

# Mentoring Research and Best Practices White Paper

*Mentors “assist and facilitate the realization of the Dream.”*  
--Levinson et al. (1978, p. 98)

## **Introduction**

A recent article in *The Chronicle of Evidence-Based Mentoring* named famous mentor/mentee relationships that have influenced history (Rhodes, 2015). Among the 25 pairs were Maya Angelou/Oprah Winfrey, Steve Jobs/ Mark Zuckerberg, Warren Buffett/Bill Gates, Ray Charles/Quincy Jones, and Ralph Waldo Emerson/David Thoreau. Even recently canonized Saint (Mother) Teresa had credited an encouraging mentor in her life, a man she met decades ago while waiting for a bus, Father Michael van der Peet.

Indeed, mentoring is a word that is often bandied about, as organizations work to attract and retain young talent. A recent *Harvard Business Review* article reports, “Research on junior to midlevel professionals shows that [mentorship] programs enable them to advance more quickly, earn higher salaries, and gain more satisfaction in their jobs and lives than people without mentors do. For employers, the benefits are not only higher performance but also greater success in attracting, developing, and retaining talent” (de Janasz and Peiperl, 2015, p. 101).

Because of the importance of mentoring in all fields, including public relations, this white paper draws from more than 100 sources, including scholarly research articles, books, magazines, media outlets, business organizations, educational institutions, professional development companies, nonprofit organizations, blogs, websites and trade publications. The work’s ultimate goal is to help grow and diversify the public relations profession. To do so, the paper includes insights gleaned from the literature, educational takeaways, steps to create mentoring programs, evaluation processes, and mentoring research strengths and weaknesses. Sources appear in a bibliography at the end of the paper and are also organized by source type for readers’ convenience.

## **Background**

Mentoring is a distinct human experience. Similar to leader-follower relationships that imply “raising one another to higher levels of morality and motivation” (Burns, 1978, p. 20), mentoring relationships can have a life-long impact on both mentee and mentor. The vitality of mentoring might be explained by individuals’ need to belong (Maslow, 1943) or the desire to develop and maintain positive interpersonal relationships.

Most academic literature traces the concept of mentorship to ancient Greek mythology.<sup>1</sup> However, Roberts (2000) argued the term “mentor” originated in Fenelon’s novel *The Adventures of Telemachus*, and the word itself did not become part of common vocabulary until 1750. In the 18th and 19th centuries, mentoring was associated with introducing young men to a military service or trade (Campbell, Smith, Dugan, & Komives, 2012).

Although the term “mentor” has been used for more than 250 years, academic research on mentoring is relatively new. The importance of a mentor who is “a person of greater experience and seniority ... a teacher, adviser or sponsor” was first acknowledged by Levinson, Darrow, Klein, Levinson and McKee (1978, p. 97) in their seminal book on career development. Levinson and his team’s work signified a shift from mentoring as a process of indoctrinating another to particular values or skills to a paradigm grounded in management development (Campbell et al., 2012). Since then, a number of mentoring research studies have supported Levinson et al.’s assumption that the mentor is “one of the most complex and developmentally important relationships” in adults’ personal and professional lives (Campbell et al., 2012, p. 97).

In the 1980s, another paradigm shift occurred and reflected the learning-centered nature of mentoring. This paradigm reframed mentoring to that of a developmental relationship characterized by “reciprocal learning and focused on goal attainment and personal growth” (Campbell et al., 2012, p. 597). In the latter 1980s, scholars also started linking mentorship and leadership by examining mentors’ interactions with protégés and seeing mentoring as one of the activities to facilitate leadership development (Yukl, 1994).

A recent international study of public relations leaders found that mentorship is highly valued by both mentors and mentees (Erzikova & Martinelli, 2016). From this research and from the list of famous mentors/mentees noted above, it is clear that mentorship is not limited to the young or to the workplace. As one might expect, mentoring scholarship reflects this breadth. Indeed, a wide range of disciplines—psychology, sociology, education, business, and social work, to name a few—have studied various aspects of mentoring within and across life stages (childhood, adolescence, adulthood). As a result, three distinct areas of mentoring scholarship have emerged: **youth**, **academic**, and **workplace** (Eby, Allen, Hoffman, Baranik, Sauer, Baldwin, Morrison, Kinkade, Maher, Curtis, Evans, 2013).

Occurring naturally or formally, youth mentoring implies a supportive relationship between a non-parental adult and a young person. Academic mentorship can take a formal or informal path and is based on the apprenticeship model of education, where a teacher facilitates students’ academic development both inside and outside of the classroom. Workplace mentoring occurs in an organizational setting and is typically oriented toward helping a novice adjust to his or her organization and to facilitate his or her career advancement, through either a formal or informal network.

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<sup>1</sup> In Homer’s *Odyssey*, Odysseus entrusted the education of his son, Telemachus, to a friend named Mentor.

