

## EFFECTIVE MENTORING

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### I. Who can be a mentor?

A mentor possesses expertise and shares that resource with another person, providing knowledge, advice, expertise, guidance, networks and encouragement in their field of expertise, to help the mentee meet his/her goals.

J. Robert Clinton (*Connecting*, p. 38) describes six qualities of effective mentors. Although they may not have all of these qualities or perform at a high level in all of them, they tend to be strong in at least four of the six and are growing in the areas that they are weaker in.

1. **Ability to see potential in others**
2. **Tolerance with mistakes, brashness, abrasiveness, etc. in others to see potential developed**
3. **Flexibility in responding to people and circumstances**
4. **Patience, knowing that time and experience are needed for a person to develop potential**
5. **Perspective, having vision and ability to see down the road**
6. **Gifts and abilities to build up and encourage people**

### II. What is Mentoring?

Mentoring is a **relationally based process of empowerment** that results in both parties growing.

Empowerment involves transformational relationships in which all participants come to a **healthier understanding and experience of their potential** as individuals, members of social networks, and members of a community who serve and empower others.

Mentoring can offer us **different perspectives and needed accountability**. Mentoring relationships in our lives can bring fulfillment, enrichment, empowering and protection.

We can be our own worst enemy if we isolate ourselves and/or surround ourselves with “yes people” who do not love us enough to point out areas of weakness or vulnerability before it is too late. It is much better to be confronted by a loving friend than to be busted in public because we were not involved in healthy relationships for growth and accountability.

### III. What is Coaching?

A coach allows the person they are coaching to set the agenda for the discussion. They ask questions to draw out assumptions, motivation, ideas and answers that are within the person being coached.

The Coach tends to **draw people out (and not give advice)** by using open-ended questions, summarization, and framing techniques to help the mentee gain insight and come to his/her own conclusions. Conversely, the mentor tends to **input into a person often by giving advice or guidance.**

Keith Webb, *The Coaching Model*, describes the following coaching process that can help to frame the coaching process : (based on a 45-60 minute meeting)

- *Connect* – build rapport and trust (3-5 minutes)

Example questions: How have you been?

How are things going (at work/at school/ at home) What insights have you had since we met last?

What progress did you make on the action steps you were going to take?

What did you learn from doing them?

In what way does your action need to inform our time today?

- *Outcome* – set the agenda for the conversation (5-10 minutes)

*Example questions:* What one result would you like to take away from our time together today?

What would you like to talk about that would be the most effective use of our time?

What is it that you would like to focus on during our time together?

What would make today's meeting successful or helpful for you?

What would be the most helpful thing we could talk about during our time?

- *Awareness* – encourage discovery, insights, and shifts in perspective (lack of self awareness is what hold most leaders back) (20-30 minutes)

*Example questions:* Talk to me about what you are presently thinking.

What do you see to be some of your major obstacles?

What are the factors that you have bumped up against in the past?

Let's look at this from a different perspective: what else could be happening?

What are some additional options you might want to consider?

- *Course* – capture insights and develop 2-3 action steps (10-15 minutes)

*Example questions:* What actions would you like to take to move forward?

What options do you think most address what you want to achieve?

Which of these would you like to do? How? When?

On a scale of 1-10 (with 10 high) how confident are you that you can do this plan? (If 7 or below, go back and work on the plan).

What question(s) do you want me to ask you next time we are together, to help hold you accountable?

- *Highlights* – review the conversation (Learning and Action Steps) (3-5 minutes)  
*Example questions:* What would you like to remember from the time we have spent?

What parts of the discussion were particularly helpful?

What awareness do you have now that you did not have before?

What are your action steps?

There may be major overlap between coaching and mentoring. A mentor goes before and “pours in.” A coach stands beside and “draws out”. Both can compliment each other as we try to empower people for life transformation.

**At strategic points the coach may switch hats from coach to mentor in order to facilitate a breakthrough in a mentee’s personal development.**

#### IV. Active Listening

80% of what you do in the meeting with your mentee is to listen, not to tell.

