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Mentoring Junior Faculty in Geropsychology: the RESPECT model

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Abstract

Mentoring junior faculty in geropsychology is becoming more critical due to the paucity of geropsychologists and the financial and talent costs experienced by universities of faculty turnover. This paper presents the unique aspects of mentoring junior faculty as opposed to mentoring of graduate students or interns, and examines some of the author's personal core values in mentoring that have been applied to over 50 junior faculty members. The author presents the RESPECT model as a way to view the important and varied tasks involved in successful mentoring of junior geropsychology faculty. The model identifies the mentee as the leader in the mentee-mentor faculty relationship and examines the types of empowerment, support, protection and planning that goes into mentoring. The model, in addition, discusses the personal and emotional relationship the mentee-mentor has and the role of mentor in handling disappointment and assisting the mentee in negotiating conflict.

Mentoring junior faculty in geropsychology is very important from the perspective of the junior faculty member, the university at which he or she studies and the field in general. It has been well documented that there are far too few professional geropsychologists, and thus one of the critical roles of geropsychology faculty will be not only to train new geropsychologists, but also to bring some of geropsychology into the training of all professional psychologists (e.g. clinical, counseling). This article draws heavily upon my own experiences, and dovetails with some of the literature on mentoring in the field. I was trained as a geropsychologist in graduate school and internship, and then completed a post doctoral fellowship in geriatric neuropsychologist. Professionally, I worked first in academic medicine positions in psychogeriatric long term care, medical rehabilitation and outpatient geriatric evaluation before becoming an administrator/researcher as Director of the Institute of Gerontology where I have been full time since 1998. During my entire career I have been responsible for hiring and mentoring junior faculty, and since my time at the Institute of Gerontology I have served as the co-director and lead for the Wayne State University site (James Jackson at the University of Michigan is the overall PI) for the National Institute on Aging Research Center for Minority Aging Research, a program designed to provide pilot funding and mentoring to junior minority faculty. Overall, I have had a mentoring role in the careers of nearly 50 junior faculty. This paper will (1) explore models of mentoring, (2) explore why junior faculty mentoring is so critical to faculty and universities in today's world, (3) examine core values that our minority aging center mentoring program and my own individual mentoring has adhered to and (4) introduce a model I developed, the RESPECT model of mentoring.

Mentoring has typically focused on the graduate trainee—faculty mentor relationships (Welch, 1997), and there are general principles from this work that are relevant to faculty

mentoring. Mentoring is viewed as having two principal function; career and psychosocial (Johnson, 2002; Welch, 1997). Career functions include sponsorship, exposure, visibility, protection, direction and the transmission of professional ethics, while psychosocial functions include role modeling, identity, acceptance, confirmation, and counseling. Two important underlying issues in mentoring include reciprocity and development. From the outset it should be understood that mentoring is a reciprocal process. Mentors often receive a great deal from the mentoring relationship including new knowledge, career satisfaction and re-energizing. At the same time it is important to note that mentoring is not static; either for mentor or mentee. Using a developmental model of mentoring allows for a continued productive relationship as the mentee experiences professional growth and career development. Finally, mentoring can be both individual and network mentoring (Welch, 1997). A number of mentors can be associated with the growth and development of a faculty member. Lee, Dennis and Campbell (2007) focused on the personal characteristics of successful mentors as viewed by their mentees after receiving over 70 nominations of mentors for a national award. Enthusiasm, sensitivity, "mentor for life" in addition to professional expertise were some of the characteristics they highlighted.

Importance of mentoring for junior faculty

The transition from being a graduate student and intern to being a junior faculty member can be intense. Not only are there new responsibilities, but there is also a shift in one's identity and the types of demands. The shift from being a student to being an independent researcher and in many cases also an independent clinician is a major change. Along with these new responsibilities comes multiple demands from the university (e.g. committees, advising in addition to teaching and research) and the need to multi-task becomes paramount. The skills of multi-tasking, time management, deciding what assignments to accept and which to say no to may all be novel experiences. The junior faculty member also encounters new types of professional relationships. A full professor with 30 years experience is now one's peer and not one's professor. I have found that many junior faculty I mentor begin to compare themselves to those with much more experience and time in the field, and find themselves wanting or lacking. With these new professional relationships often comes the need to find new and effective ways of handling and resolving conflict. Understanding organizations and the culture, politics and structure of a department and college can be necessary in order to avoid major mistakes. Along with this new belonging to a university department or unit come university and departmental policies; knowing what they are and how they impact junior faculty is an important task. Finally, getting a clear understanding of the tenure expectations within a given department or unit is critical. There often is a lack of clear advice to mentees. My experience has been predominantly in mentoring faculty within a Research I university and therefore my advice below is not always directly translatable to other types of colleges and universities. I communicate to mentees that the basics of any tenure track position are the establishment of the faculty member's independent program of research as demonstrated by a publications (two-thirds to three-quarters of which the faculty member is a first author) and a record of some sponsored research (or at the very least the potential for future finding), the establishment of some national reputation through service work and organizational involvement. At less research intensive universities the essential elements may be dynamic teaching and some active research progress; particularly if it also involves undergraduate or graduate students.

