

*The 'go to' organisation for Local  
Government improvement in Scotland*

**is.**  
improvement **service**

# Political Mentoring Handbook for Elected Members





# Contents

---

<b>Introduction</b>	<b>3</b>
What is Mentoring?	4
Mentoring in a Political Context	5
<b>Stages in Mentoring</b>	<b>8</b>
Getting Started and Initial Meeting	8
Agreeing how you will work together	8
Mentoring sessions	10
Endings and Learning	16
<b>Tools and Templates</b>	<b>17</b>
Personal SWOT analysis	17
Cost benefit analysis	18
Checklist for contracting discussion	19
Mentoring self-assessment and personal action plan	20
Reflection prompts for mentors	24
Mentoring session notes	25
<b>Developing your Mentoring Practice</b>	<b>26</b>
Building Trust	26
Encouraging	26
Empathy – the ability to sense and understand other’s feelings	27
Active Listening	27
Asking not telling	28
Giving effective feedback	28
Receiving feedback from your mentee	29
Helping Mentees to learn	30
Testing your intuition	31
Questions to challenge assumptions	31
Switching perspectives	33
<b>An Ethical Code of Practice for Mentoring</b>	<b>35</b>



# Introduction

---

As an elected member, you have a complex and challenging role that is unlike any other. Being an elected member involves a wide variety of work, some of which can be challenging, but also hugely rewarding when you make a real difference to individuals lives and to the area you represent.

It can also be a challenging role to learn, as there is more than one way to carry out your roles and responsibilities and make a difference in your community.

As an experienced elected member, you have knowledge and wisdom to share with others that wish to follow in your footsteps. This is a unique offer that only you can make, as your experience, stories and knowledge of the role is your own.

At the [Improvement Service \(IS\)](#), we want to encourage you in this endeavour.

Given the huge number of approaches, models and tools being used in mentoring, this handbook sets out key elements to frame and promote good mentoring practice within a political environment.

As you progress and become more skilled as a mentor, you will become less reliant on this handbook. In the meantime, use the advice, tools and techniques to guide you in your practice.

Welcome to your mentoring handbook!

## What is Mentoring?

---

*“A mentor is a more experienced individual willing to share knowledge with someone less experienced in a relationship of mutual trust”*

*(David Clutterbuck)*

---

There are many definitions of mentoring:

- A means of supporting individual learning and development
- About increasing an individual’s competence and confidence
- One person helping another to make significant transitions in knowledge, work or thinking

Throughout this handbook, we will use the term ‘Mentor’ to refer to your role as the elected member who is supporting the other person. We’ll use the term ‘Mentee’ to refer to the person you will be supporting.

### The Role of the Mentor

Complete this short exercise to explore your role as a Mentor.

**What is your role as a mentor? How would you explain this role to a potential mentee?**

You might have included some of the following when completing the exercise above:

- Being a sounding board – listening, helping to explore issues and analyse options
- Helping your mentee to develop specific skills
- Facilitating – pointing to sources of networks, learning, information, support
- Being a ‘critical friend’ and confidant – challenging and supporting in a safe trusting relationship
- Sharing know-how, insights, and experiences
- Helping your mentee to establish realistic goals

- Supporting your mentee to create personal boundaries between their political work and their private life

Of course, you'll do some of these things as part of other roles you may carry out (Group Leader, Spokesperson, Chair/Convener etc.) where you have a role to support others. If your interest in mentoring starts and ends with a desire to do these things better as part of another role, then you will find aspects of this handbook useful in that endeavour.

This handbook, however, is aimed at supporting elected members to have a formal 'mentoring' relationship and to bring greater structure to the role. How much of this you wish to use and in what contexts is down to you and you will of course need to adapt your mentoring practice to the needs of individual mentees.

A fundamental principle which applies to you as a mentor - Your role is to respond to the mentee's needs and agenda, not to impose your own.

## Mentoring in a Political Context

---

*“As a less structured, and more learner-driven activity mentoring is suited to the political environment, because it allows mentees more control over the topics covered during mentoring sessions.”*

*(Silvestre and Menges)*

---

Let's take the definitions and principle above and explore what mentoring might look like for you as an elected member in Scotland.

Political Mentoring:

- will usually involve you, as an elected member with experience of the role or a certain aspect of the role, mentoring a less experienced member or someone newly elected.
- could also include you mentoring someone who is seeking election to council (or perhaps other legislatures such as Scottish or UK Parliament)
- typically involves you mentoring someone from the same political party, though ultimately it is your choice as to who you do or do not mentor.
- can involve you mentoring someone from the same local authority.
- can involve you mentoring someone from a different local authority.

