

## College of Design Mentor Program

### **SEVEN SPECIAL MENTEE SKILLS**

#### **Skill 1: Ask Productive Questions**

Asking effective questions can be helpful to foster communication and learn the information you are seeking. Who, what, when, where, why, and how questions are helpful starting points for gathering information. Open-ended questions may also be helpful in facilitating a valuable discussion.

#### Examples:

Closed: "How many months will this program run?"

Open: "What level of commitment is expected for participants in this program?"

*Remember, each mentoring partnership is different. You may need to use a variety of questions to find the best approach for working with your mentor's style of communication.*

#### **Skill 2: Develop Key Listening Skills**

Effective listening, also referred to as active listening, is a very useful skill and may aid in establishing good communication and reducing miscommunication. It's important to take into account both verbal and nonverbal (body language) messages to understand what your mentor is communicating. A recommended strategy is to make a written plan for what you wish to accomplish in a meeting with your mentor. With a planned agenda, you can check off items as you go, and set the list aside when it is time to listen to what your mentor is sharing with you as he/she responds to your questions. Taking notes may also be helpful.

#### Here are some additional tips for listening effectively:

- Listen for central ideas.
- Determine what is of personal value to you in your mentor's conversation.
- Identify and eliminate as many of your "trigger" words as possible. "Triggers" are words or phrases that might stimulate an emotional reaction, either positive or negative, and may affect your ability to listen clearly
- Use the advantage of thought speed over speech speed productively. Thought speed is your pace of thinking and engaging in a conversation. If your mind is moving quickly, monitor your pace of speech and stay present to the conversation at hand.

#### **Skill 3: Use Trust-Building Behaviors**

Trust-building behaviors will help you establish rapport with your mentor and assist in the development and maintenance of this partnership. Trust-building behaviors reaffirm that you are invested in this partnership, that you are reliable, and display courtesy and respect.

<b><i>Trust-Building Behaviors</i></b>	<b><i>Trust-Lessening Behaviors</i></b>
Consistent Behaviors such as sticking to deadlines and keeping appointments.	Erratic, unpredictable.
Acts calmly under stress	Explodes, overreacts.
Cooperates	Competes, stresses winning over others
Conditional; open to new ideas and information	Convinced, close-minded, opinionated
Acts confident, self-assured	Insecure, fearful, takes leads from others
Accentuates the positive	Stresses deficiencies and negatives

#### **Skill 4: Overcome the Awe Factor**

It's possible to be overwhelmed by the "awe factor" in your mentor partnership because of a mentor's professional status. However, mentees' efforts to take initiative in communication, proactively seek information, and engage in dialogue with the mentor as a "partner" are commonly viewed as positive attributes in a mentee. If you're feeling nervous about approaching a mentor, talk with a mentor program staff member, faculty member, career counselor, friend, or family member about ways that you might practically overcome "the awe factor" and strategize to take your turn as leader in the partnership.

#### **Skill 5: Resolve Differences**

If a difficult situation arises in which you feel you need to confront a mentor about something such as the way he or she gives you feedback, take a step back and strategize about positive ways to approach the situation. Approach the situation with a "soft response" versus a "hard response" and use "I" versus "You" messages.

Examples:

##### ***Hard Response***

"That advice bothers me, but I'm not sure why."

##### ***Soft Response***

"That suggestion seems like a good idea, but it doesn't quite fit with my way of operating. What might be some other possibilities?"

##### ***"You" Message***

"You didn't show up for your meeting yesterday."

##### ***"I" Message***

"I had a message on my calendar that we were meeting yesterday."

#### **Skill 6: Capture the Essence of Your Mentor's Help**

Keep a running list of things you are learning in your mentoring partnership. At the end of a meeting, try the following actions:

- Ask yourself: "What did I learn today?"
- Ask yourself: "How can I apply what I learned?"

- Summarize for your mentor what you learned and how you intend to apply it. You can follow up by email or phone or take this step at the end of the meeting.
- Listen carefully to your mentor's feedback.
- Ask follow-up questions about anything you experienced in the meeting or tour of a facility that seems important to you.

### **Skill 7: Internalize Your Mentor's Input**

Taking time to reflect on and integrate your mentor's feedback may be helpful to getting the most out of the mentor program experience. There are four general steps to internalizing mentor input.

- 1) Sort out what you've learned and what patterns you can identify
- 2) Review what you've learned, especially larger patterns or pieces of information, very shortly after they happen. This will help you remember information and not forget important details.
- 3) Take notes and record things you have learned. Make diagrams or check off lists of actions you've taken and how you are starting to view the careers that you are learning about.
- 4) Discuss ideas and what you are learning with friends or peers.

*Remember: "It's not always what you learn, but what you retain."*

Adapted from:

Shea, G.F. (1999). Making the Most of Being Mentored: How to Grow From a Mentoring Partnership. Menlo Park, CA: Crisp Publications, Inc.