

Tool 4 – Creating a Safe Space for Mentoring

Productive and transformative conversations happen when we are free to share openly. Most of our conversations are constrained by fear, status, conflicts and confusion. Mentorship can be a safe space created by our words and intentions.

Sharing from experience is a powerful way to uncover the lessons we have learned and pass that learning on to others. When we tell others what to do we stand in judgment. When we recount our stories, we stand side-by-side as peers. Specific, detailed events and realizations are shared, not ambiguous abstractions. Dialogue happens when we share and disclose rather than lobbing charged opinions to support our entrenched positions.

Our status is equal and grounded, with our desire to be seen and appreciated as who and what we are, not as a role or relationship. We are engaged with one another, but not entangled by financial, family or emotional relationships. We do not seek to influence or direct one another, only to learn from and appreciate each other. Everyone has equal time, equal attention and equal contribution to the meeting.

We speak our honest thoughts and concerns, openly to each other. When conflict arises, we disclose our feelings and own our thoughts and behaviors. This is a space for 'difficult' conversations, exploring the power of thinking together and supporting authentic vulnerability. Our ability to affect change comes when we see our own contributions to a situation and chose to change. Tough challenges are tackled, reality is interrogated and learning provoked.

We commit to Mentorship with our full attention. We turn off our phones, listen intently and keep our focus on each other. We give the meeting our full attention and make space in our calendars and minds, prepared to be nowhere else. Our work of shared inquiry creates a flow of meaning that our contribution is uniquely valuable to.

We expand our simple, yet profound capacity to listen by practicing it. We listen to each story that is shared and to our internal reaction to it. We listen for the emotion, meaning and interaction enfolded in the words. We notice the conclusions we reach and question them, distinguishing assumption, memory and thinking. We listen to understand, to feel how others experience the world and without resistance.

The only stories we share are our own. We will never, ever share any details of any story told with anyone else. We create confidentiality with this commitment and demonstrate it by sharing our vulnerable stories. Trust is created when we share. It is strengthened with time and mutual sharing.

We suspend our assumptions, judgment and certainty. We work to understand each other in real time, as we speak and listen, actively creating our experience of the world in real time. We don't rush to solutions for problems, rather good questions "How is this working?" "What is really going on?" "What is at risk if we say I don't know?" Living with the questions will create space for us to notice our own answers.

Our Practices:

- Fully present – no phones, computers, or other electronic distractions
- Short breaks – this time together is important and we value it
- Clean Communication – we commit to speak authentically and succinctly
- Positive Emotional Engagement – suspend judgment and negativity
- Absolute confidentiality – "What is said here stays here"

Mentoring Beliefs:

- We are different and our diversity creates valuable perspectives
- We have our own answers, yet get in our own way
- My experience is a gift, not a directive
- Relationships are conversations