

MPOWIR Mentoring Guide

Please note: Merlin Walberg of Phoenix Consultancy USA, Inc. has been working with us on the development of a national mentoring program to aid the retention of women in the profession. She facilitated aspects of the Pattullo Conference and has been advising on the start-up of the mentoring groups. Some handouts included here are reproduced with her permission. For further information about her work you can visit her website at www.phoenixconsult.biz.

Table of Contents

I. MPOWIR Mentor Groups.....	3
a. Introduction.....	3
b. Description.....	3
c. Policy.....	4
II. Guide to Listening.....	6
III. Coaching/Mentoring Behaviors.....	9
IV. Giving and Receiving Feedback.....	11

I. MPOWIR Mentor Groups

a. Introduction

Mentoring Physical Oceanography Women to Increase Retention (MPOWIR) is a community-based program that provides mentoring to physical oceanographers from late graduate school through their early careers. The overall goal of MPOWIR is to make mentoring opportunities for junior physical oceanographers universally available and of higher quality by expanding the reach of mentoring opportunities beyond individual home institutions. The aim is to reduce the barriers to career development for all junior scientists in the field, with a particular focus on improving the retention of junior women.

As part of this initiative, mentor groups were formed in 2008 consisting of female junior scientists and senior facilitators. As of 2011, over 30 junior women are enrolled in mentor groups and retention is 100%. We attribute this success to a number of factors including:

- (1) low time commitment – group members and leaders do not spend more than 2 hours per month preparing for and participating in the groups.
- (2) low cost – conference calls with 7-9 participants typically cost less than \$40 for 90 minutes.
- (3) logistical ease – a private listserv facilitates conversation and the MPOWIR program coordinator handles all scheduling.
- (4) immediate feedback – group members feel comfortable asking for advice or sharing concerns via email or on the call with people outside of their program.
- (5) face to face interaction – at conferences and meetings, group members typically get together to socialize and meet.

What follows is a description of the MPOWIR Mentor Groups, which may be useful to those who would like to initiate a similar program. For additional information, please contact the MPOWIR Program Coordinator (lisa.gerber@duke.edu).

b. Description of Mentor Groups

Purposes of mentoring groups:

- To help early career women make connections and gain community support.
- To help build the confidence of early career women so that they are comfortable promoting themselves and their work.
- To support early career women scientists by providing advice, encouragement and strategies for both professional and personal success.
- To learn from sharing the experiences of both senior scientists and peers.

How this is achieved:

- Groups meet regularly by telephone for 1-2 hours every month.

- Members share issues, ideas, opportunities, and projects; work on them between meetings and share ongoing progress.
- Members may ask for information on specific subjects and agree on a way to get that information for the next meeting.
- Members take it in turn to explore their needs, and the leaders and other members act as consultants/mentors for each member in turn.

Guidelines for meeting:

- Confidentiality - EVERYTHING that is discussed is confidential, unless it is explicitly agreed otherwise.
- Every member should have an opportunity to present work or a question at least once in two meetings.
- Members should help clarify the source of issues and concerns for one particular member and identify why a particular issue is a challenge for that person.
- Respect and positivity are essential.
- Try to ask questions rather than to give answers, at least in the first instance.
- Listen without interrupting.
- Start and end on time.
- Once you have committed to this group, attend all meetings, unless there is something unavoidable. If you cannot attend, be sure to notify the group in advance.
- Groups meet for the duration of the academic year, unless otherwise agreed.

c. MPOWIR Mentor Group Policy

Purpose and Background: Groups consist of 6-7 junior women and 2 senior facilitators. The groups are intended to provide peer and traditional mentoring. Each group meets monthly via conference call for approximately 1-2 hours depending on group preferences. The objectives are to help junior women make networking connections, to offer coaching, advice and strategies for professional success, and to share the experiences of both senior scientists and peers.

To ensure that the mentor groups offer an immediate tangible benefit to participants, junior women are asked to formulate specific goals that they wish to work toward during the coming year. Prior to the first meeting of the group, each member and mentor group leader receives a notebook containing the biography and goals for each participant. These goals, along with other topical issues, are discussed during the mentor group calls.