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*Mentoring appears to have the essential attributes of ... a supportive relationship; a helping process; a teaching-learning process; a reflective process; a career development process; a formalised process; and a role constructed by or for a mentor.*

--- Roberts, A. (2000)

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Research literature notes four general ways mentoring can be initiated: by a mentor, by the protégé, through serendipity, or via an organization (Roberts, 2000). Mentoring models portray various relationships, including formal and informal, group, peer-to-peer, e-mentoring, planned and spontaneous, among others. Informal mentoring usually develops “naturally” and focuses on long-term goals, while formal mentoring typically is prompted and managed in the workplace or an educational institution. The duration of both formal and informal mentoring relationships varies significantly, from only a few meetings in a short time frame to hundreds of meetings over a decade (Crisp & Cruz, 2009).

Given the broad fields of inquiry and wide range of possible models, a single mentoring definition remains elusive. Roberts (2000) noted that mentoring is “a formalized process whereby a more knowledgeable and experienced person actuates a supportive role of overseeing and encouraging reflection and learning within a less experienced and knowledgeable person, so as to facilitate that person’s career and personal development” (p. 162). Levinson et al. (1978) argued that mentoring should not be defined in terms of formal roles, but instead should be conceptualized “in terms of the character of the relationship and the functions it serves” (p. 98).

Several scholars (e.g., Crisp & Cruz, 2009; Jacobi, 1991) have lamented the absence of a common operational definition in mentoring research, while others (e.g., Roberts, 2000; Bearman, Blake-Beard, Hunt, & Crosby, 2007) doubt if a single definition is even possible, given mentoring’s many attributes and scholars’ varying perceptions and descriptions of them. Indeed, mentoring relationships can be formal or informal; be professionally, academically or personally focused; be conducted in groups or in dyads; involve a peer-to-peer, or senior-to-junior (or vice versa) approach; and be facilitated through interpersonal or virtual contact. Still, several common themes appear across its many definitions.

First, a mentor is described as a role model, teacher, counselor, talent developer, supporter and/or friend. Second, the process of mentoring is described as a partnership, a relational connection, a chain of supportive activities (e.g., coaching, conferencing), a power- and resource-based relationship, a non-evaluative relationship, and a mutually beneficial and learning relationship. Third, the development of interpersonal relationships between the mentor and mentee is deemed as the key to success, as real learning occurs mainly because of the relationship itself and not a particular pedagogy.

Within organizations, mentoring might focus on *instrumental* support, such as providing instruction and feedback to assist with career advancement, and/or *psychosocial* support, such as role modeling and encouragement. Kram (1983), Caruso (1990) and Roberts (2000) found that these mentoring relationships evolve through various stages over time. These stages include:

- **an initiation phase**, which reflects the start of the relationship, and during which the mentor *prescriptively* directs the mentee;
- **a cultivation phase**, where mentorship functions are better established and maximized, and where the mentor guides/*persuades* the mentee, so they may begin to *collaborate*, with the mentor ultimately *confirming* the mentee's ability through full delegation of tasks;
- **a separation phase**, in which organizational and/or psychological changes within one or both mentoring parties decrease the relationship's fruitfulness; and
- **a redefinition phase**, where the relationship ceases to exist or evolves into a new form, such as friendship.

Within these mentoring phases, specific *mentoring activities* can include:

- **counseling** (listening; encouraging; identifying and evaluating problems);
- **coaching** (helping acquire particular skills and knowledge);
- **tutoring** (instructing on subject/s);
- **sponsoring** (finding the appropriate network or position for a protégé);
- **advising** (matching students' academic interests with their career aspirations); and
- **befriending** (developing informal supportive relationships).

From these mentoring activities, a number of positive *mentoring consequences* have been identified in research studies as well (Roberts, 2000). These include:

- latent abilities discovered,
- improved performance,
- retention of staff,
- growth in mentee confidence,
- personal growth of both mentor and mentee,
- increased awareness of and effectiveness in organizational role,
- self-actualization, and
- a resonating phenomenon (i.e., protégés become mentors themselves).

Research findings identify two basic psychological reasons people mentor others: 1) they are *other-focused* and want to share information to help others succeed and grow in the work force or 2) they are *self-focused* and motivated by the personal satisfaction they get from helping others (Allen, Poteet & Burroughs, 1997). In *The Mentee's Guide*, Zachary (2009) recommends that mentors reflect on their motivation: "When you hold a deep understanding of why you are doing something, you end up being more committed to it and better able to use your time and energy," (p. 114).

Other insights gleaned from mentoring research—and often reinforced by popular sources—appear below.