Let's explore further how mentoring will differ in practice for you as an elected member, compared to other forms of mentoring.

## How is political mentoring different from other types of mentoring?

Political mentoring is similar to other forms of mentoring. However, it differs in much the same way that all forms of development for elected members differs from traditional training for employees.

Essentially, as an elected member, you are accountable to your electorate for representing them. Your electorate will judge your performance and ultimately decide whether you are doing a good job and should be re-elected if you stand again. You may also be accountable to a political party and you need to be aware of your responsibilities to that party.

There are standards required of all elected members and it goes without saying that they must be adhered to, however you still have a high degree of flexibility over how you carry out your roles and responsibilities.

It also means that as a mentor, you need to respect that your mentee is also accountable to their electorate (and party if applicable) and will be judged in the same way as you. You should encourage them to pursue their own passions and learn new skills and knowledge that will help them achieve their goals. A consequence of this is they may wish to carry out their roles and responsibilities in ways that differ from you. Respecting this is crucial for a successful political mentoring relationship.

It doesn't mean that your views and opinions are not relevant or of worth. Your experience and knowledge will be of value to your mentee. The skill lies in knowing when, and how much, of your experience and knowledge to bring in while mentoring, to help your mentee decide what kind of elected member they want to be and how best to achieve their goals.

## Establishing a political mentoring relationship

As we have already established, an elected member (or candidate) should have a high degree of control over what development they wish to take forward, and so this should extend to their choice of mentor.

Equally, this same principle should apply to you as a mentor. After all, you are giving up your time to support another person and this needs to be a relationship that works for you as well as the mentee.

You should have some say in who you mentor as any process that forces a political mentoring relationship onto two people, is less likely to lead to successful mentoring relationships. In practice, depending on the needs of your political group, party and council, you may have a limited choice of who you are able to mentor.

It is important to discuss and agree clear boundaries with your mentee on what you both expect from each other as part of the relationship. We'll cover this in the section on contracting. You should also make sure you understand and follow the **Ethical Code**

**of Practice for Mentoring**, which you'll find at the end of this handbook, as this will help you to maintain a high level of ethical practice.



# Stages in Mentoring

---

In this section, you'll be guided through the four main stages of the mentoring process. As you progress and become more skilled as a mentor, these stages will become natural to your practice and you'll become less reliant on this handbook. In the meantime, use the advice, tools and techniques in this handbook to guide you.

The four main stages are:

1. Getting started and initial meeting
2. Agreeing how you will work together
3. Mentoring sessions
4. Endings & Learning

## Getting Started and Initial Meeting

Your first meeting is your chance to begin building rapport with your mentee. It is at this meeting that you should discuss with your mentee what their aspirations are and how they envisage mentoring will help with this.

The purpose of this meeting is to find out if you and the prospective mentee can work well together. For any mentoring relationship to work, it is important there is rapport and trust. While these are built over time, we can usually tell at the outset if 'it feels right'. The best way to do this is to talk about yourself and ask the mentee to do the same. Things you may want to cover:

- Where you live/who with
- Career history hobbies and interests
- How you got into politics/came to be an elected member
- Why you want to be a mentor/have a mentor

## Agreeing how you will work together

This stage is commonly referred to as contracting.

A contracting discussion should happen at the first proper mentoring session. As a rule of thumb, this should take around 30 minutes, so you should increase the length of this first mentoring session to account for that.



The initial discussion should not be bureaucratic, formal or process driven. Whilst it is important to cover the issues below, building trust and establishing rapport should be the prime goal.

The following should be understood and agreed during the initial discussion.

## 1. Boundaries and ethics

The main points around the ethics of a mentoring relationship (e.g. confidentiality, boundaries: what is in/not in scope to discuss).

This handbook contains an Ethical Code of Practice for Mentoring, and you should familiarise yourself with this. It is good practice to share this with your mentee, and agree to abide by it in your contract as this helps to build trust.

**Have a think about the boundaries you would want to put in place with your mentee. Identify at least three boundaries.**

In completing the above exercise, you may have thought about some of the following:

- Where and when you will meet
- How and when the mentee can contact you
- The time commitment your mentee can expect from you / you can expect from the mentee
- Agreeing rules around confidentiality
- Things you will/can do to help them
- Things you won't/can't do to help them
- Timescales for the relationship

## 2. Process & practicalities

- When will we meet?
- How often?
- Where will we meet?
- How long for?

