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Mentoring is largely a matter of asking questions. The right questions. But what are the right questions? These are the five types of questions every mentor should ask.

As a mentor, listening is much more important than speaking. Your role is not to tell your mentee what to do or to talk about yourself all the time. No, it's primarily listening and responding to what your mentee says.

But, before you listen, there's often a question preceding. After all, you want your mentee to talk about something, not just anything. This means that good mentoring starts with asking good questions.

In their 2002 book, "Implementing mentoring schemes: A practical guide to successful programs," Klasen & Clutterbuck identify five types of questions that, according to them, all mentors should ask to help their mentees. They are:

REFLECTIVE QUESTIONS:

Aim: Get mentee to say more about an issue and to explore it in more depth.

Example: "You said ... can you explain in more detail how you mean this?"

HYPOTHETICAL QUESTIONS

Aim: Introduction of new ideas on part of mentor; making suggestions.

Example: "What about...?" "What if...?"

JUSTIFYING QUESTIONS

Aim: Obtaining further information on reasons, attitudes, feelings.

Example: "Can you elaborate on what makes you think that?"

PROBING QUESTIONS

Aim: Discovering motivations, feelings and hidden concerns.

Example: "What would you perceive as the cause of this?" "When did you first experience that?"

CHECKING QUESTIONS

Aim: Establishing whether the mentee has understood clearly.

Example: "Are you sure about that?" "Why do you feel this way?"

What is critical when you ask such questions is that they come naturally. You're not interviewing your mentees, but mentoring them. This is also why this is not a list of predefined questions, but a list of types of questions.

Your task as a mentor is threefold:

1. Develop a repertoire of questions in each category
2. Weave them into your mentoring dialogue in a natural way
3. Listen carefully to what your mentee says and ask your next relevant question

And your task as mentee is threefold as well:

1. Reflect whether your mentor is indeed asking these types of questions (as a sign of good mentorship)
2. Decide whether or not you want to stick with your mentor or seek someone else
3. Answer the questions in a thoughtful, authentic, non-defensive way

If both sides use these five types of questions in this way, this will greatly facilitate the effectiveness of the mentoring taking place.

