

Thoughts on Peer Mentoring: Helping Colleagues Get Published

Overview of Mentoring

Mentoring is a practice traditionally geared to socializing and assisting junior members of a field with the assistance and guidance of a senior member. Mentors are often assigned to newcomers to a company or institution to guide them in the organizational culture and to ease them into promotion and general acceptance. I would ask you to put that particular hierarchical perspective aside when working as a CASE Certification Program Mentor, learn to develop the mentoring relationship but more importantly know what is important to you.

Equality in Perspectives

We are not necessarily senior scholars guiding junior scholars; instead, we are peers who have more experience writing and publishing cases than those who are seeking our help. An assistant professor can mentor a full professor easily in this context, and an academic in her 30s can guide a more mature academic without any concern about age differentials. This is truly a corps of equals with varying levels of expertise and experience. Your generosity and willingness to help others is what will make this mentoring program work.

Developing a Mentoring Relationship

“Mentors and apprentices are partners in an ancient human dance, and one of teaching’s great rewards is the daily chance it gives us to get back on the dance floor. It is the dance of the spiraling generations, in which the old empower the young with their experience and the young empower the old with new life, reweaving the fabric of the human

community as they touch and turn.” Parker J. Palmer, *The Courage to Teach*, p. 25.

A mentoring relationship is an exercise in ballroom dancing, and it demands concentration from both dancing partners. They both must know the steps, or learn them together, because everyone's style is a little different and good dancers accommodate to the other's style. They must both learn to parry and thrust, to dance forward and backward in heels, as Ginger Rogers and Fred Astaire showed us. But it's not all Fred and Ginger. Sometimes, you're dancing with Gene Kelly. Gone is the elegance, the top hat,

the tails and shiny shoes. Now, we're talking athleticism, tight t-shirts, and muscles. Sometimes, it's Fred Astaire and Gene Kelly together. Close your eyes and what do you see? The better the dancer, the easier it is to adapt to a different partner, to sense the ebb and flow, both to follow and to lead.

A good mentor is like a good dancer, one who knows the steps and leads conscientiously and clearly. In social ballroom dance, men learn to lead and women learn to follow; the man sets the frame and guides the action, always dancing forward. The woman responds to the hand on her back and the angle of the frame, almost always moving backward. In sharp contrast, in competitive ballroom dance, as in show dancing, both partners learn to lead and both learn to follow. Skill level defines the person who takes each role, and except for the most formal of choreographed routines, the music and the dancers themselves determine who moves forward and who backward in a gender-neutral display of style and elegance.



MENTORS ARE:

- SOUNDING BOARDS
- SOURCES OF GUIDANCE

MENTORS ARE NOT:

- COPY EDITORS
- RUBBER STAMPS
- AVAILABLE 24/7/365

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Those of us who have been fortunate enough to have had one or more great mentors tend to be eager to pass that experience along to others. We are among the fortunate, among those who have learned from others and been guided by others in our careers, and we are also among the fortunate who have attracted others who believe we can help them in their career development. This transition from mentee to mentor, from recipient to donor, from dancing backward to dancing forward, is a rite of passage that is hard-won and which we are most grateful to have accomplished. And we are happy to pass it on to others.

Guidance to Peer Mentoring: Existing Literature

There is little (in fact, I found almost nothing) in the mentoring literature that describes the kind of relationship that our CASE program is promoting. I did identify one article that I strongly recommend you read, and it is from our own journal. The CASE Journal has published a series of articles about Professor Moore and his journey from new case writer through this final paper that focuses on mentoring other case writers. The series was written by a group of our Fellows and senior advisors (Barry Armandi, Herb Sherman, Gina Vega, Peggy Naumes, and Tom Leach). You can download the paper through your link to Emeraldinsight. This paper exemplifies the model(s) that we are suggesting for our mentors to apply.

- See Professor Moore: From Novice Case Writer to Mentor (Thomas C. Leach, University of New England, Herbert Sherman, Long Island University, Margaret J. Naumes, University of New Hampshire). *The CASE Journal*. Volume 9, Issue 1, Fall 2012
- I also recommend you read or reread *The Courage to Teach: Exploring the Inner*

Landscape of a Teacher's Life (Parker Palmer. San Francisco: Jossey-Bass. 1998). If you are seeking inspiration and could use a good burst of enthusiasm, Parker Palmer is your very best bet.

Some Personal Guidelines

I'm happy to share with you some of my own experiences and personal advice regarding mentoring. The first has to do with *developing relationships*. A mentoring relationship is a peer relationship, not a hierarchical one. You must put yourself on the same side of the table as your mentee, remembering what it was like when you were a new case writer.

