

Session #2: Communication

Purpose: Identify and discuss the positive communication patterns: what makes a successful mentorship relationship.

Secondary Purpose: Understand how questioning can be used as a part of a successful leadership strategy.

Expected Outcome: Participants will explore different situations of mentor/mentee relationship and identify individually and together what makes a successful relationship.

Session #2 Activity

Instructions: The facilitators will divide the participants in half and place one-half the participants on the “mentor” side and the other half on the “mentee” side. You will be given a card that outlines your role in the first situation. You will be paired with a mentor if you are a mentee and with a mentee if you are a mentor. You will have 5 minutes to discuss this first situation and will then be asked to switch roles for the second situation. There are three situations in total.

Session #2 Resources: Asking Questions

Questions can improve mentoring and leadership because they open up (rather than close or focus) conversations and move the focus to the person you are talking to. They also keep you from giving advice. The philosophy here is that your solutions may not be best for your mentee. Instead, you want them to discover their own solutions through your questioning. Word of advice from Stanier: Stick to questions starting with “What” and avoid questions starting with “Why” when you want to keep your values, solution and advice at bay.

The Seven Essential Questions of Leadership

From: Stanier, Michael Bungay. *The Coaching Habit* (2016) Box of Crayons Press. Toronto, Canada.

1. The Kickstart Question: “What’s on Your Mind?”

The question, “What’s on your mind?” quickly gets the conversation into something that’s “real.” Stanier calls this a “Goldilocks question,” neither too open nor too broad nor too narrow and confining. It communicates that you are open to talking about the things that matters most.

2. The AWE Question: “And What Else?”

This question opens the door to wisdom, insights, self-awareness, and possibilities and can also be used to buy yourself time when you need just a moment or two to figure things out

3. The Focus Question: What’s the real challenge here for you? Implied here is that there are a number of challenges”

This question leads you from high-level or abstract challenges that might be out of reach to something that is focused. The “for you” is what pins the question to the person you’re talking to. It keeps the question personal and makes the person you’re talking to wrestle their her struggle and what they need to figure out.

4. “The Foundation Question: “What Do You Want?”

Stanier notes this question is at the “heart of the book” and calls it “Goldfish Question” because it often elicits that response: slightly bugged eyes, and a mouth opening and closing with no sound coming out. This question can be difficult to answer because we often don’t know what we actually want. Spending some time on this question and help your mentee understand what they really want from a particular situation.

5. “The Lazy Question: How Can I Help?”

According to Stanier, the power of “How can I help?” is twofold. First, you help identify a direct and clear request. Second (and possibly even more valuably), it helps to keep you from giving advice or “leaping into action.”

6. “The Strategic Question: If You’re Saying Yes to This, What Are You Saying No To?”

This question reminds you and your mentee about of the opportunity cost of new endeavors.

7. “The Learning Question: “What Was Most Useful for You?”

There are a number of questions you can ask to help drive a generative and retrieval process that can help with learning. “What did you learn?” “What was the key insight?” “What do you want to remember?” and “What’s important to capture?” are some of the questions people ask to do this. This question immediately frames what just happened as something that was useful and creates a moment to figure out what it was.

Questions that Focus and Lead to Actions

From: Berger, Warren (2014) *A More Beautiful Question: The Power of Inquiry to Spark Breakthrough Ideas*, Bloomsbury, New York

Motivating your team to action can begin with questions that help broader discussion. The Why-What if-How format outline in Berger’s book can help. Begin with open-ended “Why” questions and then follow these up with “What if” and “How” questions.

Example: Why aren’t faculty and other researchers rewarded for diversity, equity and inclusion (DEI) work? What if we were to reward researchers for this work? How would this change impact faculty and the faculty promotion process?

Other Questions

1. Idea Creation: How might we?
2. Difficult situations: Is there anyone else in the room who feels this way? Once discussed: are you Ok with moving forward?
3. What I think I’m hearing....