

MENTOR GUIDE



INTRODUCTION

We know that every mentoring relationship is different because relationships are, by nature, shaped by the individuals forming them. Yet, we have also learned that positive mentoring relationships for both the mentor and the mentee follow a basic lifecycle. This mentor guide will give you insight into how to mentor well in each step of the mentoring cycle, as described in our VLE Mentor Model.

Below is an overview of the VLE Mentor Model and more details on mentoring well in each of the model's eight steps. Each step of this guide includes the following sections:

- **Big question** - The central question you, as the mentor, should ask your mentee in this step of your relationship. The 'me' or 'I' in these questions is you, the mentor. The 'you' is your mentee.
- **What is the key to getting this right?** Insight into how you, the mentor, can guide your mentee through this stage in their growth and what to avoid.
- **What can you try?** Practical steps to guide your conversation.
- **Homework** - This is something for you and your mentee to try before you meet again.

THE VLE MENTOR MODEL



STEP 1: INVITE

Big Question: How can I intentionally support the work God is doing in you?

What is the key to getting this right?

When you invite someone into a mentoring relationship or accept their request for a mentor, it's important to remember that relationships are personal, not programmatic. The beginning of this relationship should focus on getting to know one another and forming a shared vision of what a mentoring relationship can be.

What can you try?

1. **Name what you see.** Sometimes, this is called an ICNU conversation - an opportunity to tell your new mentee, "I see these things in you." This may include naming spiritual gifts you see, evidence of the growth of the fruit of the Spirit, or emerging leadership qualities.
2. **Cast vision for the future.** Describe for your mentee what you hope this relationship can lead to. What does it look like for you to seek to hear and discern God's call together?
3. **Declare your intentions.** Make it clear from day one that you are in this relationship because you believe in the work that God is doing in your new mentee, and you want to support them in it. If you are beginning this relationship within the context of your church, this is also a good time to affirm that you are invested in them as a child of God, not because you need something from them in your ministry.

Homework:

In the days or weeks before your next meeting, set aside a regular time to pray for your mentee.

STEP 2: DEFINE

Big Question: What work is yours, and what work is mine?

What is the key to getting this right?

As you establish your relationship with your mentee, clearly defining the roles and responsibilities in the relationship is essential. In a mentoring relationship, the role of the mentor is to support your mentee's formation rather than be a source of information or give direction. Your role is to help your mentee learn to read the map and to use your experience to help them stay on their chosen route, rather than being their GPS that gives turn-by-turn directions. Their role is to select their route, drive, and agree to listen to your wisdom and try what you say.

What can you try?

1. **Have a conversation about previous (mentor) relationships.** When we enter into a new relationship, we bring our past relationships with us, both the healthy and the challenging. This is an opportunity to hear more about your mentee's previous experiences being led by others. Ask them what went well, how and when they felt supported, and what did not work previously.
2. **Discuss your availability and limits.** Set clear expectations for how you will interact as mentor and mentee. This includes how often you hope to meet and for how long, what forms of communication are best, and what limitations you may have (regarding time and availability) as you go. Also, it's helpful to define what scope or depth you each hope for in this relationship and what feels "out of bounds."
3. **"Publish" what you've decided.** While this is not a binding agreement, writing out your shared expectations and hopes for this relationship at this point in the process will help you stay on the same page as you move forward.

Homework:

You and your mentee should write out what you understand about your role in this relationship and include basic things you commit to as you move forward. Then, share your commitments with one another.

STEP 3: DISCERN

Big Question: Where is God leading you?

What is the key to getting this right?

In a mentoring relationship, the locus of control is with the mentee, and the Holy Spirit sets the vision. The mentor/mentee relationship must remain focused on the mentee's growth more than the needs of the church, trusting that the development of the individual will shape and grow the church.

In other words, the shoe does not determine the shape of the foot.

What can you try?

1. **Reaffirm your investment.** Next time you meet, intentionally communicate the purpose of this mentoring relationship. You, the mentor, desire to support your mentee in their growth. You are investing in them because you care about them, not because you need them to fill a role in your church.
2. **Listen to their vision.** Ask the person you mentor to tell you more about where they sense the Holy Spirit is leading them to grow and utilize their gifts. If their answer focuses on what they can do for the church, steer the conversation back to their growth vs. usefulness.
3. **Affirm what you hear.** Use this conversation as a means of affirming what you see God doing in this individual and the vision they have. Pray for them as they seek to follow God in this way.

Homework:

Have the person you mentor write out a vision statement outlining where they sense God is leading them in the coming year or years.

STEP 4: IDENTIFY

Big Question: What do you need as you move forward toward your God-given vision?

