

The Five Mentor Approaches & Ten Skills

For mentors to positively impact the emerging leader “shift” and growth over time, they must recognize when they unconsciously slip into the “driver’s seat” and a “telling” mode and move back to influencing mentees to be their own drivers through expressing their voice, learning new skills, and practicing. Because most of us are used to “doing and directing” this sounds easier than it is. We offer five “Mentor Approaches” to help Mentors stay in the facilitator role. Mentor Approaches focus on building relationships and helping individuals or groups learn and grow from their experiences.

Most people are familiar with the concepts of the Mentor Approaches, but many may not be comfortable actually using them. This is normal and ease comes with practice. Mentor Approaches require an ability to see the needs of mentees and the dynamics of the surrounding environment while using skills to empower the mentee’s voice.

As in all things, growing as a mentor happens over time. Being aware of the Mentor Approaches and skills you have strength in and those you may not be highly skilled in now helps you to set goals to develop yourself. Mastery will come with practice.

1

Building Authentic Relationships

Building authentic relationships is the heart of mentoring because the relationship is the vehicle through which Mentors help others learn and grow. Talking together about the purpose for the relationship and the roles of each one helps mentors and mentees achieve clarity and shared expectations about their roles, needs, and boundaries. Sharing and agreeing on common values and norms that the mentor and mentee commit to upholding in the relationship serves as a shared vision that can be revisited when needed. All relationships have ups, which are enjoyable and downs which, with open communication, serve to strengthen the relationship. This Mentor Approach is constantly at play in the mentor-mentee relationship. The Mentor’s goals are consistency, genuineness, and honesty. Youth flourish and grow more confident with the help of supportive relationships and as a partner in a relationship that is being consciously created; they deepen their relationship building skills.

Because the mentor and mentee are part of a larger community, the practice of building authentic relationships also includes modeling authentic relationships with others in the community.

Skill 1 - Building Relationships

Mentors need to be good at both starting relationships and maintaining them over time. “Authentic” means to be your real self: natural, genuine, and honest.

Skill 2 - Being a Community Networker

Mentors need to be door openers and link mentees to other leaders and people in the community who may be resources for the mentees as well as promote the talents and successes of mentees in the community.

2

Communicating Openly

If Mentor Approach 1 is the vehicle for the relationship, Mentor Approach 2 is the fuel for the relationship. It builds trust and safety through sharing information, being accountable, acknowledging feelings and needs, and airing differences in a civil way. Just like vehicle fuel, communicating openly must always be refilled—if it runs out, the relationship can't grow.

Skill 3 - Listening

Mentors communicate empathically to develop trust that fosters open communication and deeper understanding. Mentors model open communication and transparency.

Skill 4 - Managing Conflict

Mentors know conflict is a part of relationships and are comfortable helping mentees have open conversations about differing points of view. Mentors promote that managing conflict does not mean avoiding or eliminating differences.

3

Asking Not Telling

Growing up most of us were taught that to teach another, it was our responsibility to transfer information—to fill learners up. This image assumes that the learner is empty and the traditional teacher's job is to fill them up with knowledge. Mentor Approach 3 suggests a different image. Imagine a two-way learning dynamic where both the mentor and the mentee are learning. The mentor takes the role of a coach and asks good questions to elicit reflection by the mentee and stimulate them to share their assumptions, thinking and imagination. "Asking Not Telling" means anytime the mentor wants to "tell" a mentee something....stop...and instead, ask a question that gives the mentee room to respond and discover.

Skill 5 - Coaching

Mentors use coaching approaches to help learners formulate and clarify their own ideas and goals and articulate the steps to reach them.

Skill 6 - Reflecting

Reflection is a powerful learning tool. Mentors use it to help mentees and mentors go up in the helicopter and step back, evaluate, process, assess, and articulate learning from the experiences they are having and implications for next action.

4

Magnifying the Positive Core

Leadership author Stephen Covey says that everyone has a “unique thumbprint.” He asks, “Who will listen and validate that uniqueness?” The answer of course is Mentors! To foster an emerging leader’s transformation from “on the margin” to “in the center,” the mentor must, like a powerful zoom on a camera, focus in on and bring forward a mentee’s qualities, values, strengths, capacities, experiences, and possibilities and potential. When they are brought out in the light they can be known and built on. Magnifying means appreciating and growing in value. This Mentor Approach encourages mentors to magnify the positive core by acknowledging, giving positive feedback, asking positive questions, and encouraging. The mentor also builds a youth’s positive core by faithfully providing constructive feedback to help the mentee understand behaviors that may be detracting from their positive core and how to transform these areas.

Skill 7 - Encouraging

Mentors encourage in many ways such as praising, building confidence, gently pushing, motivating and inspiring.

Skill 8 - Providing & Receiving Feedback

Ongoing feedback is an enabling tool throughout the mentoring process. Mentors need to know how to give constructive feedback so mentors can grow and support their mentees in asking for feedback.

5

Fostering Possibility Thinking

The fifth Mentor Movement focuses on the opportunity to guide emerging leaders to see possibilities when working on challenges and issues. Fostering possibility thinking encourages them to use questions to think out of the box. It is a powerful approach that puts emerging leaders in the driver’s seat when assessing issues, challenges, and problems so that they make connections and see new options that they didn’t consider before. Modeling and encouraging youth to use possibility thinking empowers them to be solution-finders.

Skill 9 - Guiding

Mentors are guides. They illuminate a path and prepare the mentee for what it is they are about to *see* and learn. Like a ranger guide on a mountain hike, the mentor helps learners to focus on the steps and reach their destination successfully. Mentors assure there is time for mentees to reflect on what they are “seeing” along the way.

Skill 10 – Solution-Finding

Solution finding is all about involving the learners as the problem solvers. Mentors do not solve problems for mentees. They provide assistance in the solution-finding process. The goal is to guide that process rather than provide the answer.

