

A mentor conversation that goes deeper

Before you meet

Each person brings a specific event. Decide what is appropriate to discuss and remove identifying details about others when those details are unnecessary. Ask what kind of help would be useful: understanding the situation, considering options or getting feedback on an attempt.

For a 25-minute conversation, spend about five minutes describing the event, ten examining assumptions and alternatives, and the remaining time choosing an action and follow-up. This is a suggested structure. Change the pace if something needs more attention.

Questions worth making time for

“What did you want to happen, and what did the other person experience?” Ask what supports each part of the answer. If the person does not know the effect on someone else, identify a respectful way to ask.

“Which detail complicates your explanation?” Stay with it. A story becomes more useful when it includes information that does not flatter the storyteller.

“What have you already tried?” Understand the response before suggesting another approach. Advice that ignores previous attempts adds work without necessarily adding insight.

“What would a person who disagrees with you say?” Treat the answer as a hypothesis until it is checked. The exercise should make room for another perspective without pretending to read someone’s mind.

Keep ownership clear

Ask the person to choose the action. Offer an experience or suggestion when it would help, then ask what fits and what does not. The mentor should not decide which report label is the person’s real identity.

Close with an observable next step and a date to review it. The record belongs to the person doing the practice. Share notes only by agreement. Mentors should also choose a behavior to examine and invite feedback on their own participation.

Reviewing an attempt honestly

Start with what happened

At the next conversation, review the prior action before creating another one. Ask the person to describe the situation and the words or actions they tried. "It went well" is an opening, not enough detail to evaluate the attempt.

Suppose someone practiced inviting a quieter colleague to contribute. The colleague replied, "I wish you'd asked me beforehand instead of putting me on the spot." The intention was inclusion. The feedback suggests changing how the invitation happens. Agree on a better method with that colleague and test it again.

When the action did not happen

Ask what got in the way. The person might have lacked an opportunity, forgotten, avoided discomfort or chosen an action too large to attempt. These explanations call for different next steps. Do not mark lack of opportunity as failure. Find a realistic opportunity, or choose an action that fits the person's role.

If avoidance is the issue, make the first step smaller while preserving its purpose. Drafting the opening sentence and arranging a conversation might be the next commitment. Repeatedly choosing a new goal to avoid the old one deserves a candid conversation.

When the other person did not change

Evaluate the action within the learner's control. A clear request does not guarantee agreement. Ask whether they understood the response, maintained a needed boundary and identified the next responsible step. Do not reward them for getting compliance at any cost.

Decide what to keep

Continue a behavior when there is useful evidence that it helps. Adapt it when context or feedback calls for a different approach. Stop an experiment that is unhelpful and explain why. Record the evidence behind that decision.

A mentor's challenge: are you helping the person examine their reasoning, or steering them toward the story you prefer? Ask them at the end, "Where did my questions help you think, and where did I push you toward my answer?"

Your next 30 days

First week

Choose one observation from your report and one situation where it matters. Write a supporting example and a counterexample. Ask someone involved for their perspective without asking them to validate the entire report. Agree on an initial practice with your mentorship partner.

Example: "I move quickly when a plan stalls. At Thursday's meeting, I'll hear the person implementing the decision before proposing a solution." Avoid goals such as "be a better listener" until you define what someone would observe.

Second week

Try the action once. Record what you did, how the other person responded and what remains uncertain. Ask for feedback on the specific interaction while it is still recent. Keep the request small enough that the person has time to answer honestly.

If no suitable situation occurs, document that and choose a realistic next opportunity. Do not create unnecessary conflict to complete an exercise.

Third week

Repeat the action in another situation. Compare the effect. You might need more preparation with one person and a shorter invitation with another. Adaptation should respond to what people tell you and what the work requires, rather than an assumed style label.

By day 30

Meet with your mentorship partner. Bring both attempts and the feedback you received. Decide what to continue or revise. Identify the next setting where the behavior matters and put the next check-in on the calendar.

How you will judge progress

Use evidence you are positioned to observe: earlier warnings about delays, a clearer shared agreement, or input that changed a decision. Count attempts if that helps you remember to practice, but do not treat frequency alone as proof of better leadership. Someone affected by your behavior should have a voice in evaluating its usefulness.

The 30-day sheet records one experiment. Keep the scope narrow enough to repeat. You are learning how a change works in your life, not completing an assignment for its own sake.