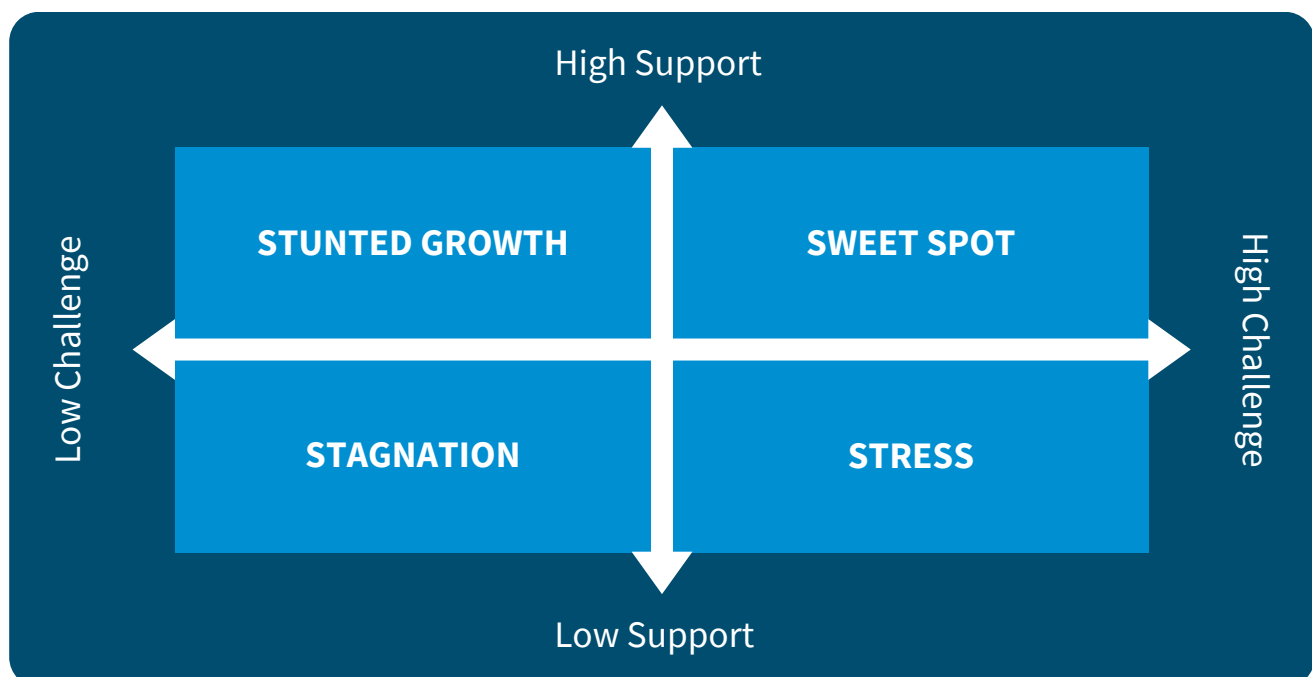
What is the key to getting this right?

As you work with the person you mentor to determine what they need to help them grow, remember that healthy, sustained growth requires a balance of challenge and support - this is the **sweet spot**. Too much support with too little challenge **stunts growth**.

In the same way, too much challenge with too little support leads to anxiety, **stress**, and often burnout. While everyone needs a cheerleader, they also need a trainer or coach. Growth must be uncomfortable to be significant.

Similarly, the leadership style of sending someone off to “figure it out on their own, sink or swim” has worked in the past, but for every success story, there are many stories of failure, whether public or private.

Here is a diagram to illustrate this concept:



STEP 4: IDENTIFY

What can you try?

1. **Ask: What do you think you need?** Next time you meet, reaffirm the purpose of your relationship: to help them grow. Then, ask the person you mentor to tell you what they think they need to do so. This will help you determine how they see themselves and understand the road ahead.
2. **Clarify and delineate.** Help your mentee develop a more comprehensive understanding of their needs by asking clarifying questions that lead toward a concrete action plan (think: time-specific, task-specific, people-specific). Then, delineate how you, the mentor, might provide challenges or support in those areas.
3. **Define success and identify boundaries.** Have a conversation about what success will look like for your mentoring relationship. This is also a good time to talk about what healthy boundaries of communication and feedback should look like moving forward, and how you will communicate when things feel hard or off.

Homework:

Based on this conversation, have your mentee write out their identified needs, how they hope to address them, and how they will seek your support as they go.

STEP 5: MEASURE

Big Question: What benchmarks do you need to reach as you go?

What is the key to getting this right?

As a mentor, you likely have ideas of what your mentee should do to grow. However, setting goals is the responsibility of the mentee, not the mentor. You, the mentor, are responsible for asking the questions that help your mentee set reasonable, realistic goals and provide accountability and encouragement as they go.

What can you try?

Using your mentee's list of identified needs and how they hope to address them:

1. **Ask questions to help them identify their goals.** Ask: What do you think you should do? What do you want to do with that? What is a realistic expectation of what you can do in the next 30 days?
2. **Provide accountability and encouragement.** Check-in: "This is what you said you would do/try... How is it going?"
3. **Help them reflect.** Ask: What did you learn from that?

Homework:

With your mentee, determine a schedule of when and how you will check in with them on their progress.