- How long is the relationship likely to last?
- Can we contact each other out-side the meetings?
- If so how (email, telephone) and when? How often is reasonable?
- How will we review progress? How often will we do this?

### 3. Broad goals (to be covered in a broad-brush way at the contracting discussion. These are likely to be explored in more detail at the next mentoring session).

- What does he / she want to achieve as a result of the mentoring relationship? What would 'different' or 'better' look like?
- Where is he/she now? Personal strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and threats
- What is the gap between where he / she is now and where he / she wants to be?

During the contracting discussion, you should ask your mentee if there is any useful 'background' material that they could give you or specific areas of focus.

## Mentoring sessions

The number and length of the mentoring sessions forms part of the contracting discussion but mentoring sessions usually follow a typical structure:

- Checking in (how you both are today, things that are going on for you)
- Review of progress since previous meeting/contact
- Clarification what the mentee wants the support of the mentor for during the session
- Challenge and sharing insights for more perspective
- Exploration of options for the mentee to consider to make progress towards their goal
- Agreeing actions the mentee is going to take and what actions you will take
- Checking out: summing up and reflecting on the work done during the session

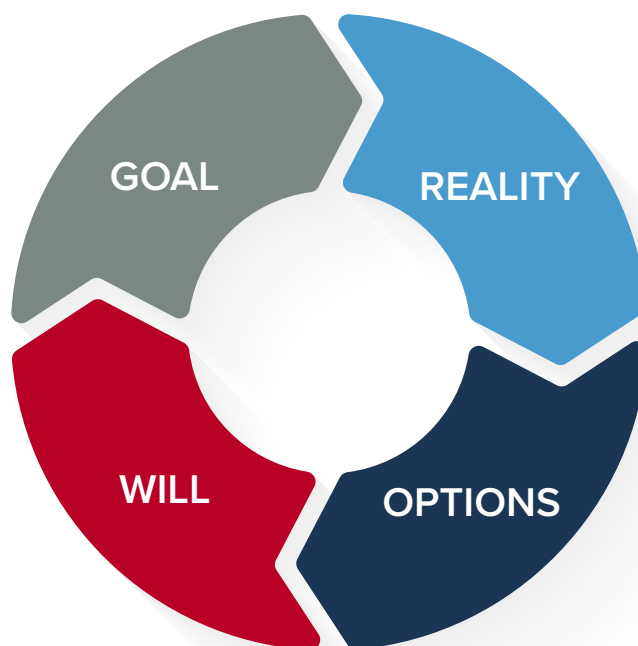
This section provides you with a model, as well as tools and tips to help you to make the most of these sessions.

### Opening the mentoring conversation

- Ask whether anything major has arisen since you were last in touch.
- If applicable, ask how the mentee got on with their actions since the previous meeting
- Confirm / agree the Goal for the meeting with the mentee (Give the mentee the

responsibility for what is brought to the session). This is the first stage in the GROW model which you'll be introduced to in this section.

## The GROW Model



The GROW model is helpful for you to follow during mentoring sessions. It has four stages:

### GOAL

Where do you want to be?

- Agree what your mentee wants to achieve from the mentoring conversations (e.g. for a potential candidate, this may be 'Understanding what an elected member does').
- This should be linked to aspirational or longer-term goals that have been identified during the initial meeting (e.g. for a potential candidate, this may be 'Getting elected to council')

People with well-formed goals are more likely to achieve them than those who don't. Your mentee may not have a clear goal in mind but simply come with an issue or problem. Helping them to clarify their goal is useful for you and them as it provides purpose and clarity to the session.

Your mentee may come with a clear goal but through careful questioning and exploration of the goal, change or refine it. Either way, spending time clarifying a goal for the conversation is a crucial step to ensure the mentoring sessions are effective.

It may help to think about two types of goal:

1. The **aspirational goal** – this is the bigger picture or long-term goal for the mentee. Some examples could include:
  - Getting elected to council
  - Being successfully vetted by the party
  - Becoming an established elected member of the council
  
2. The **goal for the mentoring session** – this is what can be achieved in the time you have that day. Some examples could include:
  - Understanding what an elected member does
  - Understanding what the vetting process involves
  - How to propose a motion at committee

Sometimes goals can't be fully achieved during the session and the mentee needs to take further action. Where possible keep the goal for the session as focussed and realistic as possible. For example, taking the example of 'Understanding what an elected member does', as well as telling the mentee what you do as an elected member, you might also want them to do their own learning and so you may agree actions for them to take e.g. 'attend a council meeting' or 'speak to Councillor Smith'.

