# Mentoring Philosophy: Ragan Glover-Rijkse

In a journal entry, I once jotted a list of attributes that I valued most in my mentors. This list included such things as "provides safe environment for taking risks," "kind, but critical," "offers feedback," and "consistent." In a subsequent list, I wrote that, as a mentor, I wanted to "listen," "be there," and "offer positive yet critical feedback." The overlaps in these two assessments does not surprise me. I have had the fortune of having inspiring mentors, and I have tried to emulate them in both my professional and personal mentoring relationships. Nevertheless, what I have learned best from my mentors, and what I have been most successful at as a mentor, is both recognizing *and* valuing the mentee as a whole person--one who has a range of personal and professional needs. To accomplish this, I establish my mentoring relationships on knowing what the mentee seeks from our relationship, identifying their interests and potential, and understanding what mentoring approaches works best for them. This requires a degree of openness, on my part, with the recognition that no one-size-fits-all approach to mentoring exists. Although each mentoring relationship requires unique approaches, I try to come to each mentoring relationship with a flexible framework of strategies which can be applied, and adapted, for each mentoring relationship and as mentoring relationships naturally change over time. Specifically, this flexible framework includes active listening, strategic goal setting, transparency, and ongoing formative feedback. This flexible framework is also coupled with regular self-assessments, of my work as a mentor, to ensure that I am best meeting my mentee's needs.

Toward the goal of **active listening,** I employ an "inquiry-driven approach," which involves listening to the mentee and asking follow-up questions for additional understanding. While I recognize that my role, as a mentor, is to offer guidance, I cannot effectively do so without first understanding the mentee's position. Given this, I use active listening as an attempt to grasp the mentee's needs and perspective, so that I can provide informed guidance and collaborate with mentees toward **strategic goal setting**. The process of strategic goal setting involves identifying the mentee's personal goals, ideas, and concerns, while also recognizing their potential for growth. This emphasis on recognizing a mentee's potential results from the fact that, often, mentees are often too close to situations to see what they can accomplish, and they sometimes doubt their potential. As a mentor, I have the privilege of "zooming-out" to see the "big picture" and using this knowledge to encourage mentees to take safe risks. Part of encouraging safe risks, however, requires **transparency**, on my end, about what a mentee can realistically achieve and what the process is for achieving it. Emphasizing transparency is not meant to discourage mentees, but to support them in understanding the (sometimes difficult, messy, and nonlinear) processes involved in achieving goals; it also establishes a foundation of trust in our mentoring relationship. Nevertheless, I recognize the importance of encouragement in a mentoring relationship, and to offer encouragement, I scaffold larger goals, such that

mentees can achieve small wins and gain confidence along the way. To keep goals manageable, I offer **formative feedback** such that mentees know when they are achieving success and when they need to make adjustments to achieve success. In addition to being useful to the mentee, formative feedback is essential to maintaining the mentoring relationship over time.

Combined this framework to mentorship provides only a starting point. However, the true value of this framework stems from its flexibility and adaptability to each mentoring situation with the goal of meeting each mentee where they are, responding to their particular needs, and helping them to grow.