STEP 6: GUIDE

Big Question: How can I help you stay on course?

What is the key to getting this right?

The role of a mentor is to help a mentee grow in their ability to self-reflect and course-correct independently as they grow. Therefore, the bulk of the guidance an effective mentor gives their mentee is in the form of asking clarifying questions and clearly and compassionately restating what they hear their mentee saying.

What can you try?

1. **Listen closely.** Mentors need ears to hear what the mentee is saying and the ability to listen for what the mentee is not saying. When you notice an area where your mentee is unclear or unaware, ask a question to help clarify or deepen a connection. When needed, ask, “What do you think the Holy Spirit is saying to you now?”
2. **Speak clearly.** Always be direct, but don’t be directive. Your role as a mentor is to name what you see in your mentee with clarity, even if the message is hard to receive. However, the mentee must decide what to do with the message and how to move forward.
3. **Teach the language they need to hear.** Your voice as a mentor has a significant impact beyond the words you say when you meet together. As you communicate, be loving, kind, and direct because you want them to be able to be loving, kind, and direct to themselves.

Homework:

Plan a listening session with your mentee. From the start, tell them your goal is to hear them process their goals and progress, and to ask clarifying questions when needed. At the end of your time, affirm the qualities and growth you heard from them and pray to bless their next steps.

STEP 7: EVALUATE

Big Question: What do we do when it's obvious a course correction is needed?

What is the key to getting this right?

If, in your mentoring, it becomes clear that something is impeding your mentee's ability to progress toward their identified goals, it's a necessary time to press "pause" on the plan and discern what your mentee needs moving forward. That may mean adjusting goals based on new realities (unexpected life changes may impact capacity, or it may take longer than expected to learn new skills or grow in new practices because of unexpected barriers). Sometimes, you become aware that what you have to offer your mentee is not what they need. As a mentor, you must be both self-aware and honest enough to name when what you can provide is not enough and point them to those who can.

What can you try?

1. **Gather all of the facts.** It's important to objectively name how your mentee's progress is not aligning with their previously defined goals. Let your mentee take the lead in putting to words what is and is not working, but do not allow the focus to shift to blame, whether blame of self or others. Your mentee needs to assess the reality of their situation with accuracy and self-compassion.
2. **Discern together the desired future.** After clearly laying out the factors impeding progress, you can help your mentee discern the way forward. As the mentor, you can ask, "What does God want for you? What is God's heart for you in this?" Then, together, you can ask the Holy Spirit to reveal this to you.
3. **Use the phrase "I wonder."** Often, a mentee who feels stuck or defeated struggles to feel hopeful about their future growth. As the mentor, you can use phrases like "I wonder" to ask questions about possibilities your mentee might not yet be open to considering or to help your mentee see potential in avenues that may feel closed.

Homework:

Ask your mentee to revisit the vision statement they wrote early in your mentoring relationship. Invite them to pray, asking God to speak to them again about that vision. Then, give them the homework of journaling about what they sense God saying, and to bring that writing to your next meeting.

STEP 8: REDEFINE

Big Question: Where should we go next?

What is the key to getting this right?

It's critical in your mentor/mentee relationships that you periodically check in with each other and seek honest feedback on how the relationship is going. This should be a process of joint discernment between you and your mentee that reviews where you have been. It is an opportunity to give your mentee the benefit of your observations and to receive the benefit of theirs. This is also an opportunity to redefine your relationship. Should you continue moving forward the way you have been? Is this the time to step into more? Or is this the opportunity to express gratitude for what your relationship has been and to transition out of this formal mentoring relationship?

What can you try?

1. **Give your mentee a concrete way to give you feedback.** In this relationship, you, as the mentor, hold power/authority that may prevent your mentee from feeling comfortable, honestly expressing how they have experienced your mentorship. You can empower your mentee by providing them with a set of questions or a form to prepare their feedback in advance of meeting together.
2. **Provide your feedback in the same way.** A mentor/mentee relationship is precisely that, a relationship. By providing feedback to your mentee in the same way you requested it from them, you help them enter what may be an uncomfortable conversation with the comfort of knowing what to expect.
3. **No surprises.** This step of a mentoring relationship is not the time to surprise your mentee with big revelations you have not discussed previously. Instead, this is an opportunity to summarize where you've been, what you've noticed and experienced, what has worked, and what hasn't.
4. **Redefine your relationship.** After you've shared your feedback, it's time to determine "What's next?" This may involve reaffirming your mentoring relationship or moving in a different direction. Whatever you choose, the decision should be mutual and include an affirmation of how you see God leading your mentee.

STEP 8: REDEFINE

Homework:

If you and your mentee decide to end your mentoring relationship as it has been, discuss how you would like to stay connected. Also, as the mentor, it's important you make it a priority to reach out and check in informally to encourage, if appropriate. If you and your mentee decide to continue your mentoring relationship, schedule the next meeting to revisit Steps 3 and 4 of this guide - to discern what is next and to set new goals.