Where this is likely, you could amend the original goal to: 'Understand what an elected member does and agree actions to further your knowledge of this.'

## REALITY

### Where are you now?

- Invite self-assessment
- Identify and challenge assumptions and faulty thinking
- Establish gap between reality and goal

Once your mentee has defined their goal, you need to explore the current reality with them. This step is crucial as your mentee needs to acknowledge the current situation and how this is having an impact on them.

You can bring in your own experience and knowledge at this point, to provide context and information that will help the mentee with their understanding.

It also helps to establish whether their goal is realistic or unambitious depending on their reality.

While it is crucial with any development work to acknowledge the current reality, be

careful not to get bogged down in this stage as it's often easier for people to talk about their problems and issues, rather than exploring what options they have.

## **OPTIONS**

### **What could you do?**

- Invite suggestions from the mentee
- Offer suggestions carefully
- Identify and challenge assumptions and faulty thinking
- Consider pros and cons
- Make choices; prioritise

Once your mentee has a clear goal and acknowledged their current reality, you can start generating and exploring options for moving the mentee towards their goal. You should ensure your mentee identifies at least three options, and not settle on the first option they identify.

You may also have suggestions to offer at this stage, bringing in options that your mentee hasn't considered. Try to do this once your mentee has run out of their own suggestions.

Each option should be explored and you should challenge your mentee to consider how each option will progress them towards their goal. Make sure to also do this with your own suggestions too and respect that the mentee may come to different conclusions on the best course of action.

## **WILL**

### **What will you do?**

- Commit to action
- Make steps specific and define timing
- Agree support

The final step in the process is to agree specific, time bound and reviewable actions, and agree accountability and reporting with your mentee. It is vital that the mentee takes responsibility for the actions and is committed to taking them. You may also have agreed actions to take as their mentor.

The actions that are agreed can be big or small, however, it is important that the mentee has at least one action to take following a session.

The GROW model raises the commitment to take actions, as it establishes a clear goal, an awareness and desire to change the current reality, a logical and thorough

exploration of possible choices, and finally specific, time bound and reviewable actions.

### Sample questions based on the GROW model

#### GOAL

Questions, which explore, and then pin down, what the goal for the session is, and what 'different' would look like...

- What is the goal for this conversation?
- What outcome do you want to get from our conversation?
- What do you want to achieve? What would this look like?
- What does success look like?
- What do you want to be different?
- What do you want to happen that's not happening now?
- What do you not want to happen, that is happening now?
- What impact will achieving this goal have on you?
- What impact will not achieving this goal have on you?

#### REALITY

Questions, which explore, and then pin down, what the current situation looks like

- What's happening just now?
- What do you see as the main issues right now?
- Describe what it's like?
- What are the positives about the current situation?
- What resources or support do you have?
- Can you give me an example when that happened?
- How do you know that what you have described is accurate?
- What have you tried to do so far?
- What has stopped you from doing more?
- What obstacles will you have to overcome?

## OPTIONS

Questions which explore the things that the mentee could do to achieve the goal...

- What options do you have?
- What could you do to change things?
- What else could you do?
- If you could start again with a 'clean sheet', what would you do?
- In an ideal world, what would you do?
- Who might be able to help you?
- What are the pros and cons of each option?
- What's the best that could happen?
- What's the worst that could happen?
- Which option do you like best?
- How far would that option take you towards achieving your goal?

Where possible, encourage your mentee to identify their own options as much as possible. Once they have done so, if you feel there are other options they haven't considered then you could ask them:

- Have you thought about...?
- What if you tried...?
- Something I've tried in the past which worked for me was...

Remember to explore the consequences of your own suggestions too, as the mentee may provide additional context at this stage which makes the suggestion unattractive. It is important the mentee feels able to make their own informed choice.

## WILL

Questions which explore, and then pin down, what actions the mentee plans to take to achieve the goal ...

- What actions are you going to take?
- What are you going to do next?
- Exactly when are you going to do this?
- What might get in your way?
- What support do you need?
- What would you like me to do?
- What will you do to get support if you need it?
- What could I do to support you?
- On a scale of 1-10 how committed are you to taking this action?
- What's stopping you from being a 9 or 10?
- When and how will we review your progress?
- What would you like to be able to tell me the next time you see me?

## Closing the mentoring conversation

Close by asking the mentee to:

- Reflect on the value of the conversation
- Summarise the options and / or decisions taken
- Select the actions to be put into practice before the next session

## Endings and Learning

Upon achieving the goals agreed between you and your mentee, you should review the mentoring relationship and agree if it has reached its natural conclusion. This doesn't mean to say that the relationship between you and the mentee ends completely, just that your mentoring arrangement has come to an end.