### ***Research Insights***

➤ *Modern mentoring involves multiple relationships.*

Mentorship traditionally has been defined as a “developmentally oriented interpersonal relationship that is typically between a more experienced individual (i.e., the mentor) and a less experienced individual (i.e., the protégé)” (Eby, 2010, p. 505). This perspective viewed mentoring as hierarchical and comprised of a single, dyadic relationship within one organization. Today mentorship is more commonly viewed as a developmental network consisting of multi-level, multi-dyadic relationships both within and outside of the organization (Higgins & Kram, 2001), and encouraging people to find and engage with mentors across landscapes contributes to a mindset of lifelong learning and growth. Indeed, General Motors CEO Mary Barra espouses using a full mentoring network. “Different people see different aspects of us as we progress in our careers and handle the opportunities and challenges along the way,” she said in *Entrepreneur* magazine (Entis, 2015). An *AdWeek* article states the same, arguing that “we don’t stop needing help,” so mentoring should span an entire career and continue throughout life (Hadlock, 2014).

➤ *Mentoring is bidirectional.*

Mentoring relationships—reciprocal and collaborative—benefit both mentor and mentee by enhancing psychosocial development and professional growth. Mentor benefits include avoiding mid- or late-career obsolescence by learning from junior employees about cutting-edge technologies (also known as “reverse mentoring” or “reciprocal mentorship,” as Omnicom Group Chairman Thomas Harrison [2013] calls it). Compared to un-mentored employees, mentored individuals have significantly higher job and career outcomes (Chao, 1997).

➤ *Formal and informal relationships are valuable.*

Informal mentoring is most common and is associated with more instrumental and psychosocial support than formal mentoring. Informal relationships also allow for learning in all aspects and across all phases of one’s life. However, formal mentoring programs can help ensure that organizational goals and resources are aligned and that assessment takes place to gauge success. In addition, formal programs can permeate the organization, so that a culture of mentoring evolves that can help attract—and keep— young talent. In her guide for creating a mentoring culture, Zachary (2005) notes the following specific organizational practices as key: alignment of goals; accountability; effective communication; program value, visibility and demand; multiple mentoring opportunities; education and training; and safety nets.

➤ *Formal mentoring should include informal attributes.*

Input into the mentorship process increases mentors’ and mentees’ commitment to it. Therefore, organizations should create a sense of voluntary participation; give participants a chance to help define goals, agendas, and relationship parameters; provide

opportunities for both formal and informal interaction between mentor and mentee; and consider discrete timeframes and constructive, non-threatening assessment options.

➤ *Interaction frequency is key.*

To help facilitate trust and build a relationship, interpersonal interaction is key. In a study of new nurses across three Taiwanese hospitals, interaction frequency was found to be one of the strongest indicators of mentoring success (Huang, Weng, & Chen, 2016). In a study of new teachers, sharing information through collaborative problem-solving helped establish the trust and respect required for positive mentoring relationships (Hudson, 2016).

➤ *Perceived similarity is important.*

The similarity/attraction paradigm implies people are attracted to those similar to themselves. Accordingly, mentors are more willing to mentor protégés whom they perceive to be similar, and research shows that the relationship for both mentors and mentees is more rewarding and enjoyable. In a study across two academic health centers, shared values was one of five key characteristics of a successful mentoring relationship (Straus, Johnson, Marquez, & Feldman, 2013). (The others included mutual respect, clear expectations, a personal connection, and reciprocity.) Therefore, organizations should ensure that prospective mentors and mentees have a chance to socialize prior to the start of mentoring programs to identify common interests and shared values, expectations and goals. Gervais (2014) recommends a number of possible questions, including “anything FORM” — an acronym for family, occupation, recreation, and motivation, which represents “universal rapport-builders.” Including an ice-breaker activity in which mentors and mentees ask each other a list of fun questions also can help increase both familiarity and affinity. Some organizations even have employees take personality tests and complete surveys that identify their desired growth areas to help ensure compatible mentor-mentee matches.

➤ *Mentorship facilitates leadership.*

Mentorship programs not only provide psychosocial support and/or career advice for novices but can also help develop leaders. In a six-month field experiment, one group participated in a semiformal mentorship program and another group received a group-based leadership education program (Lester, Hannah, Harms, Vogelgesang, & Avolio 2011). Results showed that the mentored group’s scores on leadership self-efficacy were significantly higher than the education-based group. Indeed, the mentoring context (i.e., proximity between mentor and mentee, social and emotional connection, long-term goals, assessment immediacy) mirrors the development of transformational leadership (Middlebrooks & Haberkorn, 2009). Perhaps it is not surprising then that in one vocational study, mentors with transformational leadership styles were deemed more effective than those with other leadership styles (Scandura & Williams, 2004).

➤ *E-mentoring can skirt barriers.*

E-mentoring, or career and psychological support provided by a mentor through computer-mediated technologies, can be synchronous (electronic chat), asynchronous (email), or both, and can incorporate additional modes as well (e.g., telephone and face-

to-face conversations) (Smith-Jentsch, Scielzo, Yarbrough, & Rosopa, 2008). E-mentoring may also overcome such barriers as:

- a lack of managerial support, for a mentee can have access to a diverse pool of mentors via the internet, regardless of geographic location or organizational level;
- individuals' lack of assertiveness or fear of being misunderstood, which could hamper the initiation of in-person mentoring relations; and
- flexible or alternative work arrangements, such as compressed work weeks or telecommuting, which may reduce the opportunities for face-to-face meetings (Hamilton & Scandura, 2003).

