VIEWPOINT

Mentoring and Developing a Successful Trainee: A Reflection

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A new batch of residents, student pharmacists, and graduate students enter our institutions like clockwork. Their success is multifactorial but mentoring is essential. I have listened to trainees, and many are not really sure what a mentor does, what a good mentor is, or how to find one. I have read some books, articles, and websites about mentoring to get some sense of how I could help.¹⁻³ I then thought about my own experiences as a mentee. It is these experiences that I would like to share.

A few years ago one of my mentor's passed away. Dr. Priscilla Clarkson had a huge impact on me personally and professionally.^{4,5} To this day, it is still difficult not to type an e-mail to her to share news or ask for help. I think about what she did for her students. I am humbled when I think of how she mentored them, and it makes me feel like I am failing as a mentor and faculty member. After her passing, a few generations of her students found a list of things she would tell us to make us successful. I shared this [partial] list recently with our chapter of Phi Delta Chi when they asked me to talk about networking. I share it with you now so you may share with whomever it may benefit. I feel these rules work for trainees and faculty members.

Priscilla instilled in us that a successful trainee should be a self-motivated, independent, and reliable. We were trained to be single minded because our primary goal during training was to work toward being a scholar. This included keeping up with literature in our area and making all our classes as productive as possible in terms of our goal, which included finding ways to parlay a course paper or presentation toward some larger outcome like a review paper. She encouraged us to try everything once and get involved. Everything we did was an experience that could help us focus on our career goals. These experiences included being a research subject or a teaching assistant, doing an independent study, asking to speak at seminar or to write a review article, speaking in the local community, writing a grant we did not have to, reading a paper we did not want to, taking a class we knew was hard, and so on. We needed to be independent and not be afraid to pursue areas of interest.

She instilled in us what it meant to be professional. She told us there should be few distractions while in school but, make the fun times fun, make them count, and do not fritter away free time. She encouraged us to have an outlet because everyone should have a distraction that takes their minds off school for a few hours. She emphasized that when we get away for a while, we are more productive when we return. Of all things, she was demanding about deadlines. For example, there was one acceptable excuse (that I remember) for being late to class: being hit by a bus. In this case, you needed a note from the bus driver. As for deadlines, we were told to set them whether for a manuscript, research project, or homework assignment. We should have a set date for completing that project and stick to it. And most importantly, never ask for more time. Get it done! In order to this, we had to prioritize; that is, we had to know what needed to be attended to first and foremost, but still work on everything at once. Thus, time management was important. She encouraged us to take on as much responsibility as we could handle any given period of time and ensure we were always aware of our priorities. She added that we should never put anything needing to be done in a pile and forget it. As a corollary, she would warn us not to get sucked into helping others when we had our own deadlines to make. Finally, she helped us be good planners. Projects inevitably came up last minute, so her philosophy was the more organized our life was, the easier it would be to fit in such projects, and the fewer gray hairs we may develop!

Our ability to establish a good working environment was important to making our work fruitful and enjoyable. When we were at work, she expected us to be cheerful, helpful, and have a good attitude at all times. If it was a bad day, she encouraged us to go home because we would negatively influence someone else's day. We were taught to always think of the big picture and not be selfish. She made us fully aware that faculty members and students observed our behavior, attendance, and performance in every class, and we needed to be role models. Graduate school was hard and we needed the support of our peers. She made us believe that we were

representative of the school throughout the university, and we should take this responsibility seriously. Our school was well respected on campus and we wanted to help keep it that way. Our appearance and behavior were important! She mentored us to be grateful and humble. We know that we were given a spot in the school that someone else may have wanted. We were there to make the most of it. We were to be flexible, and we were not to get discouraged when things did not turn out the way we planned on the first take.

Finally, she had some advice on working with her. We should not get angry with her when she had to revise papers, proposals, or presentations a million times. Each time, she assured us, it would get better—"really!" The last piece of advice I will leave in her own words "My goal is to make you the best you can be. I can get really pushy about this, but it is you who will benefit. Sometimes I think that my primary job is nagging. Turning you into the scientist that you want to be often times means that I have to turn into the person that I don't want to be." She had expectations of us and made them clear. She knew what buttons to push and when to push them to motivate us. I wish I had a guide now to help me with the former aspect of mentoring.

The things I read on mentoring do not compare to the advice I got from her throughout my career. She put her students in position to be successful. She introduced us to the big names in the field. When we left, she volunteered us to review articles, give presentations, etc., and she trained us not to say "no, I am too busy" to any offer. I was only with her for two years as a master's student but her impact

on me was huge. A few months before her passing, I was in her office getting career advice. She was a mentor to the end and one of the reasons was because we kept the relationship alive. Many master's students did not. So if you are a trainee reading this, you will have to take responsibility for the relationship after you leave.

We all could use mentoring, regardless of what stage of our career we are in. I rely on many people and I am thankful for them all. I would not be here without them. As we all start mentoring relationships with new students and continue with our current ones, realize the impact you can have. I was fortunate to say "thank you" to Priscilla before she passed, but you may never get that thank you. It is ok, though. Your mentees really do appreciate the time and effort.

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