listen to other people, we normally have emotional reactions to certain trigger words or phrases. These can impact on our thought process and our ability to listen because they provoke sometimes quite strong feelings in us. Observe your own listening behavior in different situations and try to identify what these trigger words are for you. Once you know what they are, you will have much better control of your own reaction and will find it easier to keep concentrating on your conversation.

## **5      keep focused**

Many of us find it difficult to keep focused while their conversation partner is talking because we can think much faster than we can talk. Be conscious of this when you listen to your mentor and try to keep pace with his/her speed of talking rather than get off track in your mind.

## **6      show your mentor that you appreciate his/her input**

Active listening skills include:

- using open body language (eye contact, nodding, smiling, not crossing your arms, leaning forward, etc.)
- making reinforcing comments
- asking questions for clarification
- summarizing key points
- or other cues.

Try to show your appreciation for your mentor by applying these skills in your conversations.