

## Mentoring and COVID-19: navigating new challenges as a mentor

Whilst we are all adjusting to a temporary new way of living and the impact on our working lives, your mentoring partnership can continue using virtual meeting places. You may already be using video conferencing (Skype, Zoom, WhatsApp, FaceTime etc) or the telephone for mentoring, or you and your mentee may be considering moving your face-to-face meetings into the virtual space for the first time.

As a mentor, you may be concerned about the topics your mentee may now want to bring into the mentoring partnership which could include how they are coping, a lack of work or where they can get support. They may display more emotion in the mentoring meetings. Below are some tips, resources and support, as well as some reminders, which are useful to highlight at this time. These may be things you can use with your mentee, or for yourselves.

During uncertain times, it can be reassuring to do some 'normal' things. Therefore, mentoring can be a good activity to continue to engage in, even if it is being done in a slightly different way or the topics of the conversations have a different focus. Below are some tips and some reminders about how to give and get the best from mentoring for you and your mentee:

- **Confidentiality reminder.** Consider re-contracting about confidentiality. It is important that the mentee understands mentoring is a safe space for them to express emotions and that they can talk freely. As a reminder, the things that are not confidential and where involvement of a third party may be required are where the mentee: 1. indicates they are going to harm themselves or someone else; 2. says they or someone they know are breaking a law or policy; 3. says they, or someone they know, is involved in bullying and harassment situation. In these situations, professional help may be required or signposted immediately, or you may refer to the ScreenSkills Mentoring team on [mentoring@screenskills.com](mailto:mentoring@screenskills.com).
- **Dealing with emotion.** How people experience the current situation will be different in each individual. Your mentee may display emotions including anger, upset, anxiety, despondency about the current situation or their future, a sense of isolation or have difficulty dealing with the lack of control. If your mentee shows lots of emotion, meet this by showing empathy and understanding. [This video](#) from Brené Brown explains what empathy is.
- **Give them time and space to share their emotions.** Listen more than you would normally, make sure they feel properly heard. Whilst you may share your situation and emotions to demonstrate understanding, keep this to a minimum - the focus should always be the mentee.
- **Empowering the mentee.** Whilst sharing how the current situation is affecting them can be cathartic, it is far more empowering and motivating to think about the future and what is within their control. Encourage your mentee to identify topics to focus on that are in the current situation, or short-term or longer-term goals, and where they have an element of control or influence.

- **Input from the mentor.** Depending on how resourceful you perceive your mentee to be feeling, you may decide to offer some ideas or advice earlier in the mentoring conversation than you would usually. It is still important, though, to encourage your mentee to come up with some ideas first. You may decide to play ping-pong ideas generation – taking it in turns to come up with one idea each. Ideas generation creates choices (where maybe the mentee felt there were none) and builds confidence and creativity which, in turn, builds resilience beyond the mentoring partnership.
- **Focusing on strengths.** Identifying areas of strength is also motivating. Identifying what they are good at, enjoy doing, achievements and high points can help foster a positive outlook. Mentoring would be a good space to discuss how to maintain strengths given the current situation, how to update them, share them and utilise them, now and in the future.

There are likely to be swings in the mental health of individuals at this time. ScreenSkills has a Mentoring and Mental Ill Health leaflet, written by a mental health professional, which may be helpful. Please find this attached.

The Film and TV Charity offers a variety [of support and has a 24/7 helpline](#). The mental health charity MIND has information, resources and access to a helpline on the [Talk to Us link](#), and a link for someone who needs help urgently.

We have launched two eLearning modules, one each for mentors and mentees. These are a useful reminder or refresher about the general principles of mentoring and can be found in the [training courses section](#) of our website.

#### **Suggested topics of conversation/areas to focus on:**

- Revisiting CVs and template cover letters
- Improving portfolios, showreels and other assets
- Developing, refining, honing, updating, consolidating, refreshing, sharing a skill
- Explore free MOOCs (massive open online courses) or online tutorials available
- Using one's creativity to participate in writing, video other relevant projects. Break it up into manageable goals e.g. focussing on writing one scene
- Staying connected with professional contacts and reaching out to peers, identifying a buddy (or buddies) to check in with daily or weekly
- How to accept the current situation, or how to create a daily or weekly routine
- How to use technology available to stay connected
- Celebrating big and small successes: what have you achieved this week?

#### **Possible questions:**

- How are you feeling?
- How are you getting on?
- What support do you have/can you access?
- What are you doing to keep motivated? What could you do to build your motivation?
- What are you finding difficult at the moment?
- If you were to look back to this time from e.g. a year's time, when it is all over, and you have come out of it OK, what advice would you give yourself?
- Think about a time when things have returned to normal and you have come out of it OK – finish this sentence: I wish I had....
- What motivating challenge could you set yourself during this time?

- What short- or longer-term career goal do you want to focus on?

### Using 'scaling' to assist the mentee

Scaling is a tool that can help to:

- break down a topic into bite-size chunks
- focus on the positive
- identify what is being done right already
- explore how to move forwards
- gain clarity
- evaluate progress.

Scaling works on a scale of zero to 10, where 10 represents the way the mentee want things to be, and zero is the complete opposite. It is useful for working on motivation, commitment, confidence, and on a topic that feels very big.

1. Ask: Where are you on the scale now?
2. A) If the answer is zero, ask:
  - What is stopping things getting even worse?
  - How are you managing to hold things where they are (*e.g. at the least - they are getting out of bed, they are talking to you etc*), even though they are so difficult?  
or
  - B) If the answer is more than zero ask:
    - What are the good things that are happening to make this a *x number*?
    - What has helped you get from zero to *x number*?
2. Then for all scores ask:
  - If you were at a 10, what would you be doing, feeling, hearing, seeing?
  - What would it take and what do you need to move up the scale? (This helps the mentee identify current or potential internal or external resources)
  - Where would you like to get to on the scale in the next day/week/month/year (as appropriate)
  - What will it feel like to get to there?
  - What will the evidence be that you have moved up the scale?
3. Then encourage the mentee to generate choices by asking:
  - What would it take for you to move up one point or half a point?
  - What could you do that would help move up the scale?
  - And what else .....? (Repeat asking for a few ideas, then share some of yours)
  - Of all those ideas, which ones do you want to explore in more detail?
  - What are some of the pros and cons of those ideas?
  - What are some of the steps involved?
  - What will you do?
  - When will you do it?
  - What support do you need?