Mentors, in many cases, serve a dual role as mentor and evaluator. Not only will mentors be involved in annual reviews, but also often in tenure recommendations themselves. While this can cause significant anxiety for mentee and mentor alike, it should not cause mentors to be aloof or overly formal. Instead, it is important that the mentor is giving the mentee who is struggling to meet expectations more feedback, and engage the mentee in more problem

solving regarding the lack of progress. In my experience, the junior faculty member who is not meeting the tenure expectations is not at a point in their career where a faculty position at a Research I university fits. Giving a mentee realistic advice about what deficits are clear in their record, along with actively encouraging them to explore their true desires and comfort level can assist in mentees beginning to seek other opportunities. Some situations are not clear cut. In all cases, it is important that the mentee is receiving feedback about their progress from multiple senior faculty.

Mentoring is important to universities as well, and perhaps more so in today's tight economy. Reducing unnecessary turnover is both cost efficient and of great importance to universities, as it is with all organizations. A few of the disruptions caused by losing tenure track faculty include brain drain (positions not being filled due to some departmental freezes or reduction in hiring), loss of real dollars due to significant investment in start-up labs and equipment that may no longer be used, and the loss of geropsychology expertise which might leave the department with graduate students without a suitable mentor to replace the departed faculty member. There are other important reasons for universities to value mentoring apart from turnover. Mentoring programs can enhance a sense of community, a feeling of belonging which is important to all faculty. Mentoring can be a vehicle for junior faculty from across different disciplines to meet each other, which can greatly aid attempts to enhance interdisciplinary research. Mentoring also enables universities to offer significant roles to senior faculty since mentoring can be very energizing for senior faculty to engage in.

Core Values in Mentoring

In establishing my own ideas about mentoring I was influenced by a book about organizations titled *Built to Last* (Porras & Collins, 1994). This book examined what made certain organizations special and their success long lasting. One of the discoveries they made was that while the content of a certain business (e.g. change in products) might change, one thing that remained constant was the businesses core values. Core values are those highly treasured ideas that guide decision making and define the culture of an organization. Below is my application of Porras and Collins' principles to mentoring junior faculty.

High quality science is Critical

The focus is always on the quality of the science, and on the junior investigator as being the leader of the research. Mentoring of faculty is a very distinct process from the mentoring that occurs with students. My expectation is that the mentees, junior faculty, are independent, skilled, reliable and capable researchers. The success of any mentoring that I offer is incumbent on the presence of a dedicated and trained professional who voluntarily enters the role of mentee. It is my explicit expectation that the faculty member is interested in achieving the highest distinction possible in their scientific inquiry, and that this is his or her primary reason for wanting to be a mentee.

The mentee is the leader in the mentor-mentee relationship

That the mentee owns his or her career and career direction is an important core value to be explicit about. In our minority aging center mentees described circumstances in which their department chairs and senior colleagues often dismissed their research ideas as trivial, unimportant or undoable. Examples from our minority center included studies on homeless elders, the use of pharmacists in identifying mental health disturbances, self-management of arthritis, the study of participant participation in research, and the use of literacy techniques to improve treatment adherence. By both supporting the researcher's focus of study, and then insisting on detailed scrutiny of the science of that study, investigators' ideas were received

with enthusiasm, and tools were given to improve the science of the project. Junior faculty should be encouraged to pursue research areas and questions that truly ignite their passions, whether it fits with what the majority of the department does or not.