- You had questions that you thought were “dumb.” Did someone answer them for you? Were they actually bad questions or did they simply reflect your ignorance at the time?
- The entire process of case writing seemed a bit daunting to you. How did you figure out how to break it down into manageable parts?
- Did you have someone available to you to give you encouragement and feedback?

A person being mentored often feels like he or she is in a subservient position. This is something that the mentor must work hard to combat. The mentor/mentee relationship is one based on honesty, respect, and trust. In that sort of environment, asking for help and/or advice seems like an easy thing to do, and for some people, it is. For many people, however, asking for guidance feels like an admission of helplessness, ignorance, or lack of ability. After all, everyone around you seems to be doing just fine figuring out things on their own – why should you need a guide or a translator? You do because you are more interested in being effective than in simply being thought

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knowledgeable in the absence of evidence to the contrary. Novelty itself signals a need for advice from someone more experienced. It is far more efficient to learn from someone else's mistakes than to make all of the mistakes yourself. Know when to ask for help and know when to offer it.

Shining Through Encouragement - A good mentor really stays far in the background and encourages the mentee to shine. And this mentor never NEVER takes credit for the mentee's work. This mentor lives by the philosophy sometimes credited to Mark Twain, "It is amazing how much you can accomplish when it doesn't matter who gets the credit." At the end of the day, neither the mentor nor the mentee can afford to be concerned about who gets the "credit" – there's plenty to go around – but the mentor should specifically steer the credit towards the mentee, not herself.

Mutuality - Parker Palmer says that mentoring is mutuality: In giving, you receive and in teaching, you learn. Mentors will find that their own case writing improves as they practice mentoring others. They will begin to hold themselves to a higher standard and, by stretching, will attain it.

Learn to let Go - Moving into the mentor role demands knowing when to offer assistance and when to back off. As a mentor, it can be hard to let go. When your mentees are ready to fledge, what do you do with the extra worms you have collected for them? Stepping back and waving good-bye is difficult; holding your tongue after you have shared your best advice requires a tremendous amount of self-control. But good mentors find that self-control. They warn their mentees of danger, they advise them of potential consequences of proposed actions, they encourage taking controlled chances, and they watch as their mentees step out on their own. They always welcome mentees back, but they don't suggest that you "need" them. You both,

mentor and mentee, know that you are needed and appreciated, and you both know that you have the power potentially to bore and exhaust one another, or excite and renew each other. I recommend the latter course.

The Mentor's Philosophy

You need a philosophy—wanting to help is not quite enough. Your first step is to determine what YOU think is important and what YOU think is valuable in case writing. Only then can you begin to help the mentee structure his/her thinking about this process.

Here is what's important to me:

I look for mutual agreement on "important and valuable"—this requires conversation. If you jump too quickly into a mentoring relationship, like any relationship, you will live to regret it. You will want to determine the willingness on the part of the mentee to pay attention and respond to your perspective. Non-response leads to a very poor mentoring relationship.

I look for reflective critique of my mentoring commentary. I am personally a direct person; I do not pull punches, I do not pretend that something is good when it is not, and I am always truthful in my opinion and evaluations. My mentees must be the same, as one-sided relationships rarely work in any sphere. You certainly don't have to agree with me, but let's talk about it.

I believe in mutual commitment. We must be able to count on one another. You can depend on me for several things: rapid response to your questions, thoughtful response to your concerns, and honest response to your submissions. What can you bring to the table as a mentee? Can you bring rapid turnaround, sincere attempts to improve your work,

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openness to critique, and willingness to discuss/debate/decide?

I can share the things I have learned over time about case writing, writing in general, editing, publishing, research, and teaching. I hope you can do the same. My ideas may help stimulate your ideas; as a mentee, your ideas should help to stimulate mine. This whole process depends on evaluative critique—mentoring is not therapy. If you are asking for advice, I will not ever say “mmm hmmm, that’s interesting...and how do you feel about that?”

And, as often as not, mentors seek out other mentors so they can continue to learn, to grow, and to return occasionally to the relative protection of dancing backward which, even wearing heels, is easier than dancing forward and setting the frame.

Mentors ARE:

- Sounding boards – The mentee provides the ideas and tests them out with the mentor.
- Sources of guidance – Mentors help mentees avoid traps and quicksand in the process of case writing and publication.

Mentors ARE NOT:

- Copy editors – Some people are unable to read anything without unconsciously editing it for grammar, spelling, and flow. This is not the job of the mentor, although some will do it this naturally.
- Rubber stamps – Some mentee ideas will appeal to the Mentor, some will not. Understand and accept this reality.
- Available 24/7/365 – Mentors also have careers and many demands on their time, mentoring being only one.