Hello, Mentors, and welcome to the first training module for mentors in the Jerry Holmes Leadership Program. I’m Kim Wolfinbarger, director of the program. A lot of you have had questions about working with your mentees. I hope our new series will help you address some of your challenges and give you some new strategies for mentoring effectively.

Today we’re going to start with a bit of neuroscience. Then we’re going to discuss the three Rs of mentoring: relationship, respect, and restraint. We’ll introduce a model of mentorship that will be new to most of you—the CATSU model—and we’re going to talk about the first element of that model, Coaching.

If you’d like a transcript of the audio for this module, you can download it from the link at the end of the slide deck, or from the Mentors section of the JHLP web page. [INSERT LINKS HERE TOO]

Before we go further, I want to give credit to Ann Betz who runs a program called BeAbove Leadership. She is the originator of the Three Rs concept and the CATSU model.

Many of you know that getting started, especially with a new mentee, can be a little bit rough. Before you can really get started working with your mentee, they have to be ready. They have to be ready to receive what you have to say, and they have to be ready to take charge of their own leadership development. In other words, their brains have to be activated so that they’re in an optimal state for engagement.

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**Activating the Brain**

Activating the brain is like wetting a sponge. If you try to wipe a counter with a dry sponge, it doesn’t work very well. But if you wet the sponge a bit, then it’s a much more effective cleaning tool. Similarly, when the brain is activated, then the mentee is going to have a positive emotional state and they’re going to think better. They’re going to be more open. And there are ways you can work with the student that will increase that early brain activation. So how do you do this?

**The Three Rs of Mentoring**

We start with the three Rs. The Three Rs of Mentoring are Relationship, Respect, and Restraint. We’re going to step through those. I want you to take minute and think about a time when somebody gave you advice and one or more of the Rs was missing. Either they didn’t have a relationship with you already, they didn’t respect you, or they didn’t exhibit any restraint. [Pause]. I’m guessing that most of you have some ideas there.

Let’s talk about the first R, relationships. So when you build a relationship with another person it takes time. You don’t build a relationship by sending one email or by saying “Hi” in the hall. It really is about connecting, knowing more about that person than just the immediate interaction that you’re having. Building a relationship can be a big challenge. Some of our mentors and students rush right in, talking about goals, trying to get something done really quickly. And they don’t spend time building that relationship. And so we’re going to talk here in a minute about things you can do to build that relationship before you ever really start mentoring because that is going to make the time you spend even more effective.

First, spend the first meeting just getting know each other. This might be counterintuitive for those of you who are more task-oriented, but give it a chance. Don’t worry about setting goals at this meeting. Don’t worry about ticking off any boxes or filling out forms. Just get to know the other person. We’ll talk more about this in a few minutes.

Next, have your first two meetings very close together. This will help you accelerate that relationship-building process. I suggest that you have that second meeting just one week after the first.

I also strongly recommend that you schedule a regular meeting time. Our pairs, whether they’re in person or long-distance, who have a regular meeting time, have richer relationships, stronger relationships, and much better results than those who don’t have a regular time set. For students, it’s way too easy if they don’t have a standing meeting with their mentor to put it off. And so often that will happen. The mentee gets busy, they don’t call, they don’t email, and then they feel guilty. And when they feel guilty, they don’t email and they don’t call. And then that makes them feel guiltier. And then at the end of the semester or sometimes even at the end of the year, I get a call from the mentor saying, my student and I didn’t really connect. What did I do wrong? And the truth is, it probably isn’t anything you did. It’s just that the relationship didn’t get started off on a strong footing.

If you want to build a strong relationship, meet frequently. Now the program requirement for our students, to meet their obligation as Holmes Leadership Associates, is four meetings per semester. But, you’re going to have better luck if you meet more often. I think you should strive to meet every two weeks. Over the years we’ve found that the best relationships are built when mentors and students meet every two weeks. And if you have that standing meeting, the nice thing is that if you have to cancel one, you’ve only got to wait two more weeks until the next one. One of the strongest pairs we’ve ever had, the student was here and the mentor was in Washington, DC. And they had a standing meeting every other Friday afternoon. And the thing is, when you have a frequent standing meeting, it doesn’t have to be an hour. When you’re meeting every two weeks, the meetings can be short. With this pair, sometimes it was just a quick check-in, 15 or 20 minutes. Sometimes the meeting would be 30 or 45 minutes, depending on what the student needed. And because they met so often, if they had to drop a meeting, it wasn’t a problem. So those are some things I would encourage you to do, to help you build that relationship, whether you are in the same town or not.

I also recommend that you have your meetings face-to-face. Build a relationship is much faster if you can see the other person. If you’re local, this is pretty easy. But if you’re mentoring long-distance, try to use Skype or FaceTime or some other type of video interaction. It may seem a little awkward at first but I think you’ll be happy with the results.

This is a good place for me talk to those of you who have mentees who do not live in the same town. You are not the only one. About half of our mentors do not live in the Oklahoma City metro area. And that means that they don’t get to see their mentees in person very often, if at all. Now, of this group, most of the pairs work really well together. But there are always some mentors who come back and tell me after a year, this doesn’t work. This mentoring thing just doesn’t work long distance. The funny thing is that our long-distance mentors often think that distance is the issue. But I have some of the same problems with students whose mentors are in town too. So it is not simply that you are not in the same town. Again, it’s usually because you’re not meeting often enough. So—two or three meetings at the start with only one week in between, and then after that schedule a regular meeting. If you’re working long distance it is more challenging. It does take longer to build a relationship than if you’re in town. But it’s not impossible.

