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# Key Communication Skills for Mentors

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## INTRODUCTION

Mentorship is a critical relationship between a less-experienced mentee and a more-experienced mentor in an area of expertise from which one is seeking guidance on a particular subject. This relationship is important particularly in radiology because it plays a key role in training as well as career development of medical students, residents, fellows, junior faculty, and junior partners alike [1]. It is important to note that the mentee-mentor relationship oftentimes transcends career levels and can be based on one's area of expertise. As a result, mentees may be many years in practice ahead of the mentor, but the mentee is seeking the mentor because of an area of interest in which the mentor may be known to excel. The role of a mentor is multifaceted and includes but is not limited to advocating, teaching, role modeling, and advising [1]. Mentorship has also been shown to play an important role in mentee's success, aiding in promotion and decreasing burnout [2]. There are many qualities of a successful mentor including being knowledgeable, resourceful, and skillful. However, we believe that effective communication skills are one of the most important. Effective communication, if performed correctly, results in facilitating the mentee's professional goals and eventual professional success [3]. Therefore, we have made a list of the top five communication skills a mentor should encompass to be a successful and meaningful mentor.

## 1. SET EXPECTATIONS AND PROVIDE FEEDBACK

One of the key steps in a successful mentorship is to communicate clear expectations of your role as the mentor and his or her role as the mentee. Making realistic short-term and long-term goals can help you stay focused on the end point. Defining success and understanding that your definition of success may differ from the mentee can help reduce miscommunication and deviation from the ultimate goals [2]. Providing and actively communicating regular and consistent feedback is one of the most important aspects of a mentor's role. The feedback should be honest, transparent, instructive, and constructive [2]. Giving positive feedback initially helps capture the mentee's attention and will ultimately be a better way to transition into giving negative feedback rather than providing only negative comments [4]. If a mentee is underperforming or deviating from the provided task, then discussing the matter in a private setting as soon as possible will be beneficial as hearing concerns from outside sources may be more discouraging to the mentee.


## 2. LISTEN

Listening is often forgotten as an important component to effective communication [5]. Listening requires paying close attention to the mentee with an active effort to understand

what is being said, in comparison with hearing, which is a passive process in which sound enters the ears without the component of understanding. Listening requires concentration on your part as the mentor [6]. It is important to ensure there are no distractions so that you can fully comprehend what the mentee is saying. Intermittent acknowledgment either by nonverbal cues (for example, nodding your head), asking clarifying questions, or repeating certain phrases or statements made by the mentee reassures the mentee that you are listening [7]. Spending time actively listening to the mentee regularly helps the mentee feel more comfortable. In turn, this can strengthen the mentor-mentee relationship and allow the mentee to speak to you, the mentor, more freely.

## 3. MOTIVATE

Motivating the mentee is an important role of a mentor. Using encouraging language helps uplift mentees and push them to work even harder toward their goals. Simple positive comments such as "You are doing a great job" or "I am very proud of you" are very powerful to the mentee. Sponsorship is another tool available to help motivate. Sponsorship is the act of nominating the mentee for opportunities and projects that resonate with the mentee's goals. When providing these opportunities to your mentees, it is beneficial to stay positive and use motivational comments such as

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“You can do this” or “I have faith that you are going to do great,” which can help push them to eventual success.

#### 4. SHOW RESPECT

Even though you, as the mentor, are more experienced than the mentee, respect must remain a two-way street. As a general rule, communicate with respect just the way you expect respect. This includes remembering basic facts about your mentee, such as his or her name and goals, and be sure to show that by mentioning it during the conversation. Take the time to really get to know your mentee and form a genuine relationship. Communicating with respect also includes nonverbal cues such as making eye contact and actively listening as well as verbal cues such as being mindful of the tone of your voice and speaking in a nonjudgmental way [7]. Empathy is another way to express respect by essentially placing yourself in your mentee’s shoes. It is important to fully understand and respect what mentees say and their perspective. Having respect for your mentee, in turn, encourages even more respect from your mentee,

which ultimately strengthens the mentor-mentee relationship.

#### 5. MAINTAIN CONTACT

Unfortunately, an eventual falling-out between mentors and mentees is very common. It is traditionally thought that it is the responsibility of the mentee of maintaining the relationship with providing regular updates to the mentor of his or her progress. However, this should not stop you, the mentor, from taking the initiative on checking in on the mentee yourself. Reaching out to the mentee regularly can help you as the mentor to assess the mentee’s well-being, check the status of his or her progress, and provide any insight to outstanding questions or concerns the mentee may have. It shows the mentee your genuine interest in his or her development and eventual outcomes. Therefore, taking the lead in managing the relationship by being accessible and initiating regular interactions helps reassure the mentee that you are taking the relationship seriously and, in turn, helps maintain and strengthen the mentor-mentee relationship [4].

#### CONCLUSION

Exhibiting effective communication skills is an integral component of the mentoring relationship. We hope that this list of top five communication skills may help you strengthen your relationship with your mentee and your skills to become an even more successful and meaningful mentor.

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