It is important that Important to take time to review and discuss:

- Progress made against the original contract
- What learning has come from the mentoring (for both parties)
- What further support, if necessary, may be helpful

Depending on the original goals and whether these have been met, you may mutually agree to continue the relationship. For example, if the original goal was to support a candidate to get elected, and they were successful in this, it may be agreed that the mentoring continues with a new aim (i.e. 'Helping the mentee establish themselves as an effective member of the council'). In this situation, the relationship will of course have changed as the mentee takes on new responsibilities, and of course new conflicts of interest may arise.

At this stage you should re-contract by discussing any conflict of interest, agreeing boundaries for the relationship and new arrangements for working together. It is important to still review the learning from the mentoring that had just taken place, and what changes could be made to make the relationship more successful.



# Tools and Templates

---

This section contains tools and templates to get you started with your mentoring practice.

## Personal SWOT analysis

It is often hard to articulate what our strengths and preferences are, not to mention our weaknesses or blind spots! Understanding what your mentee feels their strengths and weaknesses are, can help you to challenge them appropriately.

Ask your mentee to complete this personal SWOT analysis in relation to their aspirational goal. This online resource provides further information that can be sent to your mentee to help them complete the analysis [https://www.mindtools.com/pages/article/newTMC\\_05\\_1.htm](https://www.mindtools.com/pages/article/newTMC_05_1.htm)

Doing this prior to the first session, or for each major development goal they have, will provide you with valuable information about your mentee, while also encouraging your mentee to develop their self-awareness.

<b>Strengths</b>	<b>Weaknesses</b>
<b>Opportunities</b>	<b>Threats</b>

## Cost benefit analysis

A Cost benefit analysis can help your mentee to make good decisions by weighing the costs and benefits of a proposed course of action

When your mentee is considering making a change, it may be helpful to ask them the following questions:

- What will happen if you do make this change?
- What will happen if you don't make this change?
- What won't happen if you do make this change?
- What won't happen if you don't make this change?

Continuing present situation		Making a change	
Benefits	Costs	Benefits	Costs

## Checklist for contracting discussion

This checklist can be used during your contracting discussion.

CHECKLIST FOR CONTRACTING			
<b>Date of Meeting:</b>			
<b>Mentee:</b>			
Contract Topics	Action	Completed	Notes
1: Goals and objectives	Setting the agenda		
	Expectations and Goals		
2: Duration and frequency of meetings	Where to meet?		
	How long should a session last?		
	How often to meet?		
	Review of Progress		
3: Between meetings	Unexpected Questions		
	Homework		
4: Cancellations	Cancellation protocols		
5: Confidentiality	Note Taking		
	Private Issues		
	Breaking confidentiality		
6: Endings	End date, next steps and joint evaluation		

## Mentoring self-assessment and personal action plan

Please make your selection by placing an 'x' in the box to indicate your choice.

Mentoring Process		A role model for others	Does this well	Could do this better
1	Agrees a contract with the mentee, which includes timing, frequency, format, location, scope, roles, responsibilities, boundaries and ethics of the relationship.			
2	Helps the mentee to establish his / her learning style and needs, and to set goals and milestones.			
3	Encourages the mentee to record action points and asks about progress against these. Acknowledges achievements, learning and changed circumstances. Challenges and facilitates awareness when goals not achieved.			
4	Encourages the mentee to reflect on learning and to note insights.			
5	Facilitates regular joint reviews of the mentoring relationship and adjusts plans and activities as appropriate.			
Creating a learning environment		A role model for others	Does this well	Could do this better
6	Communicates a belief that it is okay to make well-intentioned mistakes, and that these provide opportunities for learning.			
7	Demonstrates a pragmatic acceptance that his/her way may not be the mentee's way.			
8	Ensures learning occurs in a safe, confidential and mutually respectful environment.			