Joining: To join a mentor group, mentees must be female scientists in positions between the last year of a U.S. PhD program and associate level positions, who self-identify as physical oceanographers. When an individual signs up to join a mentor group, they will be waitlisted until enough participants are available to form an additional group. Members may sign up at the MPOWIR website. Potential leaders may also indicate interest in mentor group

participation on the website. MPOWIR considers group membership and participation to be confidential, and will work to ensure mentor leaders come from separate institutions from participants as much as is possible.

Unjoining: The mentor group commitment is for two years. After two years, each group member may choose to remain in her current group if it continues, switch to another group, or leave the mentor groups altogether. Continued peer-to-peer mentoring is highly encouraged and MPOWIR will provide support to any group that wishes to meet without their group leaders. Mentees may leave the group before two years at their own discretion.

Privacy/Problems: Membership in the groups, with the exception of the leaders is confidential. Topics discussed in mentoring group meetings must remain confidential unless all participants specifically agree to an outreach action. Failure by participant or leader to maintain confidentiality will result in immediate expulsion from the groups. Problems that cannot be resolved within a group should be brought to the attention of the logistic coordinator, Lisa Gerber (lisa.gerber@duke.edu).

Additional Support: Some mentees may benefit from one-on-one mentoring, and mentor group leaders may meet “off line” with an individual, however, those who would benefit from more intensive mentoring may be referred to another senior scientist with particular knowledge or expertise. MPOWIR maintains a list of several “on call” senior scientists who have volunteered to talk with a mentee about specific issues. If a mentee would like to engage in a conversation with an “on call” mentor, MPOWIR will make these arrangements through the group leaders.

II. A Guide to Listening

Why is listening important?

Listening is the key skill enabling us to understand each other. Unlike speaking, in most educational systems, we are never taught to listen. It is often assumed that if we are fortunate enough to have two ears that work well, we listen well. This is not necessarily so.

Listening is an essential part of many work activities: understanding and solving problems, dealing with inquiries, attending meetings, staff supervision and development, team work, conflict resolution, effective negotiation, delegation, building co-operative alliances, and leading and implementing change.

The Consequences of Non-Listening

On the Speaker	On the Non-Listener	On the Organization
Undervalued	Lose respect	Low commitment
De-motivated	Look foolish	Poor performance
Irritated	Get avoided	Waste resources
Frustrated	Lost Opportunities	More mistakes
Repetition	Waste Time	Lower productivity
Anger	Considered Rude	Reduced Quality

The consequences of poor listening are severe and dramatic. Not listening includes half-listening; reading, writing, computer use or thinking about other things while someone is speaking to us.

Note: *Active listening is only possible for short periods of time. In fact, we spend much of our time cutting out noises and distractions. However, it is critical to know when to listen, and to have the skill and motivation to do it.*

How to Listen

To really understand what someone is saying, we need to learn to listen to the whole person, not just the words that are being said, but also what lies between and behind the words. This is described as listening on three levels, the content, the feelings and the intentions.

- 1. The Content:** This is what we usually listen for; the facts, information, the details, the story line. However, as we think at about 500 words per minute, and speak at about 125 words per minute, there is a lot of time for our mind to wander.

Developing the capacity to listen accurately to content is helped by trying to be as objective as possible. This means holding back our own feelings about what we are hearing, resisting thinking about our own experiences, and trying to capture the speaker's words.

- 2. The Feelings:** By listening to the feelings we can discover the relationship between the speaker and the “story”. We listen between the lines of a perfectly rational story to hear feelings of resentment, frustration, excitement, hope and so on. It is important to hear these feelings, because they can linger far longer than the events to which they are related, and will have a tremendous impact on future interactions.

Developing the capacity to listen accurately to feelings is helped by holding back our own feelings, likes and dislikes, and developing empathy. Empathy allows us to pick up the feelings of the speaker, rather than our own. This is done by listening to the words people choose, the tone of voice used, and in person by looking at facial expression and changes in body language.

- 3. The Intentions:** Listening to the “will” of the speaker enables us to find their motivation, commitment, and direction. This information is vital in negotiations and agreements, in order to know what the prospects for implementation and support are.