Mentoring networks, or mentoring teams work best

Research development and career development often require different types of mentoring. For any one Senior faculty member to perform all of the roles of mentoring would greatly limit the ability to mentor more than a few junior investigators. Systems of mentoring make use of many faculty with specific expertise. In our minority aging program for example, while we identified a primary mentor for each junior faculty member, a team approach to mentoring lay behind much of the mentee satisfaction with our program. Assistance with recruitment and retention issues, methodological, measurement and statistical issues, manuscript preparation, grant writing, and formulating coherent programs of research are all significant issues for junior faculty. In our program the junior faculty member receives feedback in these areas from different people depending on their research design, and their level of expertise in the areas mentioned above. Using mentoring teams has an added benefit. Both junior and senior faculty begin to feel closely aligned with the mentoring group, and, this often leads to mentees experiencing a strong sense of belonging to a group of like-minded individuals.

Developmental Issues are important—mentees represent the next generation of mentors

The explicit value I adopted is that as their own development evolved, current mentees would become excellent mentors. By having the mentee as the center and the leader of any mentoring relationship the values of mentoring are passed on, and mentees are likely to become mentors as their own career develops. Mentoring, I would argue, is an important career development skill for any faculty, and by the time they are tenured, faculty are ready to become mentors to new junior faculty.

The RESPECT model of mentoring

The RESPECT model is simply a mnemonic that helps me to put into words my own philosophy of what mentoring junior faculty should consist of.

R: Role Model

An outstanding Geropsychology mentor should be passionate about older adults and the profession of Geropsychology. Professionals need to keep a curiosity and enthusiasm about the work they do, and this needs to be learned early in one's career. Enthusiasm and enjoyment of one's work is an under-emphasized aspect of geropsychology. My first and most long lasting mentor in the profession of psychology is Dr. Jeff Barth, the Chief of Neuropsychology and holder of an endowed chair at the University of Virginia. Jeff, who supervised me for my post doctoral fellowship and hired me for my first job, had a rule that he didn't work on projects that he did not think were going to be fun! I've adopted that rule for my own program of research and encouraged mentees to show their own enthusiasm for the work they do. Demonstrating consistency is another important aspect of being a role model. Professional excellence, unlike the rhythms of graduate school where intense work may be alternated with significant breaks, requires a steady effort, day in and day out. Finally, as a role model, a mentor must be willing to invest in a personal relationship. A mentor actively inquiring about their mentee's personal life and goals, and sharing some of their own life goes a long way to meeting the psychosocial aspects of mentoring. Mentoring involves more than advising, it involves an active and intentional personal connection.

Personal Reflection

I often think about the messages I am conveying to mentees. I share my professional disappointments when I am also ready to engage in constructive problem solving. I show my jubilation at success and my passion for older adults. Finally, I try to be very consistent in being present at work and in the moments with mentees each and every day.

E: Empowerment and Expertise

As discussed in the above section about core values, empowering mentees to become the leaders and chief decision makers in their own program of research is one key aspect of mentoring. I have found mentees often wondering whether their research interests are good enough or the “right ones”. My reply is that whatever you are willing to work on thoroughly and do well is good enough and the right program of research for you. Empowerment also means learning how to say no, and to avoid attempts by other faculty to off load their service or committee work onto the junior person. Too often, junior faculty has the mistaken impression that they cannot say no to a more senior person in their department until after tenure is acquired. I encourage junior faculty to begin learning negotiation and conflict resolution from the beginning of their career. Conflict resolution is a skill to be learned early in one's career and not to be put off until later.

A mentor should bring a significant amount of expertise in the area of geropsychology. One aspect of excellent mentoring is providing expert input into the research and teaching of a mentee. One of the biggest gifts that mentors can give their mentees, ties directly to the first core value mentioned excellence in science. The research process is a long and difficult one, and learning to incorporate expert critique is a necessary skill. Most talented professionals have considerable anxiety when their work is dissected and picked apart, and often, in academia, those performing the critiques pay little to no attention to the tone of their critique. A mentor needs to be attentive to providing in depth critiques and to the tone of his or her critique. Research is typically a twisting, challenging process in which unexpected problems with data, analyses, and write-up come into play. Content expertise and expertise in the process of finishing projects and getting manuscripts completed and submitted are key skills a mentor can assist with.

Personal Reflection

I am aware of and am often self-critical about my less than adequate skills in many areas of research such as statistics, research design, and sampling. I am aware of my own strengths as well; knowing older people, and seeing how different aspects of aging fit together. Another strength is recognizing the need to empower junior faculty and not be afraid of sharing my enthusiasm for their ideas and their career.