Mentoring Skills	A role model for others	Does this well	Could do this better
9 Promotes mentee autonomy by listening well and then asking questions, which help the mentee to work things out for his / herself.			
10 Maintains objectivity by suspending judgement and prejudice.			
11 Helps the mentee to see problems/ situations with fresh eyes. In doing so, can adopt both analytical and creative approaches.			
12 Helps the mentee to generate options, confront choices, assess priorities and weigh costs, risks and benefits.			
13 Challenges/stretches the mentee in ways that motivate rather than demoralise.			
14 Manages aggression, denial and rejection when dealing with difficult mentoring situations, thriving on the challenge.			
15 Recognises the limits of own mentoring competence and refers on to others when necessary.			
16 Adopts different mentoring styles and roles to suit the mentee's abilities, needs and situation.			
17 Helps the mentee to see causes and effects of actions and behaviour.			
18 Gives honest feedback that is clear, concise, factual, constructive, and confidence building. Asks permission when appropriate.			
19 Has the courage and commitment to make a stand / take a risk if it is in the best interests of the mentee.			
20 With discretion, and only when appropriate, shares own experiences to illustrate a point or to demonstrate empathy.			

Mentoring Attributes		A role model for others	Does this well	Could do this better
21	Has good insight into personal strengths and weaknesses.			
22	Understands and manages own emotions and behaviour, even when business or personal pressures weigh heavily.			
23	Shows a human side and, when appropriate, admits own failings / fallibility, with a view to creating mutual trust.			
24	Asks for and acts upon feedback from others.			
25	Demonstrates a track record of personal development and learning from others.			

**What are my key areas of strength? (Please refer to specific question numbers as appropriate).**

**How will I play to my strengths?**

**What are my areas for development? (Please refer to specific question numbers as appropriate).**

**How will I address my development needs?**

## Reflection prompts for mentors

It's good practice for mentors to reflect on their mentoring sessions as it raises self-awareness and stimulates valuable learning that you can use to improve your mentoring practice.

**How well did the session go?**

Exactly what happened and why in that way? How did you behave, think and feel?

**What feedback did you get from your mentee about the session?**

**What have you learned?**

**What worked well? Why?**

**What could have been better?**

**What will you do differently in the next mentoring session?**



## Mentoring session notes

**Date of session:**

Items to discuss today
1. Review of previous action points
2.
3.
4.
5.

Notes of discussion
<p>Including reflection on what has emerged from the session a summary of action points and possible agenda for next time.</p>

**Date of next session:**



# Developing your Mentoring Practice

---

This section contains tips and advice on developing important aspects of mentoring practice:

- Building Trust
- Encouraging
- Empathy – The ability to sense and understand other’s feelings
- Active Listening
- Asking not telling
- Giving effective feedback
- Receiving feedback from your mentee
- Helping Mentees to learn
- Testing your intuition
- Questions to challenge assumptions
- Switching perspectives

## Building Trust

Trust building is crucial and has to be developed over time. To become trustable, you must:

- Keep confidences shared by your mentee;
- Spend appropriate time together;
- Follow through on your promises to them;
- Respect your mentees’ boundaries;
- Admit your errors and take responsibility for correcting them
- Tactfully tell your mentee if and why you disagree or are dissatisfied with something, so they’ll know you’re honest with them.

## Encouraging

Encouraging is the action of giving someone support, confidence, or hope. While there are many ways to encourage, and mentors and mentees can differ in the types and amounts of encouragement they like, you can:

- Compliment your mentee on accomplishments and actions;
- Point out positive traits (such as perseverance and integrity) in addition to their performance and accomplishments;
- Express thanks and appreciation.

Be certain that your praise and encouragement are sincere. In mentoring, err in the direction of too much praise, rather than too little.

## Empathy – the ability to sense and understand other’s feelings

Empathy is vital in mentoring encounters.

### Key skills and behaviours

- Listening well and behaving in an interested but noncommittal manner, even when you do not agree with what is being said. Letting the mentee finish what they have to say. Asking questions first; sharing your own thoughts second.
- Watching your mentee’s face and body movements and trying to sense their feelings from their expression, posture and gestures.
- Acting upon your intuition – if your mentees tone or body language is the opposite to their words, picking up on this and offering that observation
- When in conversation you find that someone holds an opinion totally opposed to your own, considering why they might hold this opinion.

Asking yourself why you react as you do in a given situation.

- How else could you react?
- How might other people feel about these different reactions?

## Active Listening

There are some skills or techniques that you can use to demonstrate to your mentee that you are listening. These include:

- Paraphrasing
  - o Re-statement of meaning: “So what you are saying is that...”
  - o Reflection of feelings: “You are clearly very upset that ...”
- Questioning for clarification: “What do you mean by ...”
- Encouraging the mentee: “That’s useful to know. Do go on...”

- Echoing or repeating back a word or a phrase that the mentee uses and forming it into a question: “At the end of your tether...?” “Rudderless?”
- Summarising the conversation: “So in summary you think...” “So in summary we have agreed ...”
- Tolerating silences.

