How to be a good mentor

Front-End Foxes School

Why mentor?

Mentoring is good for *the Mentor*

- Build and practice leadership and teaching skills.

- Learn new things for yourself via the process of discovery with your mentees.

- Mentoring is an opportunity for you to meet and get to know other developers/engineers and pay forward your knowledge and skills.

Mentoring is good for *the Mentee*

- Mentees are actively seeking guidance from their Mentor.

- Mentees will build important skills and the foundation for a career from the knowledge imparted to them by their Mentor.

- Mentees will have lots of questions, and a Mentor will be a trusted advisor that can answer those questions.

What a Mentor brings...

Kindness and patience

- When mentoring, a Mentor needs to exude kindness and patience. Mentees will have questions, and the more kindness and patience they see in their Mentor, the more comfort they will have in asking their Mentor questions.

- A Mentor may not have all the answers. That's okay! Sometimes the questions a Mentee has can be answered by the Mentee themselves - after formatting the question and typing it, or speaking the words out-loud.

Clear communication

Front-End Foxes is an **international organization**. Some mentees will be attending their cohort in a language that is not their first language.

If you have mentees that are struggling to understand the material being taught because of a language barrier, be sure to check-in with that mentee regularly to make sure they have the time and resources to understand the assignments.

Clear communication

You may want to make use of a text translator (such as Google Translate) or help your mentee find documentation resources in their first language.

If your mentee is not fully understanding all of your words, try to re-phrase things in more basic terms, and speak slowly & clearly to ensure they understand you.
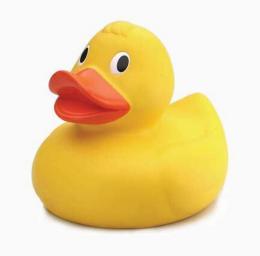
Clear communication

Use the **Explanations for all the things: Follow-up** techniques (covered later in this presentation) to be sure that your mentee has understood you.

Remember that a mentee struggling through a language barrier may feel defeated or frustrated at certain points. Use the **Acknowledgement and encouragement** techniques (covered later in this presentation) to provide a morale boost before disconnecting with this mentee.

Mentoring techniques

A good "listening ear"

Sometimes in tech we use the term "**Rubber Duck Debugging**".

As a Mentor, you may find yourself serving as a Rubber Duck. You don't necessarily want to answer all of your Mentee's questions.

You need to be there to **actively listen**, and to **encourage** your Mentee to **elaborate on their questions**, so they may **discover the answers on their own**.

Questions as response

When Mentoring, a main goal you will have is to **let your mentees find answers for themselves**.

Sometimes this can mean **answering a question with a question** of your own.

Questions as response

For example...

Mentee: Can you look at my code here? I don't know why this isn't working.

Mentor: How did you decide to format this line of code this way?

… in this scenario, it's possible that you - the Mentor - know *exactly* why the mentee's code isn't working. Your goal is not always to give the mentee a solid answer, but to ask the kinds of questions that will lead the mentee to an answer they will discover for themselves.

Explanations for all the things

There will be moments when you need to provide a direct answer to a Mentee.

This is okay! **Direct answers are not always the wrong choice** - sometimes a Mentee will be very lost or stuck on something that they cannot work their way out of.

Explanations for all the things

If you find yourself providing direct answers to a Mentee, **make sure you follow-up with questions to ensure their understanding**.

Be prepared to elaborate on any direct answers you've given. Encourage your Mentee to communicate their understanding, or ask them if they need more info.

Explanations for all the things: **follow-up**

For example…

"Now that you have the answer, **do you understand why that works?**"

"**Can you explain this back to me?** I want to make sure you understand this."

"I know this is a lot to take in, **does everything I've said make sense to you?**"

"**Would you like me to explain** [concept] **further?**"

Acknowledgement and encouragement

Remember that your **Mentees may be nervous**.

Some **mentees will be very new to tech** & coding concepts.

It's okay if they need explanations for things that **feel VERY basic to you**.

They may feel foolish to be asking you a question that will be easy for you to answer.

Acknowledgement and encouragement

Acknowledge that what they are learning can be difficult, and **encourage** them to ask the really basic questions.

Acknowledge that what they are asking about may be something that your other Mentees are also struggling with, and **encourage** them to ask their questions openly so other mentees can benefit.

Acknowledge that they've tackled a lot already, and **encourage** them to keep going.

The Grandmother Method

The Grandmother Method is a powerful, yet simple concept.

A child can learn on their own, but will need positive reinforcement for motivation.

A Grandmother can provide this reinforcement by standing aside, watching the child work, and offer verbal praise as they progress.

The Grandmother Method: **Inquiries**

If no one reaches out to you with questions, it may be that they don't know what questions to ask, or that they're doing fine on their own.

One way to build up engagement with a mentee is to lean on the Grandmother Method for inquiry.

"How is your project coming along?"

"Can you show me what you've made?"

"Can I see how you've coded this?"

The Grandmother Method: **Reinforcement**

When using the Grandmother Method, after **inquiries** comes **reinforcement**.

"This is great work, you're really getting the hang of this."

"Wow, look at how far you've come since last class!"

"That's looking excellent, I can't wait to see what it looks like when its finished."

The Grandmother Method: **Reinforcement**

If you engage with a mentee using the Grandmother Method **inquiries**, be prepared to follow up with earlier techniques, and/or reinforcement:

- **Listening**

- **Questions as response**

- **Acknowledgement & encouragement**

- **Reinforcement**

Outside of class

Mentoring beyond code

Advising and storytelling

Before giving advice, try to understand the mentee's unique situation. Get them to talk about themselves, their experiences and their goals.

"Can you tell me about your work history?"

"Have you looked at any job postings that you liked?"

"What concerns you the most about this new career ladder?"

Advising and storytelling

A career in tech, as well as writing code, is not a one-size-fits-all situation. Rather than giving straight answers to a Mentee of what's right and wrong in their career ladder, sometimes mentoring calls for storytelling.

Be prepared to **share your own experiences** with your Mentees as cautionary or morality tales. Impart your own experiences and what you've learned from them, but remember that **each mentee you work with has a unique life experience** and 'YMMV' applies in all of your advising situations.

The goal of mentoring is all-around support for mentees.

Thank you for participating in the Front-End Foxes School mentoring program.

We appreciate all that you bring to the next generation of women in tech.