Mentoring and leadership in academia

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Impact beyond $H$- and $M$- indices
Mentoring is an ongoing [personal] relationship of learning, dialog and challenge
The word “Mentor” itself was inspired by the character of Mentor in Homer’s Odysseey ~ 800 BC (sequel to the *Iliad*).

Odysseus (King) left his son Telemachus and wife Penelope at the royal palace to fight the Trojan war.

Athena, disguised as Mentor, advised Telemachus to kick out a small army of suitors and go abroad to investigate the fate of his father.

*Goddess of wisdom, courage, inspiration, civilization, law and justice, just warfare, mathematics, strength, strategy, the arts, crafts, and skill.*
Leadership/Mentoring approaches

• Situational leadership
  – Leadership style adapted to maturity level and task/objective
    – S1: Telling
      • teaching/training
    – S2: Selling
      • Planning
    – S3: Participating
      • Executing
    – S4: Delegating
      • Reporting

• Three levels of leadership model

Photos from airforce
Situational leadership/mentoring
Suggested reading:

• What excellent mentors do: Matters of skill

• Traits of excellent mentors: Matters of style and personality

• Arranging the mentor-mentee relationship: Matters of beginning

• Knowing thyself as a mentor: Matters of integrity

• When things go wrong: Matters of restoration

• Welcoming change and saying goodbye: Matters of closure
Additional resource

- Student-mentor survey conducted among RSMAS graduate students earlier this year
  - ~ dozen specific question answered by 63 RSMAS graduate students
  - 41 open ended “what my advisor is doing well” comments
  - 31 open ended “what could my advisor improve on” comments
Select your mentees carefully

• Mentorships are (demanding) relationships
  – Know your limitations and don’t take too many chances

• Look for characteristics rather than specific background:
  – Communication skills, emotional stability, ambition, initiative, intelligence & loyalty

• If at all possible meet with prospect(s) in person
Be there

• Being there for someone speaks volume

• Effective mentors are accessible and approachable
  – Exposure and frequent interaction is key for success
  – Allows for modelling of professionalism

• The majority of our students lists weekly 1:1 meetings with their advisor as ideal
  – “My advisor has an open door policy, so anytime we need something advisor is willing to drop whatever advisor is doing to answer our questions.”
Know your mentees

• Professionally and personally
  – Frequent and high quality face-to-face interactions

• Student feedback:
  – “Advisor/Advisor has an ability to communicate with everyone in a positive, encouraging, and substantive manner that enables us, advisor’s students and post-docs, to improve our science. On a personal level, Advisor encourages a lab in which we not only participate actively in the science that our labmates do, but also makes it a point that we as a lab act like a family that supports one another.”
Expect excellence (but not perfection)

• Communicate expectations of excellence clearly
  – Expect more of mentees than they expect of themselves

• Model standards of excellence
  – Confidence, competence, professionalism

• Student feedback:
  – “Motivates and provides opportunities to succeed”
  – “Asking for a lot, so I am prepared for the tough job market”
  – “My advisor is very enthusiastic and pushes me to work but reminds me to be responsive if I feel overwhelmed”
Affirmation

• As individuals and professionals
  – Affirm as mentees progress

• Communicate faith and trust
  – Build confidence

• Encourage and support
  – Mentee ought to be assured acceptance even if failing

• Narrate growth and development
  – Be observant

• Use reinforcement rather than punishment
  – Punishment does not teach new skills

• Student feedback:
  – “Advisor encourage students and give students confidence”
  – “Poor people skills - uses fear and belittling to motivate...”
Affirmation at RSMAS?

Your advisor offers you positive encouragement overall

- Strongly agree: 40%
- Agree: 32%
- Neutral: 16%
- Disagree: 6%
- Strongly disagree: 6%
Provide sponsorship and promote visibility

• Provide your mentees reflective power by extension
  – Nominate for awards
  – Sponsor conference attendance

• High profile assignments
  – Progressively challenging
  – Assist with anxiety management

• Help find and open doors – give the inside scoop
  – What is required
  – How to approach
  – Who to know/rely on

• Student feedback:
## Sponsorship at RSMAS?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Does your advisor encourage and provide you funding to attend conferences?</th>
<th>N (%)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Encourages and provides</td>
<td>41 (67%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Encourages</td>
<td>9 (15%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Provides</td>
<td>7 (11%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Neither</td>
<td>4 (7%)</td>
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</tbody>
</table>
Be a teacher and a coach

• Provide direct and explicit instructions
  – Make recommendations, offer consultation and stimulate motivation

• Self disclosure can be a powerful teaching tool
  – Use personal stories of failure and success

• Include exposure to politics and organizational powers
  – Teach conflict management and behavioral norms
# Self disclosure – my mentees

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Current</th>
<th>Past</th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Total</td>
<td>Total</td>
<td>In academia</td>
<td>Other</td>
<td>Did not</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>(as professors)</td>
<td>professions</td>
<td>complete</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Postdoctoral fellows</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>4 (2)</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>PhD students</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>5 (3)</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Offer council in difficult times

• Our mentees are often in a stage of life characterized by stress, change and growing pains
  – Informal counseling
    • Be discrete and supportive
    • Help without parenting
    • Protect without smothering
  – Know your limitations and recommend professionals when needed
Protect when needed

- Needs to shield mentee(s) against inappropriate “attacks” may arise
  - Bureaucratic entanglements
  - Conflict with colleagues
  - Hostile criticism
  - Too challenging assignments
  - Mentee’s poor decision making

- Effective protection demands calm and measured assertiveness
  - Give honest feedback and confront mentee if/when needed.
Nurture creativity and provide correction

• Be flexible and affirming
  – Mentees have developing creative potential

• Model creativity
  – Question accepted standards
  – Show your excitement when faced with challenge

• Provide correction – show you care by confronting problems
  – Professional
  – Ethical
  – Work habits

• Follow correction with affirmation
Increasing friendship and mutuality – teach faceting

• Later phases of mentorship may involve increased reciprocity
  – Prepare the mentee as a colleague and future mentor

• Secure mentors allow themselves to see mentees as junior colleagues

• Teach faceting – work hard/play hard
  – People with breath cope better with adversity
  – Model non-workaholism
Be an intentional model – display dependability

- Invite mentees to participate in most dimensions of your professional life

- Deservedly or not, competent mentors become objects of admiration, idealization and respect.

- Display dependability
  - Stay true to agreements and commitments
  - Ensure reasonable turnaround time
  - Be emotionally consistent
  - Do not stop at “inspiration” – ideas are plentiful but nothing without execution.

- The most accomplished and successful professionals are most vulnerable to be unreliable as mentors

- Student feedback:
Student feedback

• “Fast turn around time on emails, manuscripts, and proposals”

• “Advisor is spread a bit too thin, advisor travels several times a month, periodically for several weeks at a time... advisor often does not reply to emails, advisor takes months to give feedback on proposals/publication drafts, etc.”

• “Advisor provides prompt feedback on my grant/fellowship applications”

• “Come on time at meetings, Reply faster to emails/questions/paper revisions”
Student feedback

What is average response time?

- >1 month
- 1 month
- 3 weeks
- 2 weeks
- 1 week
- <1 week

Current
Ideal
What is a mentor?