Developing the capacity to listen accurately for the intentions of the speaker requires that we hold back our own wishes, suggestions and advice, and that we are interested in the outcome for the speaker. Despite the fact that intentions are often buried and unconscious it is possible to hear them by listening to the emphasis given, the amount of detail, the first and the last thing said, the energy used to describe different aspects.

It can be very helpful to the speaker, if you are able to hear their intentions and reflect them back.

Making Listening Apparent

In order for the speaker to feel valued, motivated, worthwhile and encouraged, they need to know that they are being listened to. Therefore it is important to avoid doing things like doodling and shuffling through papers.

Instead:

- Give the speaker your full attention - even if it is only for long enough to say that you are unable to listen at the moment and to arrange another time to talk. Turn away from your computer and deskwork to ensure that you do not become distracted by incoming mail, or completing processes.
- Sit or stand reasonably still - fidgeting indicates impatience, doing other activities indicates disinterest.
- Summarize and reflect back what you have heard periodically - this helps both you and the speaker to keep track of what’s being said. Do not change subjects!

- Allow silence - to help you communicate patience and to enable the speaker to draw more out of themselves.

Remember: *The thing that will most indicate that you are listening is giving your full, relaxed attention and concentration to the speaker.*

Creating the Right Environment

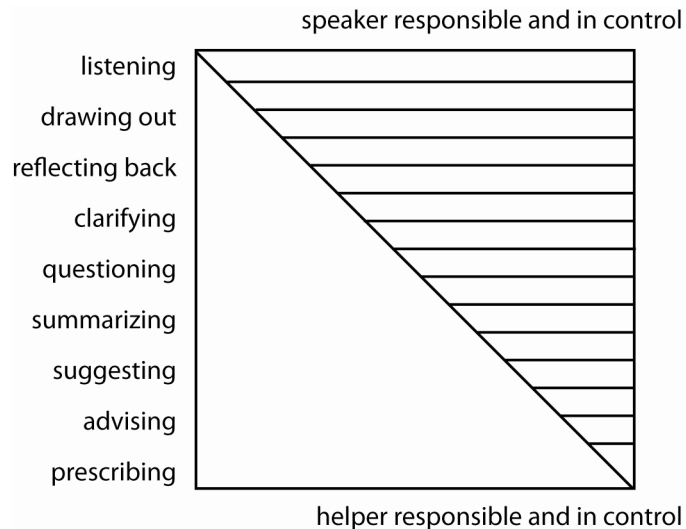
- Find a quiet space - wherever possible ensure an atmosphere of privacy.
- Eliminate distractions - divert phone calls, put up “do not disturb” notice, put your work aside.
- Eliminate barriers - use understandable language.
- Create the right “inner” environment by clearing your mind, so as to make a space for what the speaker has to say.

Note: *Remember that what you think you are hearing on the three different levels must never be assumed to be correct. Test it out with the speaker by reflecting back what you have heard and asking if it is right.*

Listening on Three Levels						
Content	Past	Objective Level: Most common, surface	Conveys ideas and information	Focus on what is said	Involves the head	Challenge for the listener: to be open minded
Feelings	Present	Subjective Level: Between the lines	Conveys values and attitudes	Focus on how it is said	Involves the heart	Challenge for the listener: to be empathetic
Intentions	Future	Operational Level: What is behind, or underneath	Conveys motivation and commitment	Focus on what is intended	Involves the hands & feet	Challenge for the listener: to retain interest in the speaker

III. Coaching/Mentoring Behaviors

There are many ways to help someone when they come to you for support, supervision or advice. The model below shows a range of responses along a continuum. The behaviors at the top keep the speaker clearly in control and responsible for the outcomes, while the behaviors at the bottom shift the control and responsibility to the helper.



If the predominant behaviors are those shown in the lower half of the model, the immediate symptom may be alleviated, though the speaker may be left feeling more helpless, dependent, indebted to the helper, more pressurized to conform than before. This, in fact, is what some people choose! This choice however has only short-term benefits and often discounts the individual's long-term potential for problem-solving, decision making and managing generally.