According to Michael Nichols (*The Lost Art of Listening*) “The essence of good listening is empathy, which can be achieved only by suspending our preoccupation with ourselves and entering into the experience of the other person.” The focus here is on really listening to and hearing the other person.

A list of what active listening is not may be helpful here (from Dave Roper, *E-Musing*, 6/21/06, “Learning to Listen”):

1. When I’m thinking about an answer while others are talking.
2. When I give unsolicited advice.
3. When I suggest they shouldn’t feel the way they do.
4. When I apply a “quick fix” to their problem.
5. When I fail to acknowledge their feelings.
6. When I fidget, glance at my watch and appear to be rushed.
7. When I fail to maintain eye contact.

8. When I don't ask follow-up questions.
9. When I top their story with a bigger, better story of my own.
10. When they share a difficult experience and I counter with one of my own.

The four characteristics of effective listening described by Dr. Marisue Pickering (*Communication*):

1. Desire to be other-directed, rather than to project one's own feelings and ideas on others.
2. Desire to be non-defensive, rather than to protect the self.
3. Desire to imagine the roles, perspectives, or experiences of the other, rather than assuming they are the same as one's own.
4. Desire to listen as a receiver, not as a critic, and desire to understand the other person rather than to achieve either agreement from or change in the person.

Communication is more than words being exchanged between people. Non-verbal issues such as body language and tone of voice are often more important than the content of words in communication. Generally, there are six components involved in effective active listening that can be helpful as we develop and grow in this skill set. They include:

1. Attending – awareness of verbal and non-verbal contents:
  - a. Environment (i.e. location of chairs)
  - b. Posture
  - c. Eye contact
  - d. Heart attitude
  - e. Words
2. Verbal and non-verbal “attending” interpretation:
  - a. Content and meaning of words
  - b. Meaning derived from eye contact, body language, silence, etc.
3. Asking appropriate questions:
  - a. Open ended questions – How? What? When? Could? Would?
  - b. Closed questions – Is? Are? Do? Did?
  - c. Probing questions – Why?
4. Focus or context of communication:
  - a. Speaker
  - b. Listener
  - c. Topic
  - d. Others

5. Reflecting back to the sender what you think you are hearing:
  - a. Reinforce and support the sender
  - b. Clarify what is being said
  - c. Reflect back content
  - d. Reflect back feelings
  
6. Summarization

**Summarization** is the process by which we pull together, organize, integrate, and feed back the primary “message(s)” that the sender is trying to communicate. The purposes of summarization include:

1. Giving and receiving feedback for clarification/accuracy (including verbal and non-verbal communication).
2. Gaining clarity on issues that are unclear or wrong interpretations.
3. Helping the sender gain clarity and become more specific about primary message(s).
4. Helping the sender prioritize issues related to their primary message(s).
5. Helping show the sender that you care about them and are really listening to them.
6. Giving the sender an opportunity to clarify or go deeper.
7. Identifying possible issues that may become the basis for action planning/accountability.
8. Phrases that help in the summarization process may include:
  - a. “If I understand what you are saying, I am hearing...”
  - b. “What I hear you saying is... “
  - c. Let me try and clarify what I am hearing you say...”

## **V. Action Plans and Accountability**

For transformation to take place in mentoring relationships, goals that lead to appropriate action need to be established by the mentee as a result of the process of effective communication. If transformation is to take place out of the communication process, the mentor must carefully move the mentee from communication to action. Setting goals is a critical beginning. A basic set of guidelines for establishing effective goals is the SMART approach:

1. **S**pecific
2. **M**easurable
3. **A**chievable
4. **R**elevant (or related to vision)
5. **T**imeframe

Other variables in establishing SMART goals include answering questions about:

1. Who?

2. What?
3. How?
4. When?
5. Cost?

Once goals have been established and action plans formulated, “**reality checks**” need to be addressed so that the mentee does not set unrealistic goals that will lead to undue frustration and even failure. To assist in this, the mentor may want to ask the mentee some questions like:

1. “What important steps are missing?”
2. “How could your plan be more effective?”
3. “How and when will you evaluate your progress?”
4. “How can I help you?”
5. “In what ways do you need me to hold you accountable to your plan?”

