

Strategies for coaching mentors to success

Being an effective mentor to a young person is not easy. That's why individualized support from a trained staff person is so crucial. Here are 6 great ways to coach your mentors towards success:

Avoid thinking about mentors as people that need to be controlled or managed.

Instead, give them the latitude to take actions and make decisions. Trust is a vital component of this equation.

Listen, listen, listen.

If there are unhappy or disgruntled mentors in your caseload, they've probably tried to tell you the problem at some time. It's possible that you weren't listening (or didn't want to listen), or perhaps your initial reaction made the person think twice about bringing the problem to you. Truly listening is one of the greatest skills to develop, regardless of your role. Good listeners are genuinely interested, convey empathy, and want to find out what's behind the conversation. Great coaches are great listeners —without exception.

Focus on developing strengths.

Develop the strengths of each mentor rather than managing merely for results. Identify each person's development needs and commit to following through on them. When people are growing and improving, their enthusiasm and effectiveness is greater. And they feel more connected and loyal to you and your program for supporting them.

Endorse effort and growth instead of pointing out failures or errors.

As individuals, we all know how seldom we are given positive feedback, but how often we are reminded of our "mistakes". Instead of pointing out errors, the coach accepts them as learning opportunities and uses them to develop their mentors. The focus is on making sure the same mistake doesn't happen again by addressing the source of the problem.

Help mentors come up with their own solutions.

The mindset of a directive leader is that it's usually faster to tell someone what to do, or do it yourself, than give your mentors an opportunity to figure it out. By always providing the answers, program coordinators take away the learning opportunity for their mentors to come up with alternative (and potentially better) solutions. If you catch yourself about to provide the answer, take a deep breath and ask a question like: "What would you do in this situation?"

Be unconditionally constructive

No exceptions. Don't patronize or be critical of others – take complete responsibility for how you are heard. If you catch yourself about to make negative remarks, take a breath and rephrase your words to get your message across without the emotional attachment. It is possible to phrase everything in constructive terms — even a negative sentiment. Practice makes perfect!

Have another strategy you've found effective? Leave it in the comments below.