➤ *Involvement spawns future participation.*

In determining whom to approach about mentoring programs, organizations might first identify any employees who previously mentored others, were mentored, or both, as they will be more likely to join or help lead the program.

➤ *Mentoring's value should not be overestimated.*

Despite the many positive outcomes of mentorship, unrealistic expectations about mentoring can result in failed relationships and can undermine confidence. Therefore, training should be offered to participants to help them understand mentoring's role. In addition, mentoring should not be a single strategy, but one of many that organizations employ.

## **Mentoring Students**

*“Mentoring, within the context of undergraduate college students, may be defined as: Support provided to college students that entails emotional and psychological guidance and support, help succeeding in academic coursework, assistance examining and selecting degree and career options, and the presence of a role model by which the student can learn from and copy their behaviors relative to college going.”*

*-- Crisp, G. (2009, p. 189)*

The number of mentoring programs at colleges and universities worldwide continues to grow, and some universities have created centers or institutes around the concept. For example, the Mentoring Institute at the University of New Mexico (<http://mentor.unm.edu/>) disseminates research-based and educational best mentoring practices; as such, it offers free resources, including tips, articles, manuals and a blog, and hosts an annual mentoring conference that includes academic researchers, educators, community leaders, government agencies, non-profits, and other professionals. The center also links to other mentoring programs and organizations, including the National Mentoring Partnership (<http://www.mentoring.org/>), an organization that provides technical assistance, training and resources to help facilitate youth mentoring programs. The Boston-based partnership hosts a National Mentoring Summit and regularly updates its book, *Elements of Effective Practice for Mentoring* (Garringer, Kupersmidt, Rhodes,

Stelter, & Tai, 2015). The book incorporates current research and insights from multiple mentoring stakeholders, with the latest edition focusing on “six core standards of practice: recruitment, screening, training, matching and initiation, monitoring and support, and closure.” The book also includes thought leadership around and recommendations for youth mentoring services.

Wake Forest University’s Mentoring Resource Center (2016) (<http://mentoring.opcd.wfu.edu/>), which is part of its Office of Personal & Career Development, seeks to become “the nationally-recognized leader in higher education mentoring programs and practice.” Its website hosts books, research articles and other mentoring resources specific to college students, including a publication produced by the university’s Center for Global Programs & Studies called *Mentoring Around Cross-Cultural Experiences* (2016). It says effective cross-cultural mentoring requires the following actions:

- “asking thought-provoking questions to guide decision-making and problem-solving;
- practicing active listening in regular, meaningful conversations;
- role-modeling behavior through words and actions;
- providing objective feedback and guidance;
- facilitating the mentee’s ability to practice self-reflection and self-development;
- displaying a sincere passion to support the growth of another person; and
- expending time, energy, and enthusiasm” (p. 2).

The Undergraduate Research Opportunity Program at the University of Michigan (<https://lsa.umich.edu/urop/research-mentors.html>) focuses on first-year and sophomore students (especially minorities and women) because they are at the greatest risk of attrition. Students who assist faculty members with research projects are supported through peer advising, peer research interest groups, skill-building workshops, speakers and research presentations. Program assessment indicated a significant effect on retention of sophomores and African-American students (Nagda, Gregerman, Jonides, von Hippel, & Lerner, 1998). Other universities, such as Brigham Young, include formal mentorship activities as part of their curricula. For example, undergraduate business majors there are required to take a semester-long mentorship course, in which each student is matched with a professional in his or her area of study. The university also has a freshman mentorship program in which all first-year students have the opportunity for peer mentoring support.

Research has found the most common forms of education-based mentorship include academic support, psychosocial support, and role modeling (Gershenfeld, 2014). Yet despite the enthusiasm around youth and young adult mentorship, research on mentoring in education has been criticized for methodological limitations and a lack of theoretical bases (Crisp & Cruz, 2009; Jacobi, 1991). In their research on mentoring college students, Crisp and Cruz (2009) identified four major mentorship domains and related latent variables:



- **psychological and emotional support** (listening, identifying problems, providing moral support and establishing trusting relationships);
- **support for setting goals and choosing a career path** (exploring students' interests and abilities, stimulating critical thinking, developing personal and professional potential);
- **academic subject knowledge support** (advancing students' knowledge of their chosen field both inside and outside the classroom); and
- **specification of a role model** (sharing life experiences and feelings, providing an opportunity to observe the mentor socially and in difficult situations).

In considering the scholarly and lay publications reviewed for this paper, the following takeaways about educational mentorship emerged.

