



Mentoring in the 21st Century[®]

Vol IV Issue II

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The purpose of this newsletter is to provide advice, insights, and suggestions helpful to mentors and induction program coordinators as they strive to support new teachers. The focus of this issue is on building skillfulness in communicating with your protégé. When you consider how his perspective may be quite different from yours, you can listen with a different lens and better plan how to promote his professional growth.

Do You Hear What I Say? Do I Hear What You Say?

The questions in the title of this issue are questions that mentors and new teachers sometimes ask themselves when having conversations with one another. Does this person understand what I am saying? Did I convey the message I intended? Did she say what I thought she said? Often these questions can surface because there is a breakdown in communication. Messages can be misconstrued and misinterpreted leaving both sides of a coaching relationship in a state of confusion or worse, upset.

Empathy and trust provide the platform for communication and understanding in mentoring relationships. To demonstrate cognitive empathy and ultimately understanding, one must become a skillful listener. Listening is a learned skill that takes determination and focus. Many people take turns talking at one another rather than listening. We feel more efficacious when we share our opinions and experiences. It is a much easier act than listening and seeking understanding of the person with whom we are communicating. Maybe Stephen Covey was right in saying, “*Seek to understand, before seeking to be understood.*” Do not underestimate the power of understanding how others view the world and the lens through which they process events, information, and authority. If we can predict or at least consider why people react and respond the way they do to us, new initiatives, new directions, conflict, and data, we can better plan our mentoring interactions.

Our life experiences combined with our natural tendencies to process information in certain ways influence the way we perceive the world. When the people with whom we work have different life experiences and process information in other ways, there can be breakdowns in communication. One mentoring hurdle is moving beyond personal preferred mode and into the mind of the one being mentored.

The questions below are reprinted from *The 21st Century Mentor’s Handbook*. Read through each category and identify your own preferences for processing information; then read through the questions again trying to see the world the way your protégé sees it. Once you identify the differences, you will be better prepared to accommodate them.

Introverted or extraverted: Do you prefer to respond to new information immediately doing your thinking out loud or do you prefer information in advance so that you have time to think about the issues before you have to respond?

Global or analytical: Do you tend to see the big picture and like to have scaffolding on which to hang details or do you prefer to see the bits and pieces and then put them into the whole?

Random or sequential: Do you prefer to work through steps in sequence or are you more inclined to jump around and deal with ones that interest you in the moment?

Concrete or abstract: Do you want to see the real thing rather than hear about the theory or the possibilities?

Sensing or feeling: Do you prefer to deal with what you can see, hear, and touch or do you prefer to go with your gut instincts?

In the moment or in the past or in the future: Is what happened in the past, what is happening right now, or what the future will bring that matters to you most?

Decisive or open ended: Do you tend to make quick decisions and stand by them or do you prefer to continue to gather information and have several options?

Head or heart: Do you lead primarily with your head or your heart? Do you say “I think” or “I feel?” Why or how: Which question is the first to come to your mind when someone presents information, “Why is that a good idea?” or “How would that look?”

Observer or hands-on active learner: Do you learn best by observing from a distance or do you need to get into the action and mess around with new ideas and processes?

Research or personal practice experience: Do you tend to seek out and cite research or do you prefer to rely on past experience?

Plan ahead or wait until last minute: Do you finish projects well in advance and put them away until needed or are you inclined to fill all available time no matter when you start?

Internal attributions or external attributions: Do you tend to question the effectiveness of your own efforts or attribute success or failure to the variables that are beyond your control?

Negative or positive: Do you view the world through a rose-colored lens or are you more likely to see problems just around the corner?

Logical or intuitive: Do you prefer to measure and quantify things or are you comfortable knowing without knowing how you know?

Systems thinker or focused personal view: Do you think more about how actions and information impact the complex organization around you or do you focus on the world right around you?

Position power or personal power: Do you define authority primarily by the titles people hold or from the respect they have earned?

After you have assessed your own view of the world and made your best predictions about the person or persons with whom you are working, it is important that you not think that you have the correct view and

they have the wrong one. It is a waste of energy to try to convince them to see the world through your lens. The way you present information or data is a variable that can be adjusted in order to promote acceptance, understanding, and action.

You may want to discuss these information processing variables with the new teachers with whom you are working. The information can be valuable to them in their interactions with colleagues, students, and parents.

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