

PODCAST MINISERIES BY: RTC AND TDR GLOBAL LAC

Mentoring as a Tool for Professional Development and Strengthening Health Research Networks

EPISODE 4: COMMUNICATING EFFECTIVELY TO BUILD A POWERFUL MENTORSHIP

Karen Linares (KL): Hello everyone, it is a pleasure to welcome you to the 4th episode of our podcast: *"Mentoring as a tool for professional development and strengthening of health research networks"*, developed by CIDEIM as the Regional Training Center and TDR Global Node for Latin America and the Caribbean. The thematic content of this podcast is based on the "TDR Mentoring Program" conducted by coach Antoinette Oglethorpe and supported by the Special Program for Research and Training in Tropical Diseases – TDR.

In this episode we will talk about communication, a key factor in effective and sustainable mentoring. We will also provide some tools to guide mentor-mentee conversations and adapt different communication styles to work effectively.

Effective communication is not just about conveying information, it is about creating a dialogue that enables mutual understanding, the development of ideas and the resolution of challenges. Without it, mentoring can be confusing, unproductive, or frustrating for both parties.

A good mentor listens actively, shows genuine interest in the mentee's concerns and aspirations, and speaks clearly to avoid misunderstandings. For example, if mentees are having difficulty defining their research area instead of giving direct instructions, the mentor asks questions such as: "What problem in your field would you like to solve?" or "What projects have you enjoyed the most?". This helps mentees find their own direction and ensures that the conversation is two-way.

When discussing a health issue, the mentor might ask, "If you were to design a study to address this issue, how would you do it?" and then provide feedback on the mentee's proposal. By opening the dialogue, mentees gain the confidence to share their ideas.

Now, our guest and expert mentoring coach, Antoinette Oglethorpe, joins us to talk about how to build a strong and effective mentor-mentee relationship and how it benefits both parties.

Antoinette Oglethorpe (AO): Well, as you say, a lot of it is about building trust. So, I think the most important thing initially is just getting to know each other and being as open as possible about who you are, what your background is, what your experience is, what challenges you're facing, sharing any insights into your own self-awareness. I think the more that both mentor and mentee can do that, the more that it will build trust between the two parties.

I think then also addressing some of those things that we just talked about in terms of getting to know the person's communication style, discussing the expectations of the mentoring and agreeing to those, and discussing things like how often you're going to meet, how long you're going to meet for, what format you're going to contact each other in, is it okay for the mentee to WhatsApp the mentor outside of work hours or any day of the week? or, will the mentor like that more contained and viceversa.

So, I think a lot of it is about and setting expectations upfront and agreeing what you're trying to achieve but also getting to know each other building trust just in building a human relationship.

So, the mentee can benefit from gaining insights so self-awareness and self-insights as we've just talked about, they can also gain insights from someone with more experience, so, we often talk about the benefit of learning from mistakes and learning from experience; but those mistakes and experience don't have to be our own, we can learn from other people's experience and mistakes. They can develop new skills because through discussing with their mentor, they will then go and try new things, which then develop their skills, and It can be very powerful in helping people expand their network, so the mentor can introduce the mentee to people that they don't necessarily know and ultimately, it gives them a safe space to discuss challenges and opportunities and that means that helps them come to decisions. We all know the benefit of talking things out without always do it, and this platform allows that.

But it's not just mentees that benefit. Mentors also benefit because firstly, they have the satisfaction of helping others, which is very important. But also, in supporting a mentee they're reflecting on their own experiences and they're learning about from that. Reflection is something that we don't do enough, and it is through reflection that we really learn. So by reflecting on their own experiences, they learn more about themselves as well as developing new insights about how to approach situations, and they also learn new perspectives from their mentees and whether that be that the mentees, you know, from a different walk of life, a different country, a different generation, a different background, those differing perspectives can be really valuable.

KL: What strategies can we use to foster trust and open communication with our mentees? Today, we will introduce you to two tools that can help you have effective mentoring conversations: the **OSKAR model** and the **DISC model**.

The **OSKAR** model is designed to facilitate effective conversations between mentors and mentees using the Solutions-focus Approach. The acronym OSKAR represents five tools:

- **O**utcome
- **S**caling
- **K**now-how
- **A**ffirm & Action and
- **R**eview

Let's define them briefly:

The **Outcome Tool** helps mentees clearly define the goals they want to achieve in their professional or academic development. We can begin a mentoring session by asking the mentee, "What do you want to get out of this meeting?" and imagine what their *"future perfect"* would look like.

The **Scaling Tool** asks us to rate current progress on a scale of 0 to 10, where 0 is the worst it has ever been and 10 is the outcome or *"future perfect"*. Remember, we are using a solutions-focus approach, so the goal is not to look for reasons why the mentee has not achieved this "future perfect" but to recognize the progress that has been made: where would you put things today? how is it that you are at this point on the scale and not at a lower level? what helped you get to where you are now?

The **Know-How Tool** consists of identifying the skills and resources the mentee already possesses that will contribute to achieving his or her goals, as well as considering what the mentor and others can contribute. It is important to share your and others' thoughts, ideas and experiences so that the mentee can consider their relevance, and accept or reject them.