### *Educational Takeaways*

#### ➤ *Mentoring fosters positive outcomes.*

Positive outcomes include, but are not limited to, developing intellectual and critical thinking skills, enhancing self-confidence, facilitating academic success, strengthening student engagement and participation, discovering latent talents, furthering aspirations, increasing persistence, and helping to ensure smooth transitions into (and through) the university and workforce. However, as mentioned above, there is a lack of convincing empirical evidence that mentoring programs make a significant difference in students' lives.

#### ➤ *No one size fits all.*

In general, mentoring programs in education should be specifically designed for different groups of students: minorities, females, low-income, freshmen, students with special needs (Crisp, 2009). For example, female mentees value mutual engagement, authenticity, and empowerment (Tracy, Taylor, Williams, 2002), and research has shown that female mentors are inclined to provide more emotional support, while male mentors tend to focus on career support (Bogat & Liang, 2005). While female mentees and those of color commonly have a mentor of a different gender and/or race, Ragins (2007) found that White male mentees tend to choose mentors that mirror themselves. Mentoring programs designed for ethnic minorities should employ mentors who can be "culturally synchronized" with their mentees. For example, a mentor of Black students should be able to appreciate features of their cultural heritage, such as "spiritualism, harmony, movement, verve, affect, communalism, expressive individualism, oral tradition, and a social time perspective" (Apprey, Preston-Grimes, Bassett, Lewis, & Rideau, 2014, p. 322). Indeed, some studies indicate that neither race nor gender has significant influence on the mentoring process (e.g., Beyene, Anglin, Sanchez, & Ballou, 2002). Instead, what's most important for mentors to exhibit are trustworthiness, open-mindedness, friendship and nurturing. Regardless, college students' needs and perceptions of mentoring differ from professionals' perspectives; thus, mentoring programs in education should not mimic those of organizations and vice versa, but instead should be developed to meet their own specific objectives.

➤ *Mentoring activities are diverse.*

Research found different universities and colleges use different activities to support students' growth: weekly meetings with mentors, participation in discussion groups, involvement in research and service-learning projects, networking with successful professionals, leadership training, student governance, and intramural athletics. While a mentoring program should not be deemed as "all or nothing," a combination of a few tactics is advisable. For example, an inclusive cluster-mentoring model for Black undergraduates at the University of Virginia includes the following components: student peer advising, faculty-student academic mentoring and advising, culturally sensitive initiatives, and organized parental support (Apprey et. al, 2014). According to the authors, they "seek to move the university ... to a model of academic and leadership achievement, with sustained learning outcomes for its students" (p. 320).

➤ *Faculty interactions help students grow.*

A dominant theory of college student identity development (Chickering & Reisser, 1993) includes seven vectors: developing competence, managing emotions, moving through autonomy toward interdependence, developing mature interpersonal relationships, forming identity in relations to family and ethnicity, fostering purpose, and developing integrity. Frequent and friendly student-faculty interaction furthers college student development. Faculty members' approachability and respectfulness and their desire to interact with students outside of the classroom and to provide career guidance are important predictors of students' self-confidence, motivation and achievement (Komarraju, Musulkin, Bhattacharya, 2010). Such faculty actions also increase students' overall satisfaction with their college experience (Wallace, Abel, & Ropers-Huilman, 2000). Therefore, faculty mentors should actively and clearly communicate their interest in helping students and offer to mentor those who approach them.

➤ *Mentors are not limited to faculty.*

Although faculty can positively influence students' lives, mentors also can be college staff, senior or graduate students, peers, friends, religious leaders and/or family members (Crisp & Cruz, 2009). However, peer mentoring involves more of a mutual exchange relationship compared to conventional mentoring, which focuses more fully on the mentee's development (Allen, McManus, & Russell, 1999).

➤ *Mentoring can foster a sense of belonging.*

For college students who are on their own and far from home, mentoring can help instill a sense of comfort and belonging. This may be particularly important for international students, who are experiencing a foreign culture as well as possible loneliness and/or feelings of isolation. According to the book *Mentoring Around Cross-Cultural Experiences* (2015), mentors should work to establish rapport with such students and help them create specific goals and objectives. In addition, mentors should encourage active reflection on what mentees have learned from their challenges and how they plan to apply those learnings in the future. Zachary (2012) notes that "who we are shapes our thinking, our conversations, our relationships, and our behaviors ..." (p. 37). Becoming aware of personal and cultural expectations and perspectives, and working to understand those of mentees', opens up vast learning possibilities for both.

➤ *Trust, time, and confidentiality are essential.*

Regardless of the mentor, frank, honest discussions are important for authentic relationships in which both parties can openly share their goals and perspectives. Such trust takes time, so mentors and mentees must be patient and diligent and not become discouraged by a lack of perceived progress.