## Asking not telling

If the mentee genuinely feels that they have exhausted all of their own ideas ... they might say... “I don’t know what to do. You tell me, you’re the expert”.

It may be legitimate for a mentor to make suggestions in this kind of circumstance, but it is not the mentor’s role to solve problems for the mentee.

The key difference between “asking” and “telling” is how the suggestions are framed as possibilities and options rather than answers.

Examples of appropriate ways of making suggestions include:

- Have you thought about ...?
- Maybe you could ...
- You may want to consider ...
- Some people find it useful to ...
- One way to look at this might be ...

Ultimately the mentee has to decide for themselves and take responsibility for their decision/actions.

## Giving effective feedback

Feedback is information about performance or behaviour and is an important part of mentoring. It can create awareness and encourage growth and change.

The key is to give feedback as cleanly as possible, so the person can receive it, assess it and decide how to proceed. It should always be well-timed, direct, succinct and backed up with specific examples.

- Be specific / describe the issue / behaviour in some detail. It is unhelpful to attribute motives to your mentee. For example: ‘It seems to me that all you want is a quick promotion’. Try to keep comments free from judgement.
- Avoid words, which can appear very definite and judgemental as they often provoke a defensive or attacking response. For example: “you always ...”, “you never ...”

- Feedback should not be presented apologetically or wrapped up in qualifying or conditional statements or the message can be lost.

Opportunities to give feedback can arise from:

- Watching and listening to your mentee during the mentoring session and providing direct feedback by 'holding up a mirror' or repeating back and commenting on the words/tone that the mentee uses.
- Asking the mentee to recount:
  - o something that they did
  - o how they did it
  - o how others responded
  - o what they learned etc...

...then providing feedback on how it comes across to you.

- During a mentoring session:
  - o role playing with the mentee
  - o listening to the mentee rehearsing (e.g. making a presentation)

...then providing the mentee with immediate feedback

- Observing the mentee in a live situation (e.g. chairing a meeting or making a presentation) and providing feedback in private thereafter.

It is important to remember, feedback (and challenge) is a 2-way process and you can both learn from each other.

## Receiving feedback from your mentee

- Say thank you (regardless of whether you are experiencing it in a positive or negative way)
- Acknowledge that feedback (is hard to give)
- When you get feedback from your mentee, ask for more information, for example:
  - o Can you tell me more about what you mean by...?
  - o Can you give me a specific example of...?
  - o What do you think would have worked better...?
  - o What did you like about that/what made it good?
- Check your understanding. For example:
  - o "So you think that it would have been better if I had challenged you more over the x incident that you described?"
  - o "so you find it helpful that I asked you questions about what was going on for you at this time?"

## Helping Mentees to learn

Mentors have a key role in helping mentees to prepare for and the review their learning experience.

Questions a mentor can ask to help the mentee to learn from their experiences.

### Planning

What is the learning experience that you plan to have?

- When do you plan to do this?
- Who will be involved?
- What skills / knowledge are you aiming to develop as a result of this experience?

An example could be: Develop networking skills by attending a specific meeting with a view to:

- practising breaking into groups; remembering names
- exchanging business cards; noting key contact details
- asking questions to establish specific information about selected attendees

### Reflecting

What happened?

- What did you do?
- How did you feel?
- What were you thinking?
- What do you think people who saw you would say about the way you behaved?
- Describe how you went about doing X, Y...
- What response did you get?

### Conclusions

What have you learned?

- What worked well?
- What could have been better?
- What would you do differently in the future?
- What difference would that make?
- What still needs to be done?

## Testing your intuition

Whether your intuition is right or wrong, you cannot really lose as the mentee can correct you and articulate their feelings.

**Step one:** Listen well

**Step two:** Receive a signal / form a hunch

**Step three:** Speak from your intuition / say what you are thinking, seeing, hearing, feeling... (but do not be too attached to your interpretation)

**Useful ways to introduce what you want to say include...**

- “I have a sense that...”
- “Can I check out something with you...?”
- “I wonder if you are feeling...”

If the matter is potentially sensitive, you should ask the mentee’s permission to give advice, or to share your thoughts.

## Questions to challenge assumptions

Whatever the mentee talks about will be underwritten by a set of assumptions. Often the mentee is unaware that they are adopting positions or taking decisions based on these assumptions.

A mentor can help mentees to identify and address unnecessary and limiting assumptions. Reviewing the past can also help to identify recurring patterns of thinking and actions that are beneficial as well as those that are limiting. Many assumptions are based on a further and deeper level of beliefs, attitudes and feelings. These too can be questioned and challenged.

