

**Analyze Your Mentoring Style.** Your mentoring style is the way you present yourself and respond to your student. Styles can be difficult to categorize precisely because there are so many factors involved. Below you will see a list of these factors. Try to answer the questions and analyze your style.

**1. Appearance.** Your clothes and grooming will send a message to your mentee. But what is this message? With regard to your appearance, your style reflects your vision of yourself as a role model. The best way to analyze your appearance is to talk to counselors at the school to learn how children there view adults. Their advice can provide you with valuable insight about the way you appear to your mentee.

**2. Body Language.** Body language has to do with your style as a communicator. Take a moment and try to visualize yourself in your mentoring sessions. How would you characterize your body language? This is important to do because body language constitutes about 70% of communication! There are four basic styles of body language—each sends a different message:

- **Open Style:** If you or your mentee sit facing each other with open hands and feet on the floor, you are open to each other; this means communication is apt to be bilateral rather than unilateral.
- **Closed Style:** If one of you is sitting with arms folded, legs crossed, or bodies turned away, this is a clear sign that messages are being rejected.
- **Forward Style:** If a person leans forward toward the other, this means he or she is actively accepting or rejecting a message.
- **Backward Style:** If the person leans back, doodles on a pad, or looks out the window, he or she is passively absorbing or rejecting the message.

Here is an easy way to define your mentee's body language style (and yours as well):

- **Open/Forward –responsive-** If your mentee has this style of body language, he or she is actively accepting your message (or you are doing so for him or her); this is the time to ask for agreement or to make a decision.
- **Open/Backward – reflective-**Here your student is interested, but not accepting the message yet. This is the time to present further facts and information. It may be a good time to let the student think about the message before deciding.
- **Closed/Forward - the fugitive-** This style signifies an imaginary flight from the conversation due to boredom. This is the time to motivate and be enthusiastic.

- Closed/Backward – combative-This style expresses active resistance to the message. This is the time to defuse the situation, back off, and avoid argument.

**3. Speech.** Is your style empowering or paternalistic? Your verbal style is a determining factor in your role as a motivator. To analyze your verbal style, think of the words you use when you try to correct your student. The goal here is to validate the person even when you may disagree with him or her. Here are the right and wrong ways to project a verbal style:

- Wrong: “Why would you get into a fight right before the end of a semester? You know that would make you ineligible for basketball! You better get your priorities straight or you will not graduate.”
- Right: “We all make mistakes, but the point is to learn from them. The same thing happened to me in high school. Things actually turned out well for me because it forced me to focus on school for a semester and my grades went up.”

**4. Listening.** Are you an active or passive listener? The best way to analyze your listening style is to first read issue #3 of the Mentor Minute in the Mentor Minute Archives and evaluate yourself in terms of the five basic principles of effective listening. Active listeners are almost always the most effective mentors. The main need of children is for adults to listen to them. If you can fulfill this need, you will find that your student will listen to you as well—further increasing your effectiveness as a mentor.

**Conclusion.** These are just a few of the factors that constitute your mentoring style. Attitude, empathy, and many other elements are involved as well. The goal here is not just to analyze your style, but also to decide how to improve it. To do so, you will have to be honest with yourself and be willing to do two things: ask your mentee how you come across and be willing to look at yourself honestly. We ask our students to improve. We also need to ask our students how we can get better as mentors.