The **Affirm and Act Tool** invites the mentor to recognize the mentee's successes with affirmations, which are genuine and positive comments about the mentee's strengths, attributes, skills, abilities, accomplishments, and qualities that will help them progress.

On the other hand, actions are the small steps that allow mentees to make progress toward their goals. It is important to plan the steps to be taken, keeping in mind:

- Doing more of what works, and
- Stopping doing what doesn't work and doing something different

Finally, the **Review Tool** challenges us to regularly assess progress and adjust strategies as needed to ensure continuous improvement in the mentoring process.

Implementing the OSKAR model in mentoring conversations promotes a structured, positive, solutions-focused approach to career development.

Now let's talk about the **DISC model**. This is a psychometric assessment tool developed by psychologist William Moulton Marston, to identify the behavioral and personality styles of individuals in different environments.

The acronym DISC stands for four behavioral styles: **D**ominance, **I**nfluence, **S**teadiness and **C**onscientiousness.

Dominance describes how a person approaches problems and challenges. People with high dominance tend to be direct, decisive, and results oriented.

Influence reflects how a person interacts with others and persuades them. People with high influence tend to be outgoing, enthusiastic and persuasive.

Steadiness reflects how a person responds to the environment and changes. People high in Steadiness tend to be patient, consistent, cooperative, and loyal.

Conscientiousness measures how a person relates to established rules and procedures. People with high conscientiousness tend to be meticulous, analytical, and quality oriented.

The 4 styles are present in all people, and this test helps us to identify which is predominant in each person. It is important to note that a person's predominant DISC style does not necessarily manifest itself in the same way in all contexts.

For example, a person may be more dominant or persuasive in a work environment, but more stable or reserved in his or her personal life. DISC styles are not fixed or immutable traits but tendencies that can vary depending on the role we play, the environment we are in, and the social or professional expectations that surround us.

It is very important to point this out:

- There are no “good” or “bad” styles
- There is no “best” style
- All styles have strengths and limitations
- All styles can be more or less effective
- People are a blend of all four styles

The DISC model is designed to increase awareness of our behavioral preferences and how they can impact our relationships and interactions, either positively or negatively. By understanding the four styles, we can adapt to work with others and establish more effective communication, which will improve collaboration and efficiency in mentoring.

That concludes this episode on communication styles. We thank Coach Antoinette Oglethorpe for providing us with all the tools we share with you. In the transcript document, we expand on each tool of the OSKAR model with guiding questions and leave you with two links to take the DISC test for free. [Take a look at the end of this document]

To all our listeners and readers, thank you for following our podcast. We look forward to seeing you in the next episode where we will talk about strategic and collaborative networks.

Best of luck with your projects and mentoring!

Additional Information: OSKAR Model

Below, you will find a series of guiding questions to help you use the OSKAR model tools in mentoring conversations.

The *Outcome Tool* provides you with a set of questions to help your mentee define the “Future Perfect”, a full, detailed and multi-perspective view of life after the change has already taken place.

- What do you want to focus on in this conversation?
- Suppose you could wave a magic wand and things went perfectly ...what would tell you that you’ve made better progress than you could possibly have imagined?
- What signs would you notice that things were going better?
- What are you most proud of or pleased about?
- Who else would notice that things were going better? What would they notice?
- What impresses them about you and the progress you’ve made?

The *Scaling Tool* uses a scale of 1 to 10 to evaluate your current progress. Ten is the highest score, representing “Future Perfect.” The following questions will guide your scaling:

- Where are you now?
- How come you’re there and not lower?
- What helped you get to where you are today?
- What positive steps have you already taken to make progress?
- What’s the highest you’ve ever been on this scale? When was that? What was different then?

The *Know-How Tool* helps us identify the mentee's skills and resources that can contribute to achieving his or her objectives. Use the following questions:

- What helps you to perform at N on the scale, rather than lower?
- What’s working already?
- When do parts of the “Future Perfect” happen already?
- What helped you achieve similar things?
- How have other people achieved this?

It is also key:

- Recognize the strengths and knowledge of the mentee, mentor, and others who can contribute to the process.
- Identify available resources (time, money, etc.).
- Highlight the mentee's technical and professional skills, as well as their personal qualities and traits, such as patience, energy, and persistence.

- Share your own experiences and those of others, which can serve as examples or points of reference. This reflection is helpful for finding alternative solutions and expanding the Circle of Influence.

The *Affirm and Action Tool* helps you acknowledge your mentee's past successes and outline the next steps.

Things to affirm:

- What's already going well?
- What attributes, skills and resources does the mentee have?

The following questions are useful for planning concrete actions and achieving established goals:

- What is the most obvious next step to take now?
- What step can you take that will be the most likely to succeed?
- What is the easiest action you can take?
- What is the most enjoyable action you can take?
- What would you do if you were guaranteed success?

The *Review Tool* is used to regularly evaluate progress and adjust strategies as needed. Some guiding questions for this stage include:

- What's better?
- What did you do that helped make the change happen?
- What did others do?
- What effect did the change have?
- What are the next steps?

Review is the final tool in OSKAR, and yet it's also the first tool you're likely to use in a subsequent discussion.

Links to take the DISC test for free:

- <https://www.personality-quizzes.com/disc>
- <https://discpersonalitytesting.com/free-disc-test/>