Follow through is critical for any action plan to come to completion. Issues of support, accountability, evaluation, modification, and celebration of progress are critical, especially if the action plan involves major personal and lifestyle changes.

## **VI. Establishing Healthy Mentoring/ Coaching Relationships**

“The Ten Commandments of Mentoring” (J. Robert Clinton, *Connecting*, p. 197-198) is a helpful guide for establishing, maintaining, and transitioning mentoring relationships in healthy ways.

### **Phase 1 - Establishing Mentoring Relationships:**

**Commandment 1: Relationship** – establish the mentoring relationship. There are several variables that are important to understand in establishing mentoring relationships. They include attraction, chemistry, “teachableness,” and faithfulness:

- Attraction – like gift mixes (spiritual gifts, natural abilities, and acquired skills) tend to be attracted to each other.
- Chemistry – some types of personalities work well together and others do not.
- “Teachableness” – the potential for transformational growth tends to be linked to one’s appetite for and willingness to change.
- Faithfulness – people tend to get out of a relationship what they invest in it.

These variables are important to consider before establishing mentoring relationships. It is wise to be aware and consider these variables before committing to a mentoring relationship.

**Commandment 2: Purpose and Expectations** – jointly agree upon the purpose of the mentoring relationship. Unmet expectations are the primary killer of the potential for growth in a mentoring relationship and can lead to disappointment, dysfunction, and premature

termination. Careful attention to purpose and expectations can set the stage for understanding and maximum impact!

A written contract can be helpful here. This sounds pretty formal, but it can save a lot of confusion and even hurt. A contract should include written purpose and expectations, times and length of meeting, homework assignments, etc. If you feel uncomfortable with a written contract you should at least talk through these issues before committing to a mentoring relationship.

### **Phase 2 - Maintaining Mentoring Relationships:**

**Commandment 3: Regularity** – determine the regularity and types of interactions. Setting dates, times, and length of meetings are part of this, but you also need to address the types of interaction and appropriateness of interactions outside of the mentoring relationship. Issues like social interactions and when it is O.K. to call are all variables that you will have to address sooner or later.

**Commandment 4: Accountability** – determine the type of accountability. What do you do if a mentor or mentee no shows for an appointment? What do you do if a mentee does not do his/her homework assignment before a scheduled meeting? What if he/she is not doing his/her best on the homework assignments? What do you do?

Some questions that may help with accountability issues:

1. Did you make your expectations clear?
2. If so, did the mentee hear them?
3. Have you let things go in the past so that the mentee does not take the commitments seriously?
4. Are there special circumstances that may have contributed to lack of follow through?
5. What adjustments need to be made so that there is not a repeat?

**Commandment 5: Communication** – set up communication mechanisms. You will not have to confront issues as often if you establish clear expectations and communication mechanisms at the start of the relationship. Setting up specific times for feedback and evaluation are helpful, but regular times of praise and the celebration of success is also critical.

People tend to learn best in environments where they are affirmed in honest and loving ways. Mentees tend to step up when they know the mentor believes in them, encourages them, and takes pride in their accomplishments. Healthy communication is more than words; it also involves an attitude of love and affirmation.

If confrontation is necessary, approach it lovingly and give the other person the benefit of the doubt. There may be circumstances that you are unaware of that are contributing to the problem. The bottom line, though, is that a person has to learn to take personal responsibility regardless of circumstances if he/she wants to grow and mature.

**Commandment 6: Confidentiality** – clarify confidentiality. We need to create safe environments for our mentoring relationships and this partially involves issues of confidentiality. Be careful here to not fall into the trap of TOTAL confidentiality. You want to be able to talk to appropriate others if you are in over your head or if there are legal issues involved.

