



BECOMING A GREAT **MENTOR**

A successful mentor is not just an advisor, but a role model, guide and colleague. Here's how to make the most of this important role.

BY CHRIS PALMER

PHOTOGRAPHY BY VANCE JACOBS

*Dr. Jan Estrellado &
Dr. Nadine Nakamura*

The two psychologists met two years ago through the Asian American Psychological Association Leadership Fellows Program. "I was asked to be Jan's mentor because we share a lot of overlapping identities as queer Asian-American psychologists who are parents of young kids," says Nakamura, an associate professor at the University of La Verne. "She understands my experiences because she has had some parallel version of those experiences in her own psychology career," says Estrellado, associate director for clinical training at Sharp Mesa Vista Hospital in San Diego.



*Dr. Maisa Ziadni &
Dr. Mark Lumley*

Mentoring happened organically when Ziadni joined Lumley's lab at Wayne State University. He encouraged her to challenge herself, such as by conducting therapy in Arabic, her native language, with Iraqi refugees for a clinical trial. Now a postdoc at Stanford University, Ziadni mirrors Lumley's mentoring style by urging her advisees to go outside their comfort zones. And Lumley now seeks Ziadni's advice on professional challenges too. "My goal of mentoring is to help the student become a colleague," he says.



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In Homer's "Odyssey," the character Mentor serves as the trusted older counselor to Odysseus's son, Telemachus. In the intervening centuries, the word has come to mean someone who gives guidance, shares knowledge and imparts wisdom. In academia, however, the term often gets watered down to refer to an advisor—someone who helps undergraduate students choose the right courses to graduate or oversees doctoral projects to completion. ¶ But true mentors do much

FIRST IN A SERIES

more, from serving as role models to helping incubate research projects to bringing protégés into a network of colleagues. Unfortunately, only a quarter of college graduates report having had any professor who cared about them, and fewer report having had a mentor, according to a large 2014 Gallup–Purdue University study. "A lot of colleges and universities advertise with glossy brochures about how students have rich mentorships with faculty," says W. Brad Johnson, PhD, a professor of psychology at the U.S. Naval Academy and author of three books and dozens of journal articles about mentoring. "And it turns out that's just not true."

As for graduate students, 60 to 70 percent report having a mentor (*Teaching of Psychology*, Vol. 27, No. 4, 2000); for students in PsyD programs that figure dips to 50 to 60 percent (*Psychotherapy: Theory, Research, Practice, Training*, Vol. 37, No. 4, 2000).

There is an implicit assumption among university leaders that people with PhDs or other advanced degrees intuitively know how to mentor. But mentoring is not a skill that comes naturally to everyone—and as the statistics above indicate, many people earn their advanced degrees without the benefit of having a mentor, so they don't necessarily have a mental map for how to do it effectively when they become faculty (*Science*, Vol. 311, No. 5760, 2006).

Another barrier is that good mentoring takes a lot of time and energy, yet compared with obtaining grants and publishing papers, mentoring often doesn't "count" for much. And while

● **More on mentoring:** This article is the first in a four-part series on mentoring in psychology. Upcoming articles will focus on:
● Innovative mentoring programs
● Mentoring for diverse psychologists
● Ethical issues in mentoring

*Dr. Sannisha K. Dale &
Dr. Jessica Henderson Daniel*

Dale bonded with Daniel the day Dale interviewed for Boston University's clinical psychology program. "Her encouraging and thoughtful words that day made a great impression on me," says Dale, now an assistant professor of psychology at the University of Miami. The two have remained close. "I carry her lessons, insights and wisdom in my spirit and mind as I navigate the walls of academia that historically were not built to promote growth for me as an African-American researcher and woman," Dale says.



a few rare institutions provide training in mentorship, most would-be mentors are on their own.

How can you go from being someone who keeps student guidance to a minimum to someone who provides mentees with exactly what they need to succeed? Seasoned mentors offer this advice:

■ **Be clear about the relationship.** The first stepping-stone to becoming an exceptional

mentor is determining what you want your relationship with a mentee to be. From the start, both mentor and mentee should spell out their goals, roles and responsibilities, and how the relationship will work.

"It's kind of like an informal contract," says Kimberley Duff, PhD, an associate professor of psychology at Cerritos College in Norwalk, California, who has won multiple awards for her mentoring. "Are you

going to meet with them on a regular basis? Are you going to review papers for them? Are they going to invite you to presentations that they're giving? This should all be discussed."