So—once you have a good meeting schedule established, and you have some mechanism for face-to-face interaction, what can you do in the meetings that will create that activated state in the mentee’s brain?

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**The CATSU Model**

This is where the CATSU model comes in. Mentoring, as you already know, involves a number of different types of activities. CATSU, C-A-T-S-U, stands for Coaching, Advising, Teaching, Storytelling, and Undefined—the other things you might do that don’t fall under the other parts of the model. And the Coaching element is at the beginning because that’s really where you start as a mentor. Your first goal is to be a coach for this student And in fact one of the things that I always look for when we’re selecting mentors is people who have a heart for coaching and who have some good coaching abilities.

Remember that having an “activated state” in the brain means being ready to receive information and really being engaged. Coaching helps activate the brain so that the student is then ready for the other parts of the model, Advising, Teaching, Storytelling, and the rest. When you are coaching, you are not giving advice. Take a look at where it is in the model. You need to spend some time coaching before moving into advice-giving. And this is tough. But bear with me. **A really good rule of thumb is that you have at least two mentoring sessions with your student before you give them any advice.** Now what do you do in these early mentoring sessions if you’re not giving your mentee advice? This is where I want to encourage you to go back and look at your *Mentor’s Guide* book. And this is particularly important for those of you who have been mentoring a while and maybe haven’t opened your *Mentor’s Guide* lately. Chapter 4 of the *Mentor’s Guide* is all about preparing for the mentoring relationship, and it includes a lot of good material. You’re going to spend some time in those first few meetings investing and being interested in the mentee, in the broader context of their lives. And the mentee should similarly be getting to know you as well. Your first meeting, if it’s in person, you may be able to do this over lunch. If you’re meeting long-distance, try virtual coffee. It may sound funny, but here’s how it works. Right before the meeting time, you and your mentee, wherever you are, fix yourselves a cup or coffee or tea, and then start the videoconference. You may not actually be at a coffeeshop together, but simulating the environment will help both of you relax. At this meeting, just get know each other. What does the student do, what are they interested in, what do you do, what are you interested in, your family, whatever you want to talk about, when you’re getting to know another person. Now it would be OK in this meeting to also ask questions about what the mentee’s goals are and what they want to get out of this relationship, maybe why they joined the Jerry Holmes Leadership Program, but you’re not going to answer any advice questions yet. You’re not going to give any advice at this point. You’re just going to get to know the student.

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**Coaching**

The question then becomes, how are you activating the brain? Here’s something that you might not know. Without effort, the brain is going to give you about fifteen seconds of listening before it kicks into “what does this mean to me” mode. Once you start talking to somebody, people will listen to you for about fifteen seconds before they start figuring out how this applies. Some of you may have done that at the start of this mentoring module. Because that’s how they know that they need to keep listening. You can counter this, you can extend that length of time that somebody’s willing to listen if you ask probing questions. Because you are asking questions and then that person is going is to come back and respond. And you just kind of keep resetting the process. And because you’re asking questions, they’re going to go hey, they really do care what I’m going to say. But you have to resist the urge to respond with an answer. Your goal is not to respond. And boy, that’s a tough one. Your goal is to listen to what that person has to say. And, to ask curious and open-ended questions. You see on the slide deck that that’s part of the skillset, to ask curious and open-ended questions. By doing this, you’re helping the mentee develop some new connections in the brain. This is activating the process of neuroplasticity, the ability of the brain to change over time. It’s like cutting a path in the snow. We live in Oklahoma, we don’t have to break a lot of snow. But I suspect some of you have had to break snow before. And if you have to tromp through snow to make a path, that’s a lot of work initially. Houston people, if you haven’t had to break snow, then think about cutting a path through brush in the woods. Either way, once a path is broken, then you can walk on it. Activating new connections in the brain is like that. It requires some effort and some intentionality, effort on the part of you, effort on the part of the student to activate those connections. But once it’s done, people are ready to learn. Your mentee ready to learn and grow.

So what about the other two Rs, respect and restraint? We’re going to pick those up in a later module when we discuss the next element in the CATSU model, Advising.

So, again. Spend some time coaching before you give advice. A good rule of thumb is two sessions of coaching before you give advice. So, you might be asking, what do you do if mentee wants advice right away? Because this is not unusual. The college student has a mentor, they’re going to want to ask you some questions. You’ve got to bring them back up to the Coaching level. If the mentee wants advice right now, you can say this: “I think I can help you with this. But let me be sure this is really what you need.” And then go back to asking questions. And it’s OK for you to tell them, “I’m actually going to hold off on the advice-giving right now. I want to think about what we’ve had to say, I want you to think about some of the questions we’ve asked, and we’ll pick this up at a later meeting.” And then make a note. Make a note in your journal, encourage the student to make a note in their journal, so that you actually do come back and close the loop. But hold off on actually giving the advice. And then sit back and see what happens a few meetings from now.

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**Summary**

As we wrap up, keep these tips in mind. Schedule your first few meetings close together. Try to meet face-to-face, whether that’s in person or through videoconferencing. Set a regular meeting time, and meet frequently. And spend those first few meetings building the relationship. Ask probing questions, and hold off on the advice-giving.

That’s it for our first mentor training module. Thank you for listening. Have a great week!