

Points of consideration for coaching/mentoring conversations.

*** Note: this document comes from a mentoring program for female researchers running at Utrecht University. It is meant as a help if you would like to have some inspirations on the question: How can I be a good mentor to my mentee? ***

Introduction

To employ the role of a mentor successfully it is important to apply coaching communication skills. We have summed up several tips.

Definition of mentorship:

Individual guidance of employees aimed to strengthen individual possibilities.

It is a voluntary, personal interaction between experienced and less experienced employees

This is an equal relationship.

Some marginal notes in coaching from: 'Coaching successfully', by John Whitmore.

Awareness and responsibility are key aspects in the mentor/mentee-relationship.

Awareness regarding your own behavior and insight in the dynamics and systems of an organization offer the mentee information upon which she can base her actions.

Mind the pitfalls of awareness!: This happens when the mentor expresses his opinion, but it might prevent the mentee from thinking for herself. In gaining awareness, the mentee goes through her own process by means of her mentor's questions. The best way for the mentor to achieve this is by aligning to the mentee. It is not about giving the mentee your best, this because it is possible that your well-meant advise does not coincide with your mentee's experience. Make sure that the conversation is a dialogue: examine opinions/feelings.

It is the mentee's responsibility to take action. The mentor can test this responsibility during the conversations. Does the mentee make decisions, is she taking steps, does she meet up to the agreements? Does she speak in terms of 'I'?

PHASES of a mentoring conversation

Start of the conversation:

Make contact, make her feel welcome, explain briefly who you are (in no longer than 5 minutes)

Phase 1. Determine coaching-goal:

What is your situation (actual and perceived)

On what do you want to work?

What is your goal?

What is your dream?

What personal talents would you like to further develop?

What do you expect from me?

Attitude: listen, summarize and ask questions; be curious, feel and show involved
Pitfall; suggestive questioning, judging and advising, too helpful, too critical

Phase 2. Coaching, asking future- and goal-oriented questions:

What do you need to reach your goal?
What do you want to conquer?
What is troubling you, how come?
Which barriers do you experience? (internally, externally)
What advice are you looking for?
What would help you?
What is favoring you and what is holding you back?

Attitude: listen actively; look for barriers together, stimulate her to find solutions, help her think; reflect upon, empathize, be critical; challenge, stimulate, affirm
Pitfalls: advise too strongly, take over responsibilities, push in a certain direction, avoiding the core

Phase 3. Action planning:

What are you going to try, what will you take on, on a short term and long term; time planning
How SMART is your goal?
On what do you need advice? What do you need from me?
What exactly are you going to do?
What is your first step, when, where etc. (specific)
Make appointments.

Attitude: help the other to be specific, encourage, challenge
Pitfalls: feeling responsible for the result, wanting to do too much for the other, being satisfied too soon (with half goals and action planning)

Concluding: What did you think of the conversation? Perhaps email the action plan.
Mentee keeps track of a logbook.

LSA:

The most important mentor skill is LSA:

Listening: Nodding, eye contact, and a body posture that is focused on the mentee show that you're really listening.

Summarizing: Provide a summary of what your mentee is telling you at least every 5 minutes. Give her the opportunity to reflect: do I really mean that?, and yourself the opportunity to check whether you really understood what she said.

Asking: In order to form a well-founded opinion, it is important that the mentee's visions, ideas, and experiences come to light.

Possible tasks for the mentor:

Passing on knowledge:

- Provides information about strategy

- Discusses operational issues in a broader context
- Explains how to behave within the organization; what attitudes are appropriate?

Act coaching: listen and ask questions:

- Gives feedback regarding behavior, asks questions
- Helps mentee to outline her career path
- Nurtures a safe and honest relationship with the mentee
- Links the way of working with the results
- Confidant in case of personal dilemmas

Required mentor skills:

- Is a good listener and is able to reflect
- Picking up signals
- Empathize
- Encourage and enthuse
- Enforce the mentee's confidence
- Provide knowledge, if requested
- Confront in a positive way
- Be patient
- Be reliable
- Let her make her own mistakes
- Really know yourself, and how you come across