Also, if you don't have time to be a mentor or the fit doesn't feel right, be up-front about it. "There's nothing wrong with very gently indicating that there may be someone else who could be an even better mentor," says Drew Appleby,

PhD, a professor emeritus of psychology at Indiana University-Purdue University Indianapolis who has mentored more than 500 students over the course of his career.

■ **Take the time.** According to experienced mentors, by far the most important thing great mentors do is simply make time for their mentees. While that's not always easy amid a busy academic schedule, it's an essential part of good mentorship because it

*Dr. Mike C. Parent &
Dr. Tyler C. Bradstreet*

Bradstreet credits Parent, an assistant professor at the University of Texas at Austin, with showing him how to balance work, service and self-care. “Mike modeled that you can be high achieving and successful in your career without sacrificing your personal life,” says Bradstreet, who, in addition to his clinical role with Texas Tech Athletics, is a member of APA’s Committee for the Advancement of Professional Practice. Now at different schools, the two check in regularly about shared research projects and meet at conferences to get feedback on each other’s work.



signals that you value the relationship. Some mentors establish regular check-in times for their mentees. For example, Diane Finley, PhD, a professor of psychology at Prince George’s Community College in Largo, Maryland, recommends talking at least once a month either in person or on the phone.

Other mentors make themselves available on an as-needed basis. “If you haven’t heard from your mentee in a while, don’t

wait—just reach out,” Johnson says.

■ **Champion their dreams.**

Many mentors make the mistake of trying to mold their protégés into mini versions of themselves. But mentoring is about helping a mentee realize his or her goals.

“It’s like being a parent,” says Nadine Kaslow, PhD, a professor of psychiatry and behavioral sciences at Emory University School of Medicine in Atlanta. “Good

parents don’t make their kids into clones of themselves. Instead, they help their kids thrive and flourish doing what they want to do.”

And with so many careers for people with psychology degrees to funnel into, it’s rare that students follow closely in their mentor’s footsteps, Appleby says.

That’s why great mentors make the effort to learn about their mentees’ career goals and tailor their mentoring accordingly, Johnson says.

“It’s only when you have done that work that you can open the right doors and do the right networking and provide the right challenges for a mentee,” he says.

A critical part of a mentee’s maturation is developing the capacity to cultivate, launch and see through to completion independent research. So, give them the freedom to bring their own ideas to life rather than foisting projects on them that you’ve come up with.



*Dr. Maggie Syme &
Dr. Linda Mona*

Mona and Syme met 10 years ago, when Syme began her internship at the VA Long Beach Healthcare System, where Mona was a clinical supervisor. Today, their relationship has deepened to close friends who connect at least weekly. Syme, now at Kansas State University, credits Mona for teaching her how to translate her passion into her work. Mona says Syme has taught her the joy of mentoring, and how to “let go of giving too much guidance because you really don’t need it any longer.”

*Bridget Makol &
Dr. Andres De Los Reyes*

De Los Reyes met Makol three years ago at the Association for Behavioral and Cognitive Therapies national conference. Both at the University of Maryland, College Park—he's a professor, she's a third-year psychology graduate student—they connected over their mutual curiosity in mental health assessment. They meet each week and see each other in research team meetings. "Part of what made our relationship click is that Andy always treats me as an equal partner in decision-making, seeking out and being responsive to my perspective," Makol says.



■ **Learn to listen.** Successful mentors listen to what a mentee is asking for and don't project what they think they should be asking. That's especially important if you've been in the field for years, says Finley. Listening closely is also key when working with mentees who may not yet even know what they need mentoring in, she adds.

In a related vein, it's critical to learn to ask good questions, says 2018 APA President Jessica Henderson

Daniel, PhD, who has mentored hundreds of students as an associate professor of psychology at Harvard Medical School. "Asking questions that stimulate their thinking and problem-solving skills will help guide them toward self-sufficiency," Daniel says.

■ **Model key behaviors.** Once you've taken time to understand a protégé's career goals, show them what it takes to reach those goals. If your mentee is looking for a

faculty position and doesn't know how to put together a professional curriculum vitae, show her yours and walk her through how to write it. If a mentee doesn't know how to run a meeting, let him watch you run one.

■ **Offer support.** Long hours, heavy workloads and career uncertainty mean that grad students, postdocs and early career psychologists can feel overwhelmed. So, provide them with support and

encouragement, says Johnson. A great mentor is there to accentuate a mentee's development and achievements.

