

IntegrAGE Living Learning Labs

piloting intergenerational learning and mentoring programme

TRAINING FOR MENTORS

Module 2: THE HEART OF CONNECTION - ACTIVE LISTENING & EMPATHY

Duration: 90 min

Core Focus:

To equip mentors with the principles and practical skills of active listening and empathy, which are foundational for building trust, understanding, and effective guidance in the mentoring relationship.

Training Goals:

- **Define** the key concepts of active listening and empathy and distinguish them from passive hearing and sympathy.
- **Explain** why active listening and empathy are critical for successful knowledge transfer and relationship-building between older mentors and younger mentees.
- **Practice** applying active listening and empathy techniques through structured exercises and role-playing.
- **Develop** a personal action plan to integrate these skills into upcoming mentoring sessions.

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TRAINING STRUCTURE

SESSION 1: ACTIVE LISTENING AND EMPATHY

1.1. Why It Matters: The "Why" for Mentors (15 min)

"You have a lifetime of skills and experience to share. But the bridge that allows that knowledge to cross generations is built with two key materials: listening and empathy."

! Briefly link back to motivational theories from Module 1

- ▶ Active listening makes a mentee feel valued and respected.
- ▶ Empathetic understanding is a form of recognition and shows the work is meaningful.
- ▶ A mentor who listens creates a safe space for collaboration and gives the mentee a sense of choice in their own development.
- ▶ The Generational Bridge is a modern approach acknowledges that younger generations often value authentic communication and psychological safety as much as technical advice. Listening and empathy are the tools to provide this.

1.2. Defining the Terms: Listening vs. Active Listening, Sympathy vs. Empathy (20 min)

A) Active Listening - The Modern Approach

Passive hearing, waiting for your turn to talk, formulating a response while the other person is speaking.

What it IS (The RULE Framework - A Modern Approach):

- **R – Receive** is pay full attention. Put away distractions (phone!). Use open body language (lean in, nod).
- **U – Understand** is process the meaning. Listen for content and emotion. Don't interrupt.
- **L - Label & Validate** have briefly summarize what you heard ("So, if I'm understanding correctly, you're frustrated because..."). This validates their feelings and proves you are listening.
- **E - Explore & Empower** have ask open-ended questions to help them find their own solutions ("What do you think your options are here?"). This empowers rather than dictates.

B) Empathy - The Connection Catalyst

Sympathy ("I feel sorry for you"). Pity. Agreement.

What it IS (The Modern Approach):

- Cognitive Empathy support understanding how someone else sees and feels about a situation. "I see this is challenging for you."
- Affective Empathy is sharing and connecting with the feeling they are experiencing. "I can feel your frustration, that would be tough for anyone."
- The Goal is to make the mentee feel understood and not alone, creating a foundation of trust for open communication.

2. Exercise 1: The Good Listener vs. The Bad Listener (Role-Play) (35 min)

Format: In pairs (Mentor A and Mentor B).

Secenario:

A young mentee comes to you saying: "I'm really overwhelmed. I was just given this new project with a tight deadline, but I'm still expected to attend all my regular meetings. I don't know where to start and I'm worried I'll fail."

Round 1 (3 min)

Mentor A practices BAD listening (looks at phone, interrupts, gives unsolicited advice quickly: "Just make a to-do list.").

Debrief (2 min)

How did Mentor B (the "mentee") feel? (e.g., dismissed, unimportant, more stressed).

Round 2 (5 min)

Mentor A now practices ACTIVE LISTENING & EMPATHY using the RULE framework. (e.g., "It sounds like you're feeling really overwhelmed by this new responsibility and the time pressure. That's a tough spot to be in. What part feels the most daunting right now?").

Debrief (5 min)

How did the interaction change? How did Mentor B feel this time? (e.g., heard, supported, calmer).

Group Discussion

What were the key differences in behavior and impact?

SESSION 2: VALIDATION AND ACTION PLAN

3. Exercise 2: Practicing Validation and Empathic Statements (30 min)

Format: Individual reflection + group sharing.

Task:

Read the following mentee statements. For each one, write down:

1. A simple validation of their feeling (e.g., "It makes sense that you'd feel that way.")
2. An empathic response that connects with the emotion (e.g., "It's really disappointing when you put in the work and don't get the result you hoped for.")

Example Statements:

1. "My presentation didn't go well. I completely forgot a whole section of my talk."
2. "I don't feel like I fit in with my team. Everyone seems to know each other so well."
3. "I'm excited about this new task, but I'm also really nervous about getting it right."

Discussion:

Share responses. Highlight that empathy is about connecting with the emotion (frustration, isolation, nervous excitement), not necessarily solving the problem immediately.

4. Good Example in Practice (Case Study) (20 min)

Secenario:

Mentee (Young Employee): "I tried to use the software you showed me, but I got a different error message and I didn't want to break anything, so I stopped. I feel like I should know this already."

Break down a GOOD mentor response using the learned skills:

Active Listening (Receive & Understand)

The mentor puts down their pen, makes eye contact, and lets the mentee finish.

Label & Validate

"Okay, so the software threw an unexpected error and it made you hesitant to proceed. That's a completely normal reaction; it's smart to stop when you're unsure."

Empathy (Affective)

"It's also frustrating when things don't work as planned, especially when you're eager to learn."

Explore & Empower

"Let's look at it together. Those error messages are often just the program's way of asking for more information. What do you think the message was trying to tell us?"

Why it works

It avoids making the mentee feel incompetent, normalizes the struggle, connects emotionally, and turns the problem into a collaborative learning opportunity.

5. Personal Action Plan & Conclusion (30 min)

Individual Work (10 min)

Using the matrix structure from the provided document, mentors fill out their personal plan for the next mentoring session.

Group Commitment (10 min)

Mentors share one thing they will consciously try to do in their next conversation with their mentee (e.g., "I will not interrupt," "I will try to validate their feeling before giving advice.").

Conclusion

Reiterate that these skills are a practice, not a perfection. By actively listening and leading with empathy, mentors build the trust necessary for a truly successful and rewarding cross-generational mentoring partnership.

Objective 1: Master Active Listening in My Mentoring Sessions

Results (R)	Actions & Notes
R1: Use the RULE framework in at least one full conversation with my mentee.	I will put my phone away, summarize what I hear, and ask an open-ended question.
R2: Reduce interruptions and my own talking time by 50% in the next meeting.	I will practice pausing for 3 seconds after my mentee finishes speaking before I respond.
R3: Receive positive feedback from my mentee that they felt heard.	I will directly ask at the end of a session: "Did you feel like I understood your main point today?"

Objective 2: Integrate Empathy to Build a Stronger Connection

Results (R)	Actions & Notes
R1: Identify and name the emotion my mentee is expressing in our next conversation.	e.g., "It sounds like you're excited/frustrated/concerned about..."
R2: Practice moving from sympathy to empathy by focusing on connection, not just solution.	I will lead with "That must be..." or "I can understand why you'd feel..." before offering any advice.
R3: Create a psychologically safe space for my mentee to share challenges without judgment.	I will consciously use phrases like "Thank you for sharing that," and "It's okay to feel unsure about this."