➤ *Electronic peer-mentoring can be valuable.*

Compared to traditional mentoring, which is predominantly face-to-face, electronic peer-mentoring was found to be more interactive, with mentors writing more words of psychological support compared to face-to-face meetings (Smith-Jentsch et al., 2008). Educational mentors should receive training about the value of electronic dialogue, but should also be made aware of possible miscommunication that can arise without visual and vocal feedback cues.

➤ *Mentoring is hard work.*

Setting boundaries regarding how often mentors and mentees will meet or talk can be important, so as not to exhaust or overwhelm either group. Although frequent interaction is ideal, the learning relationship will suffer if it becomes strained or burdensome, and mentoring relationships are just that: relationships that must be created, fed and nurtured. According to the group Mentorship @ MIT, which provides resources to cultivate mentoring relationships, potential conflicts can easily arise between mentors and their protégés. Such conflicts might include differing expectations, miscommunication, breaches of trust, or strongly held, at-odds opinions. The group's website offers various tips to resolve such conflicts, such as finding areas of common ground, knowing when to let go of an issue, earnestly seeking solutions and reconciliation, and seeking help from an objective third party, if needed. Ideally, issues should be discussed in person to expedite solutions and avoid the possible misinterpretations that electronic communications can foster. Conflicts may even provide new opportunities to define expectations and set ground rules (DesignMentoring, 2013).

➤ *Faculty biases can derail mentoring.*

In a field experiment, 6,548 tenure-track professors at 259 top U.S. universities were contacted by fictitious prospective doctoral students, who requested a 10-minute meeting to discuss research opportunities (Milkman, Akinola, & Chugh, 2015). The emails were identical, but the names of "students" signaled their gender and race (e.g., White, Black, Hispanic, Indian, and Chinese). The study found professors tended to favor Caucasian males and were less inclined to mentor women and minority students. The magnitude of the discrimination was large and it occurred across disciplines. Counter to perceptions, the study revealed that the representation of women and minorities among faculty did not change the discrimination exhibited. Therefore, discrimination awareness and prevention activities should not be limited to formal institutional actions, such as admissions and hiring, but should also emphasize bias tendencies in informal, everyday actions as well.

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*Mentors should be role models who offer “timely, context-specific counsel drawn from experience, wisdom, and networks that are highly relevant to the problems to be solved.”*  
--de Janasz and Peirperl (2015, p. 101)

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### **How to Begin?**

According to the International Mentoring Association (2016) (<http://mentoringassociation.org/>), everyone should be learning and working with a mentor, for “the fast-paced, competitive, and global nature of information flow, changes in business and other professional transactions, and new models for decision making require that we all be actively and continually learning.... Even CEOs need mentoring, argue de Janasz and Peirperl (2015) in *Harvard Business Review*. But with so many types of mentorship, how does one begin?

Drawing largely from the professional literature, best practices to develop a mentoring program appear below.

#### ***10 Best Practices***

- 1) *Identify the purpose and available resources; then set clear goals and expectations.*

Lawrence (2011) suggests that formal programs be customized to fit each organization and its culture. Some organizations first establish the *purpose* of mentoring (e.g., leadership and management development) and build the mentoring program’s structure around it. An audit may be necessary to determine if there is enough human, financial and organizational resources to run a successful program, and nearly all sources stress the importance of setting realistic and achievable goals for the mentorship experience. Some experts even recommend creating formal mentorship meeting agendas, a year-long action plan with identified strategies (Alsever, 2008), and a manual of key policies and procedures (Miller, 2007). PRSA Fellow John Guiniven (2008) notes that companies should clearly define at the outset what a mentor is and isn’t and the expected time commitment, for “recruiting mentors is difficult when their duties are vague.” Mentees should specify what they hope to learn from the experience, while mentors should ask themselves if they have the time and experience to make the relationship successful (Johnson, 2011).

- 2) *Demonstrate management’s support.*

The belief that a mentorship program is an important organizational initiative motivates mentors to join (Parise & Forret, 2008). Organizations seeking to develop and implement mentorship programs should secure consistent and visible support from top management.

Such support might include senior executives serving as mentors, rewarding participants with small gifts, and/or publicizing involvement and achievements.

3) *Provide training.*

In their workplace mentoring best practices study, the American Productivity and Quality Center (2015) suggests that both mentors and mentees need training on roles and expectations, communication strategies and relationship-building techniques. Their research found that mentor training tends to focus on how to effectively talk with mentees and build trust, while mentee training emphasizes asking the right questions. David Clutterbuck, author of *Everyone Needs a Mentor*, found that “only about 1 in 3 mentoring relationships actually work if there is no training, whereas 2 in 3 will work if the mentor is trained. When you train both the mentor and mentee you get a 90%+ success rate” (Art of Mentoring, 2015). Of course, it’s important that training include ethical expectations as well. The European Mentoring & Coaching Council (2016), a nonprofit organization that develops, promotes and sets best practice mentoring and coaching expectations, has a global code of ethics for formal mentoring and coaching practice that offers guidelines about confidentiality, conflicts of interest, integrity, inappropriate interactions, and other issues related to professional conduct.

