TITLE: Engaging the "Reluctant Mentee"

AUTHOR(S): Wells-Edwards, A., Evans, T., Munoz, L.

ABSTRACT 250 WORDS

At Everett Community College (EvCC), we have implemented a successful mentoring program for new Adjunct Faculty. In our fourth year of a five-year federal grant, we have valuable lessons to share. Our program pairs experienced faculty mentors with new Adjuncts in their first quarter at EvCC. Not every new faculty member is initially receptive to this mentoring opportunity, however.

In this session, we discuss current research on the essential mentor/mentee relationship and offer ideas for engaging the "reluctant mentee." Key to the success of a mentoring partnership is the full investment of both sides; because mentoring is sometimes a mandatory component of employment, the parties are not always equally invested at the start. Typical conversations around mentoring assume the eager participation of all involved, so this is an important discussion.

In our presentation, we explore the dynamics and paradigms around the basic mentor/mentee partnership and examine the causes of hesitation or resistance among mentees, as well as offering possible ideas for increased protégé engagement in the mentoring process. Factors preventing full commitment to the pairing vary but all revolve around "culture" of varying types.

Significantly, it is only through the full investment of both mentor and mentee that the maximum potential of the relationship can be reached, which is what makes this dialogue (and our session!) essential.

In addition to being UNM conference alums, we are fresh from hosting our own first annual mentoring conference at EvCC and are eager to share our depth of experience with UNM conference participants!

CONTENT

Most conversations around mentoring assume the willing and even eager participation of all parties, when in fact, there is sometimes resistance to the mentoring relationship. Particularly in mandatory mentoring pairing, we occasionally find initial hesitation. In our fourth year of a five-year federal grant, we have extensive experience in mentoring new adjunct faculty on the Everett Community College (EvCC) campus. Usually, our assigned mentees are keen to work with us and are appreciative of our attention. Sometimes, however, new faculty are not excited to embark on the mentoring experience that they are told they are expected to complete.

Much literature focuses on the essential skills of mentors but neglects the tools that mentees should bring to the partnership. The University of Washington has uniquely focused on the ideal characteristics of the engaged mentee: Asking Questions, Skill Practice, Listening Skills, Building Trust, Finding Your Comfort Zone, Resolving Differences, Making the Moment(s) Count (University of Washington Human Resources). Generally speaking, mentees should be encouraged to commit to the work of mentoring by evaluating their own skills and contributions in a conscientious way. By being responsible for their own engagement, mentees can ensure a more rewarding experience.

Beyond individual mentee effort, there are factors that detract from a successful partnership. We have discovered that many issues arise from a lack of choice and control in choosing a mentor or in fact whether to utilize a mentor. Our new adjunct faculty hires are assigned a mentor and told to work with him/her over the course of a quarter. While the new hires are paid for completing the course modules within the online academy we have established, they are also told that their continued employment requires this mentoring. According to Bell and Treleaven, "The benefits for mentees in being able to choose their own mentors are twofold. First, mentee choice reduces the likelihood of mismatches, and second, increases their agency thereby positioning them more comfortably in the relations of power that are inevitably present within organisations and thus in mentor-mentee pairs" (Bell & Treleaven, 2011).

A study at the University of Missouri (Straus, Chatur, & Taylor, 2009) revealed similar findings:

> All mentees expressed concern that assigned mentorship could have a negative impact on the mentor–mentee relationship. One mentee observed that 'the relationships that were most productive were those that were spontaneous and not due to a requirement.' Mentorship felt 'forced' to some mentees when they were assigned a mentor, and they felt that a 'forced relationship could lead to failure.' Mentor participants also felt that assigned mentorship could lead to 'an artificial or superficial' relationship.

Therefore, our EvCC program relationships potentially begin at a disadvantage when proteges are forced into pairings not of their own choosing. We deliberately assign mentors outside of a faculty member's own discipline. This is done not only to encourage cross-campus dialogue and to work against the silo effect – "the frequent and increasingly predictable accusation that institutions of higher education operate in 'silos' is based on the primarily *vertical* organization

of those institutions" (Keeling, Underhile, & Wall, 2007) - but also to combat feelings of "spying" within a department. However, this model is not always popular. According to one recent mentee, "It isn't helpful to have a mentor from another department. I want answers about *my* department...If it isn't possible to be assigned a mentor from within my department, then maybe we could have time with our dean" (Faculty Reflections, 2016). While this feedback isn't necessarily typical, this faculty member does not represent a lone voice.

Beyond this lack of control in mentor selection (and resulting lack of engagement), there are other factors that prevent mentees' full investment in the relationship. In a loose sense, "culture," widely defined, is responsible for the various factors that prevent engagement. Traditionally, some research has been done on the problems inherent in the mentoring relationship. According to Moberg and Velazquez, "a number of ethical questions have been raised about the mentoring process. One group of professionals offered the following indictments: "It's favoritism," "It's too time consuming," and "It's empire building" (Moberg & Velazquez, 2004). Mentoring is often seen as exclusionary, neglecting the unique priorities of women and people of color. The Moberg article observes, "Some scholars have noted that mentoring is typically a conservative process that reflects and reinforces the status quo in terms of power and conflict" (Moberg & Velazquez, 2004). Moberg continues, "Mistreatment reported by proteges includes tyrannical and manipulative behavior such as revenge, political sabotage, and harassment" (Moberg & Velazquez, 2004). Clearly, these are extreme examples, but issues like these point to a darker side to mentoring and do work to undermine an organization's mentoring efforts.

