

## What Mentors Do

Mentors facilitate learning by keeping the learner front and center. To mentor effectively, you will use the learning approach most appropriate for your mentee. Asking questions, reformulating statements, summarizing, listening for the silence, and listening reflectively will help you do this. These strategies should always be part of your toolkit.

### ***Ask Questions***

Questions encourage learning by allowing us to reflect. Asking questions that require thoughtful answers (like those in the exercises in this chapter) is a good way to help mentees articulate their own thinking. Use questions to engage the mentee in the conversation. Remember ethical, role-appropriate questioning is a must. When you stray outside these boundaries, it is easy to exceed limits of appropriateness and fairness.

- Ask questions that support and challenge—for example: "That's a nice way of describing the culture. How would you apply some of that thinking to the staff?"
- Ask questions to stimulate reflection—for example: "Could you tell me a little more about what you mean by...?" "Is there another way to look at this?"
- Ask specific questions that draw on your mentee's unique thinking and learning style—for example: "That seems logical, but let's take a moment to brainstorm some other possibilities." "It sounds like you have a lot of good options! Is there one that you really resonate with?" "That's a great idea. How do you think we might put it into action?"
- Allow time for thoughtful reflection —for example: "It sounds as if we've only begun to scratch the surface. Let's think about this some more and discuss it further in our next conversation."

### ***Reformulate Statements***

When we rephrase what we've heard mentees say, we can clarify our own understanding and encourage the mentee to hear and reflect on what they have articulated. This offers an opportunity for further clarification:

- Paraphrase what you heard—for example: "I think what I heard you saying is ..."
- Continue the process of rephrasing and paraphrasing until you clearly understand and the mentee is no longer adding new information—for example: "My understanding is ..."

### ***Summarize***

Summarizing what you've learned during a session reinforces the learning. It also serves as a reminder of what has transpired and acts as a way to check assumptions:

- Share the content of what you have heard, learned, or accomplished— for example: "We've spent our time today doing... During that time we... As a result, we achieved the following outcomes..."
- Leave judgments and opinions out when you summarize—for example: "Did you say that...?" "I understood you to say... Is that correct?"
- Deal with the facts of the situation, not the emotions—for example: "So, I am hearing three things. Number 1 is..., number 2 is..., and number 3 is..., Have I got that right?"

### ***Listen for the Silence***

Silence provides an opportunity for learning. Some individuals need time to think quietly. Silence can also indicate confusion, boredom, or even physical discomfort:

- Don't be afraid of silence.
- Encourage silence.
- Use the silence as an opportunity for reflection—for example: "I notice that whenever we started to talk about... you get kind of quiet. I'm wondering what that is about."

### ***Listen Reflectively***

Often we hear but do not really listen. When you listen reflectively, you hear the silence, observe nonverbal responses, and hold up a mirror for the mentee:

- Be authentic—for example: "What I'd like to see is..."
- Clarify—for example: "What do you mean by...?"
- Provide feedback—for example: "You did a great job with that. I like the way you... I also thought that... Next time you might try ..."

When your work is solidly grounded in principles of adult learning, you and your mentee can be co-learners who both benefit and grow from the relationship.