4) *Hold all parties accountable.*

By their nature, most mentorship programs seem to put the onus for success on the organization and/or the mentors. DiFebo (2016) notes “listening and sharing knowledge are important facets of any mentoring relationship, but what sets really great mentors apart is their willingness to actually *do* things for their mentee.” She offers such examples as introducing them to people who could be helpful to their careers, pointing them toward professional development opportunities, and passing their resumes along to others. However, mentees also shoulder a large responsibility for the success of mentoring relationships. PRSA Fellow and Plank Center Advisory Board member Gary McCormick, APR, noted in a 2015 presentation that mentees should demonstrate initiative in managing the relationship, be able to learn quickly, and follow through on tasks and obligations. In *The Mentee’s Guide*, Zachary (2009) agrees. She says mentees should be proactive in the relationship and take the initiative to maximize their experience. Specifically, she says, mentees should:

- both give and receive feedback,
- define specific learning needs and goals,
- be authentic and open,
- listen actively,
- reflect on growth,
- deliver on promises,
- ask for what they need, and
- value differences.

5) *Provide time for mentees to watch, do, interact and learn.*

Explaining not only the *how* but also the *why* of things is the difference between simply modeling a behavior for others and mentoring them to foster deeper understanding.

Deutsch New York CEO Val DiFebo (2016) says giving mentees opportunities to learn on the job and actually getting to know mentees personally are keys. “Your intimate knowledge of their strengths and weaknesses coupled with a crystal-clear understanding of how they are looking to you for help will enable you to guide them in a new direction, consider a different solution, or spark an idea that would never have occurred to them [otherwise],” she says in *Fortune*. However, for millennials, time together need not be wholly physical or on the job. One international study by human resources consulting firm Development Dimensions International (2015) found that millennials preferred social activities and mobile learning opportunities to connect and build relationships.

6) *Encourage mentors to model professionalism.*

Mentees closely watch professional mentors and see them as role models for success. Therefore, mentors should be vigilant about demonstrating professionalism, no matter how informal their interactions with mentees. However, in the process, mentors should not expect to produce carbon copies of themselves (Layton, 2005). Instead, being an effective mentor requires strong self-esteem. Carlton (2006) says in *Ad Age* that it takes “people who are not at all threatened by having their young charge do better than they can.”

7) *Be helpful, transparent and honest.*

Good mentors should not only provide clear direction to mentees, they should also help untangle bureaucracy, provide a sense of community, avoid giving “busy work,” and always be open and honest. “What you do can make the difference between [mentees’] failure and success,” Maxwell (2008) says. “And when they succeed, so do you” (p. 21). Indeed, several business publications note the importance of being honest with mentees—of avoiding the need to be unduly nice when constructive criticism is warranted—and of not buying into the “babysitting” mentality (Lawrence, 2011). Giving mentees an opportunity to shadow mentors, to hear about and be kept updated on complex problems, and to hear the mentor’s full thinking process behind difficult decisions can help mentees both better understand the organization and develop crucial critical thinking skills.

8) *Maintain consistency and know that mentoring takes time.*

Regular, frequent and productive meetings are important to build credibility and trust within the mentor-mentee relationship and to help keep expectations realistic over time. Exhibiting ongoing enthusiasm toward the relationship also is important (Hudson, 2016). But mentoring involves not only a time commitment from the parties involved, it also requires time to reap benefits. Understanding the long-term goals—and the ongoing commitment required to meet them—is crucial to success.

9) *Don’t forget to mentor leaders.*

As noted previously, high-level leaders too want to learn from others. Development Dimensions International (2015) (<http://www.ddiworld.com/>) conducted a study of more than 13,000 leaders across 48 countries and 32 major industry categories. Although not the focus of the study, findings about mentorship emerged. For example, suggestions for leadership development included mentoring new leaders by “next-level” leaders,

mentoring leaders for six months following their promotions, and working to identify an individual's specific strengths and weaknesses to develop a more focused development plan. The study noted that "development efforts won't have a lasting impact unless they are followed by opportunities for leaders to practice and use their newly acquired skills" (p. 13). They found that when organizations allowed leaders to practice and then receive feedback from their managers, they were "five times more likely to have high leader quality and bench strength ..." (p. 13). In his book *Mentoring 101: What every leader needs to know*, Maxwell (2008) says that to more efficiently mentor organizational leaders, one should look for leaders who inspire other leaders. These people's influence, he says, will be far greater long term. He also suggests viewing every mentee as a "10," meaning when mentors see the best in their protégés, they are more likely to inspire and motivate them (p. 43).