S: Support

Support comes in many forms to mentees and is very important to mentee's sense of efficacy as a faculty member. Encouragement, particularly in the face of negative reviews, rejections of manuscripts and/or grant proposals is one important aspect of support. Timely feedback, not being a hold up to the mentee's work proceeding is another aspect of support. Celebrating successes is an important activity to teach and share with mentees. Perhaps most important, is demonstrating how mentees can learn from disappointments, and find and utilize good constructive criticism. The field of academia involves repeated experiences of being critiqued and being presented with negative reactions to one's work. Helping mentees to overcome their personal reactions of hurt and anger about this aspect of the profession, and instead to be able to utilize constructive criticism is a key trait for a successful faculty member. Consistent with this is the importance of mentors giving direct and critical

feedback to mentees about their work in a way that enhances the work while not demeaning or diminishing the spirit of the mentee.

The term support also conjures up images of personal connections and relationships between mentor and mentee. As mentioned briefly in the role model section above, successful mentors reach beyond the professional life of their mentees and reach out to the personal aspects of life for mentees. I routinely ask mentees what their personal plans are for relaxation, fun and nurturance for their relationships. Many have commented that this was the single most impacting part of my mentoring; my encouragement for them to learn how to be whole people and not simply on the tenure track treadmill. Not shying away from listening to mentees' personal crises such as illness, loss of loved ones etc. is also an impacting aspect of support.

Personal Reflection

Support ranges from giving direct and difficult feedback about such things as the quality of a mentee's work, or their lack of effort or responsiveness (i.e. the proverbial kick in the pants), to embracing a mentee to help comfort them in time of professional or personal trouble.

P: Protection and Planning

I have had a long standing interest and gained some expertise in organizational development and leadership. I use this knowledge very explicitly in the protection and planning aspects of mentoring with junior faculty. Bowman and Deal (2008) examine organizations through four frameworks-- structural, human resource, political and symbolic/cultural. Viewing oneself as part of a larger organization is one of the transitions to a faculty appointment. Junior faculty members are often dismayed to discover that departments or other academic units are fraught with the problems of many other organizations. "This department is so political" or "faculty members have factions and I don't know which side to choose are common refrains I hear from junior faculty. Using the four frameworks, I explicitly discuss the structure of the mentees department/college, the human resource views of those units (how prescriptive is the department chair and/or Dean's office), as well as examine the political aspects of life in a department. Political frameworks focus on power, coalitions that emerge to gain power, and these coalitions often adopt a win-lose mind set. Finally, the culture of a department, college and university is important. One of the strengths of Wayne State University where I have been on the faculty for 20 years has been the widespread collegiality among faculty members and a genuine desire to see others succeed. This collegiality, however, is routinely challenged during times of scarce resources; the exact conditions that lead to increased political aspects of an organization. I try to insure that junior faculty looks for solutions that will work long term, and learn a win-win negotiating strategy (see Covey, 1989).

I urge junior faculty to develop their own strategic plan for the tenure years. I often suggest that mentees read the *7 Habits of Highly Successful People* (Covey, 1989) which emphasizes skills such as knowing what one's end goal should be, learning how to listen to others first before making one's own views known, and adopting a win-win negotiation strategy. One of the key tasks for junior faculty is to create their own program of research. In geropsychology successful junior scholars are invited to be a part of many projects since their talents are recognized. As a junior faculty member this may not be the best strategy, since these roles are often a part of someone else's program of research. Having a plan that delineates how important one's own independent program of research is can be helpful to junior faculty in negotiating what projects to take on and which to avoid. A mentor's protection here is to advise the mentee to say no to most other projects if they involve significant time but do not lead to the growth of the mentee's own program of research.

Mentors should be careful about the extent to which they co-author articles with their junior faculty mentees. During the tenure period, it is critical that the junior faculty member develop their own program of research. Tenure review committee members often are concerned if a junior faculty member's research publications are almost all with a mentor. They tend to credit the senior mentor with more of the work than the junior faculty member. Thus, mentors cannot allow themselves to be involved in every aspect of the mentees research and publications.

Personal reflection

Recognizing when mentees are not seeing the organizational signs and symptoms of trouble is something I work hard at as a mentor. I have spent considerable time learning about leadership and organizational functioning and try to apply this to a mentee's situation. My bias is that junior faculty needs to be protected from too much committee work or other energy draining assignments. I also believe in the utility of unit level and individual level strategic plans that list objectives in easily measured terms. The biggest mistake people make about strategic plans is to treat them as contracts, instead of the guides they are supposed to be.