In consideration of these "cultural factors," one sort of culture involves teaching experience. If a seasoned instructor becomes a new hire at EvCC, he/she is still a new faculty member for our purposes. Not only do we want to be sure that new faculty have all the resources, contacts, and pedagogical tools they require, but we want to be sure that they understand our EvCC institutional culture. While we try to be sensitive to another professional's perceptions of expertise (and pride), there obviously remains an obstacle if individuals do not feel that they are at all in need of mentoring. Studies have shown that former proteges from a formal mentoring relationship tend to be paid more, be promoted more often, and are more positive about their careers than those who have never been mentored (Tonidandel, Avery, & Phillips, 2007). These facts, though, are often overlooked when new faculty do not wish to be mentored. The idea that seasoned faculty sometimes feel they do not require or have time for a mentor is a prominent hurdle to be faced.

Another cultural factor is age. Younger faculty may fail to see the benefit in investing time in training and acting as a mentee. If they are skeptical about the payoff in the mentoring work, they are likely to avoid engaging in the program. One new faculty member in business - until recently an EvCC student herself - asked if it was required that she attend a training session or if she "could get out of it." Whether her attitude is typical of her age bracket could obviously be debated. However, much research that has been conducted on the millennial generation suggests "that many of the career goals and expectations among Millennials are 'supersized,' unrealistic, and disconnected between reward and performance" (Ng, Schweitzer, & Lyons, 2010). Broadly speaking, these characteristics make this generational group more challenging to work with in a mandated mentor scenario.

The flip side of the age consideration is with faculty (often older) who are hesitant to utilize technology. This is a fundamental part of our course delivery; reluctance to engage with technology means, by definition, less interaction with the course content and the mentoring relationship. Most discussion on the lack of technological comfort and age appears to be largely anecdotal, but we have found it to exist in our academy, nonetheless. Additionally, many of our older faculty hires, particularly those coming from K-12 education or from industry, may need help with the most fundamental of computing tasks, which requires much time-consuming, basic help that interferes with the actual mentoring process.

Further, in our community college work, there is often a perceived divide between academia and our professional/technical programs. Sometimes, this presents a cultural difference that means that professional/technical (commonly called "prof/tech") faculty members feel less engaged with academic exercises and pedagogy than our traditional academic faculty (for example, those from the humanities or natural/social sciences). This gulf also means that prof/tech faculty may perceive less benefit in working with a mentor from an academic field. The parallel between the comfort found in a shop or lab versus a classroom is evidenced in the mentor-mentee relationship as well. We have found success in meeting with the prof/tech faculty in their own instructional environments and helping them to adapt pedagogical exercises to their own purposes. For example, instead of using some of our recommended Formative Assessment Techniques like Minute Paper or Red Card/Green Card, faculty at our Advanced Manufacturing center (and their mentors) altered the exercises toward functional lab prep, and the techniques were therefore perceived to be more relevant and useful. Our new faculty have commented that adaptations they used were "easier" and "turned out better than expected" (Faculty Reflections, 2016). When encouraged to employ inventive approaches, faculty outside of the traditional academic realm experience greater success and engagement than when forced to use the molds that work in other disciplines.

Our new adjunct faculty mentoring program, like most mentoring, relies heavily on the practice of reflection. Increasingly, we see a negative association of reflection as punishment. One "fails," so he/she is asked to reflect and fix whatever is wrong. We instead hope to encourage improvements in practice through reflection and try to frame thoughtful introspection (and resulting adjustment) as an opportunity. According to Lockyer, Gondocz, & Thivierge (2005),

> Reflection is the mechanism by which we contemplate and try to understand relatively complex and sometimes troubling ideas for which there is no obvious solution. Reflection allows us to transform current ideas and experiences into new knowledge and action. Personal experiences and organizational feedback can trigger reflection, whereas a lack of time, available colleagues, and social networks detract from the ability…to reflect.

Convincing our new faculty that reflection is a valuable academic practice is challenging but ultimately pays dividends.

All of these factors that work against a successful mentoring relationship beg the questions: how do we make mandatory mentoring work? How do we engage the reluctant mentee? Obviously, we need to overcome cultural obstacles and emphasize the benefits of our productive partnerships. Research offers five suggestions for mentors and proteges, both, for

improving mentor-mentee relationships: make sure to screw up (show your blunders), be empathetic, show you care, ask for advice, and apologize the right way (Rhodes, 2015).

Some additional (and obvious) solutions involve incentivizing participation. At EvCC, new faculty who complete the mentoring experience and Canvas LMS Associate Faculty Academy receive a $500 stipend. Certificates of completion are awarded and are accepted at our five-college (Five Star) consortium partner institutions, which make mentees more easily hired elsewhere, should they choose to move to a partner college. Transferable skills are emphasized and conveyed, and those who complete are more likely to be hired again. The more that faculty are realistic about the demands on (and qualifications of) both mentor AND mentee, the challenges of various cultural aspects, and the incentivizing of the mentee experience, the more invested our proteges are likely to be.

At EvCC, we are proud of the success we have enjoyed in our academy for new adjunct faculty and with the lasting relationships we have cultivated with instructional colleagues across campus. We recognize the challenges inherent in the mentor-mentee dynamic and seek to improve our program through dialogue and reflection. In addressing the areas that need attention (buy-in, experience, age, academic/vocational differences, lack of choice), we hope to maximize the efficacy of the mentoring experience for all parties involved.

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