10) *Provide an "out" for mentoring relationships that do not work.*

As in any personal relationship, potential dysfunctions may occur during mentoring. Scandura (1998) identified four possible types of destructive mentoring relationships: negative relations (e.g., bullies, enemies), sabotage (e.g., needling, revenge, silent treatment), difficulty (e.g., conflict, binds) and spoiling (e.g., betrayal, regret). Awareness of potential problems is the first step in preventing negative behaviors, and appropriate interventions should be part of mentoring program protocols. In addition, identifying distinct timeframes and allowing people the freedom to end unproductive relationships without prejudice can assure mentors and mentees that their time and dignity are valued.

### ***Evaluating Effectiveness***

Research studies have employed multiple methods to evaluate mentoring effectiveness, including interviews, focus groups, surveys, experiments, quasi-experiments, content analysis of mentor and mentee journals, and program evaluation. A 25-item college student mentoring scale developed by Crisp (2009) assesses the impact of educational mentoring programs and is currently being used at a number of universities in the U.S. and abroad. The scale includes items that measure psychological and emotional support, degree and career support, academic subject knowledge support, and the existence of a role model.

Organizations assess mentorship in various ways: through surveys, formal and informal interviews, anecdotal and systematic feedback, counting employee promotions/successes, individual/unit/corporate goal achievement and more. Australian-based coaching, mentoring and leadership development consultancy Art of Mentoring (2015) suggests a methodical approach to build and assess a mentoring program, beginning and ending with research. Specifically, they suggest organizations

- conduct research to understand their organization's needs and employee interest;
- prime the organization by securing buy-in;
- plan the program by determining resource commitments, the type and length of program, and how it will be introduced to employees;

- recruit and match participants;
- provide training to mentors and mentees to improve listening, communication and goal-setting skills; and
- evaluate the program through satisfaction surveys, results obtained, and interpersonal feedback.

For more formal mentoring activities and assessment, the European Mentoring & Coaching Council (mentioned above) offers accrediting options, one of which includes the six core components of International Standards for Mentoring Programmes in Employment (ISMPE) (<http://www.ismcp.org/>). According to the website, ISMPE's vision is "to support the maintenance and development of effective mentoring or coaching within the workplace and the broader working environment" (ISMPE, 2016). Its core accreditation standards include 1) clarity of purpose, 2) stakeholder training and briefing, 3) selection and matching processes, 4) measurement and review processes, 5) high ethical standards and pastoral care and 6) administration and support.

Regardless of the evaluation methods employed, the key to determine mentoring success is similar to that of a communications campaign: the objectives should be defined, measurable and deadline-driven, with goals and evaluation methods agreed upon in advance and progress regularly tracked. In addition, the best practices and key insights noted in this paper should be implemented, as applicable, to increase the odds of success.

### **Research Strengths and Weaknesses**

The strengths of mentoring studies lie in their multidisciplinary and interdisciplinary approaches, the diversity of perspectives, and an identified overlap of patterns. Mentoring research weaknesses include its fragmented nature, a lack of theory guiding data collection and analysis in many studies, mixed empirical evidence, self-reported data, and limited projects with external validity (i.e., generalizability to others). Several researchers have observed the need for more studies to better understand the following specific mentorship dimensions:

- predictors and outcomes of successful mentoring;
- how sequential mentoring relationships influence personal and professional outcomes;
- examination of Kram's (1983) mentoring phases (initiation, cultivation, separation, and redefinition) using a longitudinal design;
- how new career orientations (e.g., the protean career or a career determined by the individual, not the organization) impact mentoring functions; and
- how new technologies are changing the ways mentors and mentees develop and sustain their relationships.

Public relations-specific mentoring studies are rare, although relationships with mentors have been identified as an influence resource within organizations (Berger & Reber, 2006). Therefore, future research is warranted to examine whether and how public relations practitioners capitalize on mentoring opportunities to gain influence and



advance their careers and organizations. Other future research directions should include an investigation of best mentoring practices in public relations units and agencies, effective ways to incorporate mentoring in college and university public relations programs, best mentoring practices to develop public relations leaders, and global perspectives on public relations mentoring.

## **Conclusions**

Although there is anecdotal evidence of mentoring's positive role in others' lives, there is a general lack of convincing empirical evidence that mentoring programs make a positive difference. Part of the problem seems to rest in the research methodology itself (i.e., a lack of consistent operational definitions and variables), as well as the wide range of mentorship activities. For example, some programs occur organically, others are formally structured, and some evolve into different types of relationships over time. In addition, it is clear that no one mentoring program fits every situation, and there is a dearth of public relations-specific studies.

However, themes and patterns do emerge across the academic and popular literature that point to best mentoring practices and key insights, which are included above. Also referenced are college, national, and international entities dedicated to furthering strong mentoring practice across the lifespan. In both college and workplace mentoring, it is clear that the setting of goals, development of trust, and patience in and commitment to the process are fundamental to success. And regardless of its location or intent—personal, educational or professional—mentoring is largely a future-oriented endeavor, as mentors help mentees build confidence and encourage them to envision future success.

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