

Identified key skills for mentees

The identified key skills for a mentee are:

- Being proactive
- Maintaining an active role within the relationship

Spectrum Approach to Mentoring requires mentees to be proactive in:

- Addressing areas of concern or areas that they would like to improve
- Finding a mentor
- Contacting the potential mentor directly
- Requesting assistance or advice in a particular area

The mentoring relationship requires mentees to continuously take the initiative and accept an active role in the mentoring relationship. This might be as simple as allowing time for reflection before you meet with your mentor, or sending an agenda for the meeting. If you prefer a less formal approach you could write a list of items that you would like to discuss and even prioritise them (Connor & Pokora, 2007).

It is helpful to consider what you would do to be proactive. Connor and Pokora (2007, p. 64) suggest that mentees think about the following variables:

- Your time
- Your usual ways of reflecting
- How you learn
- How you might prepare for each session
- How you would act between sessions

Identified key skills for mentors

The identified key skills for mentors are:

- Active listening
- Questioning
- Providing constructive feedback

Listening carefully is considered to be the most important of the key skills (McCarthy, 2008, p.56). Poor listening has been described by Johnson and Ridley (2004) as 'an epidemic in Western culture'. They claim:

People do not take the time to attend to the meanings behind other people's words ... mentors often rush to give an answer, offer advice, or tell their story without tuning into their mentee's real concern or points of view. This inattentiveness communicates that what the mentee has to say is not worthwhile or important (Johnson & Ridley 2004, p. 46).

Active listening is a multifaceted and demanding activity that requires several skills. When you are listening to your mentee it is sometimes useful to clarify what the mentee has said, by either asking a question or repeating a fragment what you have heard (McCarthy, 2008). It is important not to interrupt while you are clarifying or repeating a portion of what your mentee has said (Johnson & Ridley, 2004). It is equally important to ask questions as you are listening, to help the mentee crystallise thoughts or opinions. Some 'open-ended' questions suggested by McCarthy (2008, p. 55) are:

- What have you tried?
- Tell me what has worked and what has not.
- Do you know why?
- Have you thought about it from another perspective?

These questions can help you to adequately reflect on what your mentee has said, and they can also show the mentee that you have understood (Johnson & Ridley, 2004; McCarthy, 2008). Active listening and questioning are two of the most important key skills, but utilising these skills can lead to situations where the mentor will need to provide constructive feedback to the mentee.