

How mentoring looks like in practice

What can I do as a Mentor to support my Mentee?

Keep in mind 💡

There is no single recipe as to how you should mentor someone: sometimes you will be more learning goals-focused, sometimes you will be more focused on technical or psychological guidance, sometimes it will be totally different. The mentoring will depend on the type of relationship you have with your mentees, your personalities and their needs of the moment.

Some examples of the various ways you can support your Mentee:

💬 Defining the Mandate of the Mentorship.

At the very start of the Mentorship, you should have an open conversation with your Mentee to define what this relationship will be about. The goal is to align expectations and create an open dialogue between you two.

🗒 Listen and Ask them self-reflective questions.

Often you will be acting more as a mirror than a source of knowledge. You are here to guide them in their reflection process, helping them gain more self-knowledge and confidence. Look at Yoda when he's training Luke for example, he asks more questions than he gives answers because the answer is within Luke. The mentor way it is. Here's some exploratory questions you can ask:

- *How are things going for you?*
- *Where do you feel blocked or in need of help?*
- *How would you approach this issue differently? What are the alternatives?*
- *What are the coolest things you learned this month? Why? Tell me about it.*

🎯 Define learning objectives, assess and celebrate progress.

A part of your job is:

- helping them figuring out the map ahead for their growth (*how can you grow? where can you improve?*)
- and frequently reminding them of the journey they've already achieved (*X months ago, you were here. You have come far, I've seen you improve in Y and Z way*)

Learning goals is a good way to structure their growth. It can be focused on hard skills and soft skills, both are important. They can be quarterly, semesterly or yearly. Some real examples to give you an idea:

- *Learning Objective: “Improve my basic understanding of backend concepts”. How?*
 - 1 - Complete the “Spring Boot Basics” Learning Path
 - 2 - Do 10h of pair programming with X
 - 3 - Attend conference X on Kotlin
 - 4 - Talk with two senior backends from other teams
 - 5 - Write an article about the “Backend Basics”
- *Learning Objective: “Be able to give awesome demo presentations”. How?*
 - 1 - Complete Learning Path “Public Speaking 101”
 - 2 - Facilitate the next 2 retros for the team
 - 3 - Present the next demo

♥ Provide support when they need it, be available for them.

That one applies both for technical issues but also for discussing their anxieties and struggles with them. This part might feel more scary to you, but you're not expected to be a psychologist. What you are expected to do is pay attention. Look out for potential signs (showing nervousness, not following up on tasks, ...) and address them (“I noticed that you have been doing X lately, is everything okay?”).

In those moments, it goes a long way to listen with empathy: ask questions to really understand their pains better and show that you care. Sometimes making them feel heard will be enough, sometimes you might need to also think of solutions together. Some examples: re-adjusting expectations, breaking down the elephant together for a challenge that seems too big, sharing knowledge on a topic they feel they don't master.

🚀 Challenge them to get outside their comfort zone.

You can encourage them to take ownership of new tasks or responsibilities, write an article, do a knowledge-sharing sessions, ... Outside our comfort zone is where we start learning!

👤 Encourage some Shadowing / Pair Programming with experienced people

This can be with you or other experts.

🗣️ Give and ask for feedback.