The following diagram illustrates the point:



It is particularly important to challenge assumptions when a mentee is working through the potential consequence of an action. Assumptions are closely linked to the mentees self-image. If the self-image is faulty, the assumptions might be too.

We come to hold our beliefs / make our assumptions from thinking processes and earlier experiences that we have learned from. Some of these may be faulty for example:

- exaggerating the meaning of an event
- disregarding important aspects of a situation
- over simplifying events as good / bad; right / wrong
- over generalising from a single incident
- drawing conclusions, making assumptions without evidence

Here are examples of the kind of questions you could ask to help the mentee to challenge their assumptions:

- What leads you to believe that they would respond that way?
- What do you think would happen if you did? Why do you think that?
- How likely is that to happen?
- What hard evidence are you basing that belief on? What conclusions did you draw from that evidence?
- What past experience have you had of...?
- How do you think that this is influencing your behaviour and beliefs today?



## Switching perspectives

Getting a different perspective on something is often the key to getting unstuck and making progress. It can help mentees where there is a difficulty in a relationship or perhaps when no problem exists, but the mentee wants to enhance their understanding of a situation.

A useful approach is to encourage the mentee to view a situation from each of the following perspectives:

1. their own
2. the other person's position
3. an onlooker's position

### Switching perspectives approach

#### Own position

Ask your mentee to describe the situation from their own perspective Mentor: what did you see?

Mentee: I saw...

Mentor: What did you feel? Mentee: I felt ...

Mentor: What did you hear? Mentee: I heard...

Mentor: What did you want? Mentee: I wanted...

#### Other's position

##### Step One

Ask your mentee to step into the shoes of the other person and experience the situation as if they were that other person.

##### Step Two

Ask your mentee to describe the situation from the other person's perspective, using the word 'I' rather than 'he' or 'she' when they are in this mode

Mentor: what did you see?

Mentee (as the other person): I saw ... Mentor: What did you feel?

Mentee (as the other person): I felt ... Mentor: What did you hear?

Mentee (as the other person): I heard... Mentor: What did you want?

Mentee (as the other person): I wanted...

### Onlooker's position

Ask your mentee to stand back from the situation and experience it as if they were a detached observer. Remind the mentee that it is unlikely that, in this mode, they will have any emotions about the situation.

As before, ask your mentee to use the word 'I' rather than 'the observer'

- What are you seeing?
- What are you hearing?
- How are you interpreting what you are seeing and hearing?



# An Ethical Code of Practice for Mentoring

---

The ethical code of practice **should** be discussed during the contracting phase of the mentoring relationship.

1. The mentor's role is to respond to the mentee's needs and agenda; it is not to impose his or her own agenda.
2. Mentors and mentees will work within an agreed 'contract', whether verbal or in writing. The contract will define what 'confidentiality' means for both parties in the mentoring relationship.
3. Mentors will ensure that the mentee's and mentor's expectations are defined and understood by both parties and that any contracting arrangements are not changed without discussion.
4. The mentor and mentee will respect each other's time and other responsibilities, ensuring that they do not impose beyond what is reasonable.
5. The mentor will not intrude into areas the mentee wishes to keep private until invited to do so. However, they should help the mentee recognise how other issues may relate to those areas.
6. The mentor and mentee will aim to be open and truthful with each other and themselves about the relationship itself.
7. Mentors will truthfully represent their competence and experience. They will be aware of the limits of their own competence and operate within these limits.
8. Mentors will develop their own competence in the practice of mentoring.
9. Mentors will, when needed, seek advice and support from sources of appropriate external expertise, whilst maintaining confidentiality.
10. The mentee will accept increasing responsibility for managing the relationship; the mentor will empower them to do so and will generally promote the mentee's autonomy.
11. The mentor and mentee share responsibility for the smooth winding down of the relationship when it has achieved its purpose – they will both avoid creating dependency.
12. Either party may dissolve the relationship. However, both mentor and mentee have a responsibility for discussing the matter together as part of mutual learning.

13. The mentoring relationship will not be exploitative in any way, nor will it be open to misinterpretation.
14. Mentors will observe principles of equality of opportunity and non-discriminatory practice.

iHub  
Quarrywood Court  
Livingston  
EH54 6AX

Tel: 01506 282012  
Email: [info@improvementservice.org.uk](mailto:info@improvementservice.org.uk)  
[www.improvementservice.org.uk](http://www.improvementservice.org.uk)

August 2020

*The 'go to' organisation for Local  
Government improvement in Scotland*

  
improvement **service**