

Practical Skills for Difficult Conversations and 'Mentoring Up'

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Setting goals, planning meetings, providing updates, and actively and effectively engaging with one's mentors



Setting goals, planning meetings, providing updates, and actively and effectively engaging with one's mentors

Especially when they are busy, under-resourced, and distracted

Managing up/ Mentoring up

1. Practice Boundaries
2. Check your stories
3. Real but not true
4. Kindest alternative
5. Favors vs expectations
6. Prepare for the tough conversations
 - What I want what I don't want
 - Future focused

Discernment- we are not talking about toxic relationships

Avoid confirmation bias

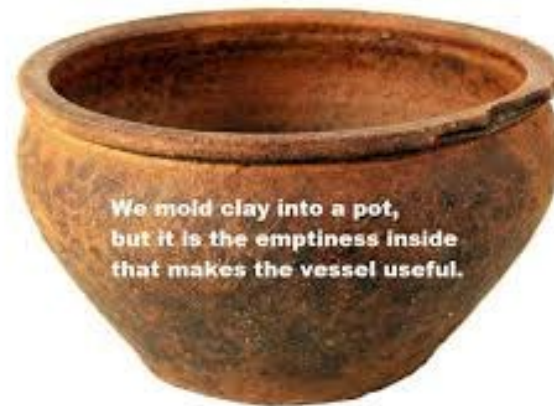
Check your stories

Verify information

Get other perspectives

How full is your cup? Do you even know?

Conditions and conditioning



CONDITIONS

Hot, cold

Hungry, thirsty

Tired

First thing in the morning

Trying to leave early, feeling already rushed

Fighting a cold

Tasks on the to do list

CONDITIONING

Upbringing

All prior relationships

Books you've read

Movies you've watched

Communities you are part of

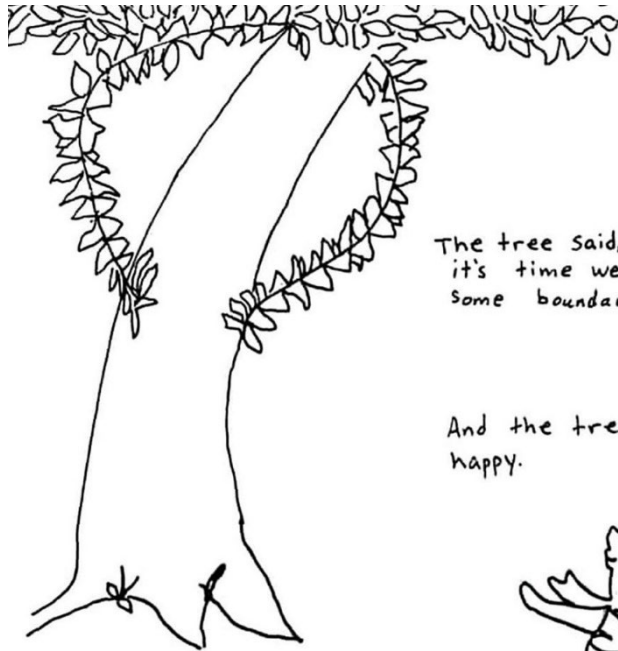
Sensitivity to words, volume, body language

The significance you've assigned the topic

Awareness of your tendencies



Boundaries



The tree said, "No,
it's time we set
some boundaries."

And the tree was
happy.



Check your stories

Here is the actual situation

- What story am I telling myself?
 - Is this true?

Is there evidence of the opposite?

Real but not true

The feelings are very real

The reality is often not true

- Negative confirmation bias
- Relationship and past bias
- The way we frame a situation

You have to give your first departmental research in progress presentation. Your PI has told you what part of the project you should discuss but has not given any additional guidance. You've asked to go over your presentation. She asked you to email it to her and you have not heard anything back. The presentation is in 2 days. You know she is busy and you mention the presentation in her presence a few times but she has not set a time to go over the ppt.

How you describe it to your fellow grad student....

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Where is the potential
Negative confirmation bias
Relationship and past bias
The way we frame a situation

Kindest alternative

You ask the lab manager to help you with a procedure you have never done before. He gives a heavy sigh and says “can we do it later?”

After your presentation, your PI walks out of the room without saying anything.

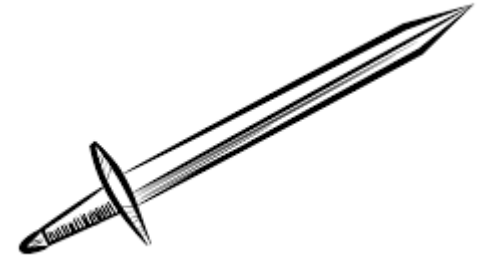
At lab meeting your PI is on his phone the majority of the time you are talking.

Your pathologist collaborator said they would pull the slides for your project and for the second time they have forgotten.

How can you take more agency?

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Favors vs expectations



It is 7:00 pm and the rest of the lab has left for the day.
You are putting reagents away...again.

How to prepare for a conversation

1. What is the problem? Be clear what you want to talk about.
2. Kindest possible reason for their behavior.
3. What do you want, what don't you want.
4. Can you anticipate feelings you might have and recognize it before it builds?

As the conversation starter

Time and place

Think about your conditions and is this a good time for feedback? What do you need to do to empty your cup a little bit.

Work to get the recipient in control

If you think it might be triggering: Are you in a good headspace to talk about a problem, discuss a complaint, receive some feedback?

When you have a specific thing that needs to be discussed: Can we talk about a timeline for my manuscript?

As the conversation progresses

Be curious “Tell me more”

Take control of the asking and pace of information “The story I am telling myself”

Pause

Name the triggered emotion in your head and give it a minute to subside

Real versus true

How to ask for something

Bring them into your world

Be future facing

Changing habits

In the midst of the stress is not the best time

When stress is low, great time to make an agreement for the future

“I see how busy you are and I don’t want to add to your problems. I do want to take ownership for moving it along and I know that’s my responsibility. When I give you the next draft, what’s the best way to keep it on your radar without being irritating?”

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