Our basic value system works towards each of us becoming more responsible for ourselves. Helping behaviors shown in the upper half of the model tends to grow individuals who, following help, become more self-sufficient and creative, less dependent on others, more willing to take high decision and tackle tough problems. Here the person's own resources are validated, they are allowed to develop their own answers and discover more fully their own resources.

The behaviors on the top half of the model enable development and the growth of proactivity and responsibility.

Behavior	
Listening	Actively listening for content, feelings and intentions. Allowing silences, nodding etc., and being fully present for the speaker.
Drawing out	Helping the speaker to go deeper: "Can you tell me more about...?" "Give me an example..." "What happened next...?"
Reflecting back	Mirroring back the words to the speaker: "So you're angry with her." "You told Joe to go home."
Clarifying	Helping the speaker to clarify important words or concepts. "What do you mean by 'success'?" "So whose responsibility was it?" "How will you know when you've achieved it?"
Questioning	Helping the speaker and/or listener to get a fuller picture: "You haven't mentioned Jane, what part did she play in it?" "How does this relate to the rest of your team?"
Summarizing	Helping the speaker to take stock of sections of the conversation: "So there are three things which you say you're concerned about: namely..." "You've said it will take 3 weeks, 2 more staff and support from your manager."
Suggesting	Putting forward possible actions for the speaker to take up: "Have you thought about trying...?" "As I see it, there are two options you can choose,..."
Advising	Strongly suggesting that the speaker follow your advice: "My advice to you is..." "What I would do if I were you is..."
Prescribing	Telling the speaker what to do: "This is what you will do..." "Now that I have heard you, I want you to..."

IV. Giving and Receiving Feedback

What is Feedback?

Feedback is the process of giving people information about the results of their actions. It provides a unique opportunity for learning and development. This opportunity can only be realized with the help and goodwill of another person.

The purpose of Feedback

The purpose of feedback is to help people see themselves as others see them and to highlight the nature of individual strengths, weaknesses and contributions. This provides a basis for learning, so that individuals have the opportunity to do things differently in the future.

Why it is important

Feedback is important because it has the potential to improve levels of motivation, performance and loyalty and develops the capacities of the receiver. If feedback is avoided an important opportunity is lost and when badly handled, it can cause, at best, superficial conformity, but most likely, underlying rejection and resentment.

Why it is difficult

Feedback is difficult to give because no one likes to be criticized. Therefore, the receiver of feedback needs to feel that the giver is motivated only by the wish to be helpful - not punishing or judgmental. Even giving and receiving praise can be difficult but is just as important as giving critical feedback. Praise reinforces positive action, raises confidence and makes the receiver feel valued.

How to Give Effective Feedback

Feedback is successful when the receiver: *understands* it, *accepts* it and *can act* on it. This will be achieved if:

1. The intention of the feedback is to be helpful; looking ahead to what can be done better in the future. Therefore, before giving feedback first check your motivation.
2. The feedback includes a positive reinforcement of strengths.
3. It is specific. Use examples to describe actual behavior. Generalities do not help someone learn.
4. It concentrates on areas that the receiver can do something about, preferably fairly easily. You may be able to give some helpful advice.
5. It is presented as your opinion. Use "I" statements so that you own what you say. e.g. "I get the impression..." rather than "you are..." Do not judge.

6. It gives only as much information as the receiver can absorb and act on. Overloading may get things off your chest but it won't help the receiver.

When to give feedback

Ideally feedback should be given immediately and not stored up. Immediately after the event, the recall of the circumstances is better. The exceptions are:

1. When the atmosphere is not right because of pressure of work, feelings running high, lack of privacy, etc.
2. When a specific period has been agreed and set aside for feedback.

Receiving feedback

1. Listen openly and try not to defend or justify yourself.
2. Be sure you understand precisely what is being said so that you can take appropriate action.
3. If you are uncertain, check its validity with others.
4. Encourage feedback. Ask others directly for what you need.
5. Thank the giver. You have received a valuable opportunity to learn more about yourself and, if you consider the feedback to be valid, can change for the future.
6. Decide what you want to do about what you have heard, and how you will go about it.