E: Emotional Relationship

The fundamental difference between advising and mentoring is the willingness to engage in a meaningful emotional relationship. Advising is very valuable and can assist junior faculty tremendously, but it is different from mentoring. Mentoring implies an ongoing, developing relationship, which necessarily means that there is real emotional investment and connection. In practical terms, mentoring involves helping mentees elucidate not only their professional goals, but also their personal ones. Trying to find the balance between personal and professional goals is an especially intense experience for junior faculty. Mentors need to spend the time to help mentees sift through this perpetual tension between work productivity and personal growth and fulfillment. Mentors also need to be available emotionally when difficulties or even positive transitions such as becoming a new parent happen in faculty members' lives.

Personal reflection

I was widowed at age 25 and this experience, although brutal, left me with an appreciation of the full personal life that my wife of 3 years and I had. It also left me with keen desire for my mentees to find fulfillment and happiness in their relationships and lives. My own healing led me to find a second "once in a lifetime" spouse, a colleague, Susan MacNeill, with whom I have shared professional and personal happiness.

C: Connections and Conflict Resolution

One important way of enhancing the career of a mentee is to introduce him or her to other colleagues. This can occur on local campuses and at national and regional meetings. It becomes an important aspect of assisting mentees. Establishing a national reputation is often one of the expectations for tenure. This can be accomplished both through meeting and sharing one's work with colleagues nationally, and through becoming involved in professional organizations, committee work and service to the profession. Breaking into the organization(s) may not be easy for a mentee unless the mentor specifically arranges for it to happen. I have often been amazed that through my experience of being involved in national organizations and at an institution for two decades that I can identify key colleagues for mentees to know and provide effective introductions that lead to tangible results. Being a "match maker" in this way saves mentees considerable time and frustration. As our world

becomes busier all the time, an established relationship can be key to getting a response from a faculty member across campus.

Conflict resolution, which I mentioned briefly before, is a key skill for junior faculty to be adept at. Training in conflict negotiation can be found in classic texts such as *Getting to Yes* or in more modern books such as *7 Habits of Highly Effective People*. These sources teach people to separate the person from the problem, focus on interests or outcomes versus positions, use brainstorming in determining possible choices, and to monitor choices made by some measurable standard. A key to success with these techniques is to learn to minimize “position bargaining”. In position bargaining faculty engaged in the conflict seek to “convince” the other side that their own position is correct. Taking the focus away from personal conflicts and from positions stated and refocusing the discussion on goals or interests of the faculty members can be extremely effective in resolving conflict. A critical component to conflict resolution is the agreement to monitor and measure the success, or lack of success. An agreed upon set of outcomes should be designated along with the plan. Mentors may be in a good position to model conflict resolution skills that strengthen the junior faculty member's position within the department or unit.

Personal reflection

Junior faculty may instinctively act in ways similar to a friendship or family situation (i.e. getting overtly angry, holding grudges), and yet this may be some of the most damaging behaviors in a faculty situation and some of the more difficult to undue. Introducing junior faculty to their new roles as professionals, within a professional organization can be hugely important to the productive career of a mentee.

T: Two Way Relationship

We should all recognize, including mentees that mentors gain an incredible amount from a productive mentoring relationship. Expertise in a new or related area is one way that mentors gain. Mentees may be closer to and more aware of the latest trends and developments and thus enhance the mentor's skill set. The enthusiasm that junior faculty who are devoted to their craft bring contagious. Mentors often gain inspiration and energy from the mentoring relationship. Mentors gains in their own identity in the profession should not be under-emphasized either. As mentors become senior and their mentees begin to make more contributions to the field, there is deep satisfaction of one's own contributions to the profession. For me, for example, many of the faculty I mentored have made significant contributions to geropsychology, not only in their research, teaching and practice with patients, but also in their dedication to their peers and several of them have become outstanding administrators as well.

Concluding remarks

One of my favorite powerpoint slides was choreographed by my own mentor Jeff Barth. It is a photo of Jeff and me on my back patio of the house I had just bought. Jeff said, “hey, take a picture of us with you putting me in a headlock.” We did and it came out great. I converted the picture into a powerpoint slide and use this slide often, and especially when I present on mentoring to reinforce the idea that with mentoring junior faculty, the mentee is in charge and the mentee runs the show. The mentor needs to be responsive to the mentee's requests, demands and expectations, but is not responsible for creating the spark and interest in the mentee. The RESPECT model highlights my own ways of mentoring and my own approach and expectations about the mentoring process.

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