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## Great mentors do not need all the answers

Sometimes mentors may feel they don't know what to advise or how to help their mentee. In the moment when the mentee is looking for answers, mentors can panic and think: 'I don't know how to help', or 'I don't know what to advise'. First - don't panic. Mentors can experience this particularly if they work in a different department, in a different industry sector or have a different craft from the mentee. Mentors and mentees will have different work and life experiences, and mentoring can still be effective. Mentors do not need to have all the answers or have had the same experiences as the mentee as they can help in other ways. In fact, sometimes it is not helpful for the mentor to provide answers to all the mentee's queries, as this can prevent learning and growing from taking place (more on this later). It can be liberating for mentors to know that they do not need to have all the answers!

'Help' can take many forms, and not all involve having the answer, in fact there is rarely only one right answer – there are many possible answers. Where there is only one right answer, for example in legal matters, health and safety situations, the mentor can ask the mentee where they can find the answer for themselves or, in this case, the mentor can give the answer.

There are a variety of techniques a mentor can use if they feel they do not know how to help and below are some suggestions which many mentors have used with good results.

### Actively listen

Calm your nerves as well as the voice in your head and put energy into actively listening to what the mentee is saying, and not saying. Tune into the mentee and their story, what they are saying, how they are saying it, the language they are using, disparity between words and body language, and the assumptions are they making. You will pick up more clues and cues from the mentee to follow up on or to challenge. Remember instances where someone you have admired showed humility or willingness to admit that they did not know the answer to a question.

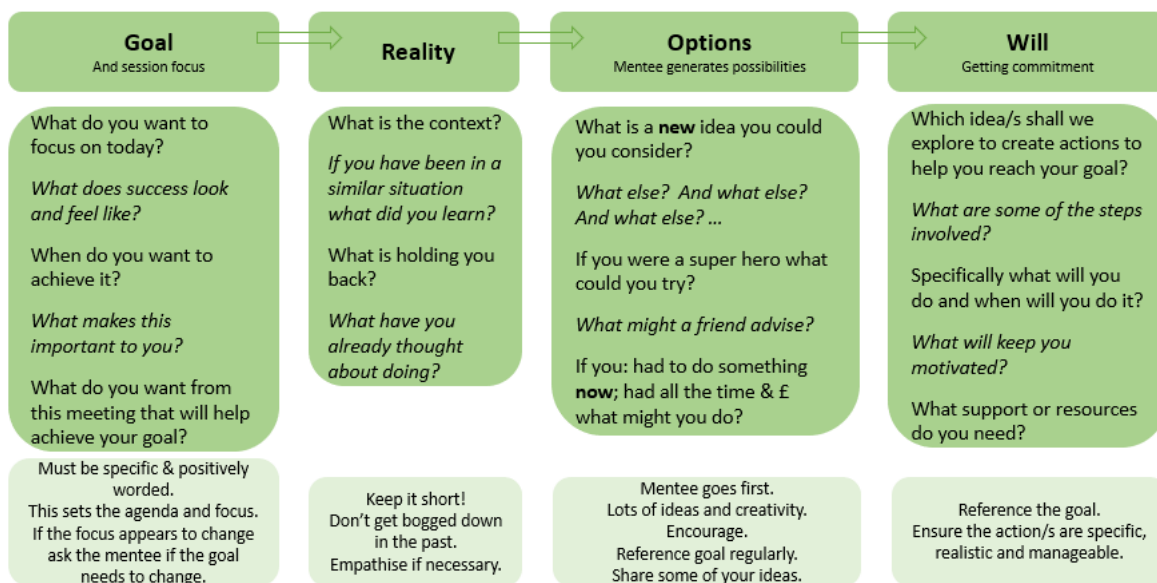
Reflecting and summarising regularly using the words of the mentee has many benefits including:

- Demonstrates you are listening
- Builds rapport
- Provides a punctuation mark in the conversation
- Highlights the main points
- Allows the mentee to hear repeated back to them what they have just said, which is particularly useful if this is the first time they have shared a thought or an idea
- Gives a springboard or a signpost to the next stage in the conversation

## Generating choices

Part of your responsibilities as a mentor is to get your mentee to think for themselves, rather than telling them what to do or having the answer. Mentoring is about helping the mentee to develop their problem solving and ideas generation skills, and to be creative. You can share your knowledge, stories, advice and ideas – if you have them, or you can build on the mentee’s ideas, or bounce ideas off each other. You are not expected to always have the answer or direct experience relating to their situation or their goal for mentoring overall or a specific meeting goal.

Remind yourself of the GROW model which is covered in more detail in the eLearning module and was explained in the initial mentor training webinar offered as part of the ScreenSkills mentoring programme. The GROW model gives a structure to conversations: clarifying a focus; generating choices; identifying an outcome. Outcomes of successful mentoring conversations can include an action or activity, research, reflection, reading.



At the Options stage, mentees generate choices, options, ideas and possibilities. The mentor offers encouragement and stimulus to help the mentee develop their thoughts. It is important for the mentee to generate ideas first as this helps them to develop many skills: problem solving skills; creativity; the ability to think for themselves; and builds confidence. All of these transfer back into the workplace. If you have ideas, you can then offer them or can build on those of the mentee. Think, too, of who else can help.

You are aiming for a **pick-and-mix** of ideas generated together. As wide a range of ideas as is possible can include those which are:

Practical	Logical	Whacky	Ideal
Concrete	Weird	Wild	Unusual
Creative	Challenging	Impossible	Illegal*
Boring	Obvious	Safe	Dangerous
Easy	Normal	Genius	Inspired

\* it is only an idea at this **brainstorming** stage. Brainstorming involves suggesting as many new ideas as possible no matter how outlandish or bizarre (adapted from definition of brainstorming in [www.businessdictionary.com/](http://www.businessdictionary.com/))

Then, as usual, identify a couple of ideas to explore further and finally agree an outcome the mentee will put into action.

## Practicing

Mentoring can be a safe space for mentees to practice a new technique or activity before doing it for real. Examples can include:

- A presentation
- Job interview
- Pitching an idea
- Networking
- A difficult conversation they want to have with someone at work e.g. asking for or giving feedback; making a request

A mentor and mentee can work together to craft what a mentee may want to say and how to say it, paying attention to tone, their breathing, volume and pace as well as body language. It is important to focus on the first couple of sentences to create the foundations for the rest of the content. Consider what the mentee could do if they feel they could dry up – this could include; a specific phrase they will use; spending time taking a breath to give them thinking space; a question they will ask; summarise what they have just said; or a mantra they can use privately to help their confidence in the moment or calm their nerves.

Practicing a few times gives the mentee the opportunity to receive direct useful feedback from their mentor and a chance to make and see improvements in their 'performance'. It also helps to put the activity in their muscle memory and therefore easier to recall when they do the activity for real. The mentor can encourage and highlight what is going well and one or two things that could be improved.

## Where else to look

Where else could ideas and choices be found? Whilst mentor and mentee can generate ideas together, build on each other's ideas and bounce ideas off each other, ideas and advice can be sought elsewhere. Involve someone else who is an expert or reach out to the network of the mentee or the mentor; encourage the mentee to do some research to see what others have done in similar situations in the screen industry; or research what other industries do and whether/how this could be applied to this situation. Consider organisations and charities, forums and communities which may offer advice in person or online.