Like anyone else, mentees also have their share of personal problems, so being in their corner during these times can mean a lot, Johnson adds. "Be prepared to tolerate tears, provide encouragement and do triage when somebody gets into a crisis," he says.

■ **Challenge your mentee.** That said, part of being a great

mentor is resisting the urge to spoon-feed your mentees and allowing them to figure out for themselves what they need to know. “Trainees have to learn to be independent as they navigate becoming a faculty member,” Finley says. “They can’t rely on you to tell them everything.”

So, challenge them, Johnson says. If your mentee struggles with writing, suggest he write a review article. If she’s terrified of public speaking, convince her to present at a meeting. “Your mentee may be ticked off at you, but she will likely say, ‘Boy, it really pushed me to get more comfortable—I needed that,’” Johnson says.

■ **Give public praise.** A litmus test for mentors is whether

they talk about their mentees when they are not in the room. “Are you telling people how great your protégé is? Are you introducing them to key people and networking them in? That’s sponsorship, and it’s crucial to a mentee’s success,” says Johnson. But don’t be disingenuous. You’re not helping your mentee when you praise them excessively or give them credit for something they didn’t do. And you still have to carefully evaluate their work.

■ **Stay humble.** Great mentors are willing to say, “I don’t know,” or to talk about their own failures. “A lot of our mentees are perfectionists,” says Jerry Rudmann, PhD, a professor of psychology at Irvine Valley College in

California who has mentored hundreds of students. “A mentor who’s willing to talk about what didn’t go well can be really empowering.”

In fact, great mentors may not even call themselves mentors, says Johnson. “I would hesitate to call myself someone’s mentor unless we’re formally paired in a mentoring program,” he says. Especially if you’re in a cross-gender or cross-race relationship, saying you’re someone’s mentor may signal power and privilege, even ownership. “However, when your mentee starts referring to you as a mentor, then you know you’ve arrived,” he adds.

■ **Let the relationship grow.**

The best mentorships become more friendly and mutual over time, so allow this relationship to evolve naturally, Kaslow says. Treating mentees more as colleagues than underlings provides them with much-needed validation and makes a big difference in their self-perception. While in some ways, “once a mentor, always a mentor,” it’s common for the best relationships to flower into true collegiality, she adds. “Before you know it, your student will be writing letters of recommendation for you,” she says.

■ **Enjoy the benefits.** Finally, great mentoring is not just give, give, give. There are many advantages to shepherding the next generation of psychologists, Duff says. First are the intrinsic benefits.

RESOURCES

On Being a Mentor: A Guide for Higher Education Faculty (2nd ed.)

Johnson, W.B.
Routledge, 2015

The Elements of Mentoring (3rd ed.)

Johnson, W.B., & Ridley, C.R.
St. Martin’s Press, 2018

APA’s Tips for Mentors

www.apa.org/pi/disability/resources/mentoring/tips-mentors.aspx

APA’s Introduction to Mentoring: A Guide for Mentors and Mentees

www.apa.org/education/grad/mentoring.aspx

RESEARCH

WHY WE NEED MENTORS

Research shows that well-mentored people are more likely than those without good mentorship to:

- Be competent and confident.
- Perform at a higher level.
- Receive better evaluations and promotions.
- Make more money.
- Contribute more to their field on a variety of measures, including number and quality of publications.
- Be loyal to their institutions, which translates into increased giving as alumni and increased retention and lowered attrition, especially for junior faculty.
- Mentor others themselves.

“Good mentoring shapes not only the current generation, but future generations as well,” says W. Brad Johnson, PhD, a professor of psychology at the U.S. Naval Academy and author of three books and dozens of journal articles about mentoring.

“It’s like having your own children go on and be successful and you have a small part in it,” she says. “It can be extremely rewarding.”

In the extrinsic sense, appreciative mentees often pay back the efforts you’ve made on their behalf, Johnson adds. They can broaden your network, bring you in on new collaborations and even let you know about job opportunities, according to research by Rajashi Ghosh, PhD, and Thomas G. Reio Jr., PhD (*Journal of Vocational Behavior*, Vol. 83, No. 1, 2013).

“There’s lots of reciprocity as these relationships evolve,” Johnson says. ■

● **To view a slideshow** of more mentor pairs, go to www.apa.org/monitor/digital/mentors.aspx.