

Coaching Tips for Mentors: Washington Immigrant Network (WIN) Business Resource Group

As a new mentor, you probably hear the word “coach” used frequently but with many different definitions. Author Anthony K. Tjan writes about three different types of mentors in this [Harvard Business Review Article](#). However, the mentor role we’re describing is somewhat of a combination of the three, or potentially a fourth type of mentor which is a cultural mentor. With that in mind, think of your role as someone who shares your story, inspires your mentee to create their own, and serves as a confidant along the journey. To help you do that, we’ve compiled a list of tips below:

Ask open-ended questions – this helps your mentee learn by processing aloud. Open-ended questions cannot be answered with one-word or simple sentence answers. Using “Why”, “What”, “How”, “When” are indicators of an open-ended question. Some examples might be:

- Why do you think you weren’t selected for that promotion?
- What might you do differently next time to get a difference outcome?
- How do you think that approach came across to others in the room?
- When do you find yourself happiest in your current job?

Help them understand their why – research shows that people are happier, more productive, and even healthier when their work aligns with their core values. A person’s “why” is the thing that makes them want to get out of bed each morning. Once they’re clear on what their “why” is, then they can help narrow down the hundreds of different jobs that can help them achieve their why. As you ask your open-ended questions above, help them explore their why so they can understand if their career goals are moving towards or distracting them from their core values.

Build their self-awareness – Study after study keeps yielding the same results: self-awareness is the strongest predictor of overall success in a person’s career. The problem is that most people focus on internal self-awareness, taking assessments like MBTI, DiSC, etc. and ignore the need to be aware of the impact we have on others. Using coaching questions, you can help that person start to get curious around how others might perceive their behaviors and interactions. These questions won’t substitute the need for your mentee to start seeking that information at the source, but instead spark their understanding of the need to do it and potentially start practicing with you on how to seek that input.

Share your successes and your mistakes – your mentee sought you out because of your success and accomplishment but it’s important to share the full story of how you got to where you are. This is helpful in that your mentor can learn from your mistakes (e.g. I assumed as a female POC that I could mimic my white, cisgender male boss’s approach to conflict and people did not receive me well!). The second, just as important reason is because it makes you human and it makes your success more attainable.

Validate, encourage and celebrate – On the same note of helping your mentee believe that they can attain the same success as you, one of your most important roles is to provide encouragement and positive reinforcement. In our “performance management” focused culture, it’s often easier for us to share constructive feedback than it is to provide meaningful encouragement. Taken from the Leading

Others © training, the CARE worksheet can help you formulate positive feedback in a way that reduces awkwardness for the giver and increases value on the receiver's end.

Know when to wait and be ok with silence – one of the most common difficulties mentors describe is the desire to jump in and solve a mentee's problem as soon as it's identified. Resist the urge to prescribe the answer and stick with the coaching questions, even if your mentee doesn't get the "right answer" the first time. Leaving room for silence can also allow your mentee to process through some things. Although your insight and advice are helpful, providing space for your mentee to formulate ideas and solutions on their own helps them flex important critical-thinking muscles as well as come up with the solution that's right for them.

Know when to step in and call it out – in contrast with the point above, there will also be times that you'll need assert your opinion or call out unproductive behavior in your mentee. This isn't a likely scenario but in the event that it's necessary, the STATE model from Crucial Conversations © is a great formula.

Share the facts

Tell your story

Ask for their opinion

Talk tentatively

Encourage Testing

For example: Hey _____, I've noticed something that I'd like to check with you. The last three times we've met you've talked about your interviewing experiences using words like "stupid", "idiotic", and "waste of air". I'm starting to wonder if those emotions are following you into the interviews and having a negative impact on your ability to be hired. What are your thoughts?

**the talk tentatively and encouraging testing part are about how you say this so that you come across as wanting to start a dialogue where the other person's point of view is just as important as your own.*