UNDERSTANDING SCENARIOS

Scenario A: Revealing Abstract
You have just spent the last month working intensively with your new graduate mentee. You have given her multiple papers to read and have had several discussions about your research. In addition, she has engaged in several different aspects of an ongoing project over the last month. She is hard-working, seems to understand the research your group does, and things seem to be going well. On Monday morning, she hands you a draft of the introduction section for a possible thesis project. After reading through the draft, you are forced to conclude that she does not understand the work your lab does at all.

Questions for small group:
1. What can you do to address this situation? How can you avoid this situation in the future?
2. Come up with at least three specific techniques for avoiding this situation.

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Scenario B: It Seemed So Clear When You Explained It
You have recently explained a complicated technique to your mentee. While you were explaining, he nodded the entire time as if he understood every word you were saying. When you were finished with your explanation, you asked him if he had any questions. He said no. Just to make sure, you asked him if everything was clear. He said yes. Three days later you asked the mentee how his work using this technique was going and he told you he hadn’t started, because he did not understand the technique.

Questions for small group:
1. What can you do in the future to make sure your mentee understands what you are saying?
2. Come up with at least three specific approaches for assessing your mentee’s understanding.

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Scenario C: It Just Didn’t Work
I have a really promising mentee, he’s doing well in all of his graduate courses and when we work through experiments together, he knows all the right techniques but he doesn’t seem to be able to get experiments to work right when he’s by himself. I’m trying to help him figure out what’s happening in his failed experiments, but our conversations all seem to go like this:
“So what happened with your reaction?”
“It didn’t work.”
“What happened?”
“Nothing. It just didn’t work.”
“What do you think went wrong?”
“I don’t know. But I tried it twice and it didn’t work either time.”
We’re both getting a little frustrated with the lack of progress, and I’ve noticed that he’s started spending less time in the lab.

Questions for small group:
1. Think with your colleagues about how to get things back onto the right track?
2. Come up with at least three specific approaches for dealing with this situation.