More Tips for Advisors

Be fully present. Connection requires excellent listening and your full attention. Set aside your daily challenges and pressures during an Advisor session so that you can devote your full attention to your Participant. Whether the Connection session is in person, by telephone, or via email, this means making yourself unavailable to others during the Connection conversation. By not allowing interruptions, the quality of your Connection will be significantly more effective and productive for both of you.

Take time to make a personal connection at the start of the session. One of the pleasures of a Connection relationship is the sense of connection between two people. Before launching into the focus area for the day, spend a few minutes to build your relationship with your Participant. "Small talk" often helps both people to relax and get ready for a deeper conversation.

Ask open-ended questions. In order to provide relevant perspective, the Advisor must understand the Participant's situation and concerns at a deep level. Rather than asking questions that can be answered with a simple "yes" or "no," practice asking questions that call for a reflective response. Remember to ask early on why the Participant has sought an Advisor and the intended gain from the experience. It is better to know some of the right questions than to have all of the answers. High-gain questions are open-ended questions rather than yes/no questions that typically start with "Who, What, When, How, tell me more about…Give me an example of…" You will find a list of open-ended questions for Advisors in our resources section.

Listen with curiosity, not judgment. Be conscious of your own listening and strive for deep listening coming from your own curiosity rather than problem solving. You will find that your Participant faces issues that you have also faced. However, each person is unique and comes to their present moment from a different path. Listen with the goal to learn more about the person. Catch yourself before judging and simply "follow curiosity" to learn more.

Try not to interrupt, unless there is a need to manage time or focus the dialogue. Paraphrase or "feedback" what the Participant says to confirm that your understanding is accurate.

Ask direct questions to focus the session. Connection sessions often go all too quickly. To focus the session, ask simple and straightforward questions at the beginning of the session to ensure that the conversation is focused on the topics that are "top of mind" for your Participant today. For example, you could ask, "What would you like to talk about today?" or "I'd love a quick update and then let's choose a topic for today's session." Ask early on in the session: "What help do you need from me?"

Notice what has "heart and meaning" for your Participant. A good Connection conversation involves much more than trading information and knowledge. By paying attention to the emotion and energy of your Participant, you will be able to observe what matters most to your Participant, as well as where he or she may feel discouraged or overwhelmed. Notice your
Participant's enthusiasms and areas of confidence and point them out to your Participant to help build confidence and connection.

Tell your story. People often learn best through storytelling. If you have experiences related to the challenges faced by your Participant, check to see whether your Participant wishes to hear the story of your experience. Make sure to focus on the aspects of your experience that are most pertinent. Telling your story should take no more than 10 minutes of a Connection session, though it may lead to a rich discussion that links directly to the Participant's situation. Try not to preach!

Share the conversation rather than doing all the talking. Sometimes, Advisors mistakenly believe that their job is mainly to impart wisdom and expertise. If you find yourself talking at length, with little interruption or dialogue with your Participant, stop yourself and reorganize the conversation by asking questions about your Participant. Watch out for the tendency to "download" when someone asks the question you've been waiting all your life to answer!

Set and honor boundaries. Connection relationships work best when each person knows what to expect – and what not to expect. During the first session, establish the way in which the Connection relationship will be set up. How frequently will you meet? Decide on the best form of communication (email, phone, Instant Messenger, etc.). How long will the conversations last? May the Participant contact you by email or telephone in between Connection sessions? Be clear about how you would like it to work. Attention here early on prevents misunderstandings later on.

Follow through on your commitments. Inevitably, you will find yourself volunteering the title of a book, a referral to one of your contacts, to review or pass on a resume or some other small service to your Participant. Make note of your promise and make it a priority to follow through. Dropping the ball can lead to confusion and mistrust in the relationship. Make commitments carefully, being realistic about what you can offer and by when you can deliver it.

Be encouraging and action-oriented. Recognize that the problem isn't figuring out what to do – the problem is doing it!

Give helpful feedback. Provide constructive feedback that is specific, descriptive, and nonjudgmental.

Honor confidentiality. Conversations between Advisor and Participant must be considered private. It is a violation of trust to talk about the Participant's life and issues outside of the Connection conversation without the permission of the Participant. Be careful about honoring your Participant’s trust. Hold Connection conversations in places where details shared in confidence will not be overheard by other stakeholders or interested parties.

Language

Have you ever felt judged by someone who you thought was listening with the intention to help you? When connecting with others, you can avoid giving this impression by avoiding the language of judgment. Here are some examples of what **NOT** to say:

- "You should…."
- "Yes, but…."
- "Either/or"
- "There's only one way to do it…."
- "What you need to do is…."
- "What I always do is…."
- "Your problem is…."
- "Actually what needs to be done is…."
- "If you don't….. you aren't going to…."
- "I wouldn't think about it that way."

For Advisors – Language that Encourages

- "You could…"
- "Have you considered….?"
- "What would happen if you…?"
- "What might be the consequences of not acting on this?"
- "Yes/and" rather than "Either/or"
- "There are many approaches that might work…"
- "One idea is…what do you think?"
- "What do you think needs to be done?"
- "How else could you think about this?"
- "What resources are available to you right now to support progress?"
- "When has this happened to you before? What did you do?"

Basic Beliefs of Good Advisors

- The Participant is naturally creative, resourceful, and able. Nothing is wrong or broken – no need to "fix" the Participant. Participants are capable of finding and acting on the answers.
- The agenda comes from the Participant not from the Advisor.
- The relationship is a designed alliance, not a top-down directed conversation

Listening: The Hallmark of a Great Advisor

Good Advisors are empathetic listeners. They understand the benefit for the Participant of speaking aloud what is on his/her mind. The seasoned Advisor does not focus on interpreting the Participant's story for problem solving. Instead, Advisors seek to help Participants define the real issues. Advisors listen for the word choices, intentions, emotions, and nuances of the story. The Advisor uses active listening and encouragement to connect with the Participant, while focusing on asking powerful, open-ended questions.

Advisors listen for:

- Goals and intentions
- The meaning behind the story
- Themes and recurrent words
- Resistance, fear, anxiety, hesitation, “BS”
- Progress
- Tone, mood
- Commitment and passion