

# Strategies for Effective Mentoring

By Dene Wood

Three key strategies facilitate the mentoring relationship: listening empathetically, asking questions, and engaging in feedback.

## Biblical Examples

Moses and Joshua	Deut. 31:1-8; 34:9
Elijah and Elisha	1 Kings 19:16-21; 2 Kings 2:1-16; 3:11
Barnabas and Saul/Paul	Acts 4:36,37; 9:26-30; 11:22-30
Paul and Timothy	Acts 16:1-3; Philippians 2:19-23; 1 & 2 Timothy
Naomi and Ruth	Book of Ruth
Elizabeth and Mary	Luke 1
Titus Model	Titus 2

## Strategic Questions

In his book, *Coaching for Performance*, John Whitmore suggests the following acronym—GROW—to help one to ask strategic questions in any situation:

- Goal:** What goal is the protégé pursuing?
- Reality:** What has the protégé been able to accomplish to this point?
- Options:** What options are open to the protégé for consideration?
- Will:** What steps will the protégé take next?

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## Strategy 1: Listen Empathetically

Generally, great learners are great listeners. Listening shows respect for another person, helps to develop strong relationships, increases knowledge of another person, and helps to generate fresh ideas.

By becoming a good listener, you increase your understanding of others and of yourself, too.

What is the difference between listening and hearing? Listening is wanting to hear. An empathic listener seeks to understand the other person rather than trying to be understood. To listen with empathy means that a mentor strives to get inside the

protégé's frame of reference.

Empathy is not the same as sympathy, however. Sympathy is a form of agreement or judgment. Empathic listening does not mean that you agree with your protégé.

Rather, it means that you try to see the situation through her eyes and to fully understand her emotions as well as her words. You listen with your eyes and your heart as well as with your ears.

Empathic listening gives you more accurate data with which to work. You want to deal with the reality inside your pro-

tégé's head and heart, rather than project your own thoughts, feelings, motives, and interpretation.



Only after you begin to understand your protégé's view of the situation can you effectively begin to help bring about a new perspective to the situation. A benefit for both mentor and protégé is that a sense of trust and well-being emerges in their relationship.

## Strategy 2: Ask Questions

Good questions help a mentor to listen, learn, and gather valuable information. Questions can open up a learning conversation or shut it down.

Asking questions that require thoughtful answers can be helpful in getting the protégé to express her thoughts and feelings. By listening to her responses you can

help adjust her understanding.

Two kinds of questions are effective in the mentoring relationship: holistic and strategic questions (see left margin).

Effective mentors ask questions that demonstrate value for the whole person. Holistic questions address a protégé's feelings and emotions, her

relationship with her family, her relationship with Christ, and her challenges and opportunities for growth and development.

As the mentor and protégé work through this process, the protégé can reflect on her situation, making adjustments as needed to reach her desired goals.

## Strategy 3: Engage in Meaningful Feedback

Feedback is a powerful vehicle for learning and a critical tool in facilitating the mentoring relationship.

It is possible to develop and maintain an effective mentoring relationship, create a learning environment, foster reflection, and evaluate progress made by the protégé only by giving feedback.

One of the most important contributions a mentor can give to her protégé is the gift of giving and receiving ongoing, honest,

loving, and constructive feedback. If it is given or received in the wrong way it can damage the relationship.

To ensure an enriching feedback process, the mentor must develop a climate of readiness and expectation. These guidelines will be helpful:

- Work toward bonding with each other.
- Be genuine and honest in your communication.

- Focus on behavior, not on personality.
- Ask for feedback on your feedback. This helps you know whether or not you are meeting needs and sets an example of how to give and receive feedback.
- Give constructive and timely feedback.

Mentoring is a heart-to-heart relationship. Nothing can substitute for honesty and the genuine desire to help others.

### The Feedback Cycle

In *The Mentor's Guide*, Lois Zachary shows a cyclical approach for feedback.

- **ASK** for feedback. Mentors may need to coach their protégés on the importance of feedback in the mentoring relationship and how to ask for feedback. You can show the way by asking for feedback on input you have given to the protégé.
- **GIVE** feedback. When feedback is given and received in the right way and at the appropriate time, it nurtures the growth of the mentoring relationship. The mentor's challenge is to give thoughtful and constructive feedback that provides learning and encourages the development of her protégé. Offer practical steps and options. Take care not to undermine the protégé's self-esteem.

• **RECEIVE** feedback. Receiving feedback is an open, interactive, clarifying, and confirming conversation between mentor and protégé that takes place often throughout the mentoring relationship. The protégé is "learning" and the mentor should be intent on receiving feedback on the process and the content of that learning.

- **ACCEPT** feedback. Reactions to feedback may be negative or positive. Some protégés may be encouraged, energized, and eager to act on feedback from their mentors. Others, however, may react in denial or resistance. Mentors must listen actively and allow the protégés to express their feelings. Space and time may be needed. It is crucial for the mentor to maintain a loving and nurturing attitude throughout the relationship.

- **ACT** on feedback. Action is the ultimate goal of feedback. The mentor encourages and gives guidance to the protégé in moving ahead to meet new challenges and opportunities in her development. This action itself causes the cycle of feedback to begin again. The mentor now has the opportunity to help her protégé integrate the new learning.

## Mentor and Be Mentored

Effective mentors understand that they are in a lifelong process of self-development.

A network of mentoring relationships is essential for an effective leader. This network can help you continue to grow and develop, to minister effectively where God has placed you, and to finish well. Listen to the note of

accomplishment as Paul writes to his protégé: "I have fought the good fight, I have finished the race, I have kept the faith.



Now there is in store for me the crown of righteous-

ness, which the Lord, the righteous Judge will award to me on that day—and not only to me, but also to all who have longed for his appearing" (2 Timothy 4:7,8, NIV).

Look deep within yourself. What do you need to focus on so that you will finish well? Look around you. Who can you come alongside and empower so that she will finish well?

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