

## The Art of Mentoring Students with Japanese Principles

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Harden proposed that a good teacher has 12 structured roles to perform in an academic set-up (Crosby and Harden, 2000). One of the most challenging roles is being a mentor. Often in a professional school/college/university, when mentees look up to their mentors for solutions to their curricular and life problems, the mentors are also perplexed on how to guide the dispirited mentees.

In the reflective practitioner model, the mentor plays a role as a critical friend and co-enquirer. The mentor can practice some of the time-tested Japanese principles (Smith, 2023) himself/herself, while guiding the mentees to practicing these principles. The principles are not only for achieving academic excellence but also accomplishing a holistic transformation in life.

### **IKIGAI - FINDING THE PURPOSE**

Mentors need to ask their mentees why they have chosen this study program. By choice or based on the aspirations of their parents? Is there a purpose or a sense of fulfilment? Is there a sync between passion and choice of profession? Did they find any single 'wow' or 'eureka' moment after joining the program viz while attending a teaching-learning (T/L) session, first experience with a cadaver at the anatomy hall, or during their first hospital/field visit? If the mentees can find their purpose, then it is easy to mentor them. People who realize ikigai only can maximize their success.

### **KAIZEN - CONTINUOUS QUALITY IMPROVEMENT**

Burnout during studies because of intensive curriculum or extensive T/L activities is common in students who pursue professional degrees. Mentors can teach mentees to derive small achievable goals. This paves way for continuous improvement without burn out. Breaking down an overwhelming task to small pieces is possible with proper time management and systematic approach to studies. The immediate goal may be set to achieve a targeted score in a continuous assessment or learn a required clinical skill while a longtime goal is to secure a good score/distinction in the professional exam. Feedback and self-reflection are important in continuous improvement.

### **POMODORO TECHNIQUE -RHYTHM OF WORK-LIFE BALANCE**

This technique is based on dividing work into focused time intervals of 25 minutes and taking short breaks in between. But some students get stuck in the time durations and feel difficult to adopt this technique. A simple solution that the mentors can suggest is a modified pomodoro technique where the mentee sets his own time interval of focussed work and break time. A customized 'Pomodoros' may work as the attention span is variable among individuals. The idea is to promote a balance between

work and rest. Quite a few students get blanked out or confused about the answers at the exam hall owing to stress and lack of sleep. Pomodoros, if well practiced, increases productivity and reduces anxiety before exams. The breaks between study schedules can be used to do some favourite activity like workout, listening to music, watching a favourite TV program, a short stroll, eating your favourite dish, etc.

## **KANBAN - VISUAL MANAGEMENT TECHNIQUE**

Mentors need to introduce their mentees to effective time-management and organizational strategies. Mentees can be encouraged to use tools such as calendars, post-it slips, to-do lists, and study schedules to prioritize tasks, track their progress, and stay on top of deadlines. Visual learning by creating flow charts and mind maps that can be prominently displayed on worktables or walls can be useful to recollect and retain the concepts learnt.

## **WABI-SABI - FINDING BEAUTY IN IMPERFECTION**

Mentors need to help their mentees to embrace the process of learning, including its challenges and setbacks. Encouraging them to view failures as opportunities for growth and refinement, Mentees should be made to understand that giving and receiving feedback is the best way to bridge gaps of imperfection. Mentors need to understand that each mentee is unique with different learning styles, adaptability, and problem-solving skills and that only such imperfections make them authentic. Learning from failures is the key to wabi-sabi. A medical graduate who is average in theoretical knowledge may turn out to be outstanding with his clinical or practical skills in the later years. Accepting one's imperfection and working steadily to reach the target is the key to success.

## **WA – HARMONY IN COLLABORATION**

Mentees of the same mentor could be encouraged to collaborate with one another or with other members of the batch to make a 'study group'. Mentors can foster pairing or form collaborative grouping among the high achievers and students needing additional curricular support (SNACS). This facilitates peer assisted learning. It is a win-win situation for both; high achievers mature into holistic individuals by improving their teamwork, confidence, and professional skills while SNACS get the required academic and emotional support from their peers. Peer-teaching and learning is an effective tool as it increases metacognitive processing and motivation to learn.

By incorporating these Japanese methods into the mentoring approach, mentors can empower their mentees to excel academically, cultivate a deep passion to study, and develop the skills and mindset needed to become compassionate and competent healthcare professionals.

## **REFERENCES**

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