**Commandment 7: Life Cycle** – establish the time frame for the mentoring relationship. This helps define the phases of the mentoring relationship so that folks are prepared for the eventual closure of the mentoring relationship. Remember that intensive mentoring relationships tend to involve regular meetings over a specific time frame (i.e. three months or six months) while occasional mentoring relationships tend to be on a need-to-know basis and may be more sporadic.

During the agreed upon time frame it is important to communicate regularly about how the relationship is going and to revisit the purpose and expectations of the relationship (if needed).

**Commandment 8: Evaluation** – periodically evaluate the relationship. Regular evaluation can help monitor progress and clarify expectations. Even if you are clear about expectations at the start of the relationship, things change. Perceptions change, circumstances change, anything (and sometimes everything) can change.

Periodic evaluation may lead to adjustments in the time frame or even the expectations of the relationship, and can lead to a much more effective outcome.

**Commandment 9: Modification** – modify expectations to reflect real-life circumstances. You may need to slow down or change the focus of your expectations because of what is happening in and/or outside the mentoring relationship. If something is not working, evaluate and modify. Sometimes some pretty creative and helpful modifications can come out of frustration or even failure when the mentor and mentee stay connected through healthy communication, evaluation, and modification.

### **Phase 3 - Transitioning Mentoring Relationships:**

**Commandment 10: Closure** – bring timely closure to formal mentoring relationship. This can be a pretty critical phase in the mentoring relationship and can potentially be hurtful if not handled well. Clear expectations about the duration of the mentoring relationship are important, but gradual transitioning can also be very helpful.

As the end of the mentoring commitment nears, it is important to clarify closure and relational issues. You can become pretty close in mentoring relationships and may want the friendship to continue even though the type of relationship will change. You may not develop a friendship that lasts into the future. That is O.K. as well.

These relational issues need to be worked through in ways that are honest, open, and mutually agreeable (as much as possible). The bottom line is that transitions can be difficult and expectations can get fuzzy. Again, setting clear expectations at the start, maintaining good

communication, regular evaluation and modification (if needed) can help minimize potential misunderstanding and hurt during times of transition and closure.

## **VII. Making Referrals**

From time to time, we will find ourselves in situations where making a referral is best (possibly critical) for the welfare of the mentor and/or the mentee. Making a referral involves helping transition a mentee to another resource person or system who/that are better suited to help address specific life issues in healthy ways.

Here are some guidelines that can be helpful in discerning/deciding whether or not to refer a mentee. **Guidelines for making referrals** include:

1. Know your limitations. If you feel that you are in “over your head,” you probably are!
2. Be accountable. Have qualified resource people you can contact to gain perspective!
3. Know your resource base. Know qualified people/systems who/that you can refer to!
4. Understand dynamics and process for appropriate referrals:
  - a. Talk through referral options with qualified resource person who you are accountable to
  - b. Share with your mentee in an appropriate context that it is in his/her best interest to consider other resources in addressing issue(s) that you are not competent/comfortable in dealing with
  - c. Attempt to communicate to your mentee that this is not rejection but an opportunity
  - d. Assist your mentee in making the referral transition in appropriate ways
  - e. Maintain relationship with mentee in appropriate ways
  - f. If you are a person of prayer, pray consistently for mentee

This is a general list of guidelines. In mentoring, we are dealing with other human beings. Be careful not to buy into the “messiah” complex where we are the only person who can help this needy person. It may feel good (for awhile) to be needed by another person, but mentoring is not primarily about the mentor. It is about the mentee and his/her well being! Please make sure that you are in accountable relationships with responsible mentors of your own who can help you navigate this very difficult dynamic. It is certainly better to be safe than sorry!

**•With gratitude to my own mentor/coach, Dr. Paul Leavenworth, for extensive use of his notes and outlines, 2014.**