



A black and white photograph of a person in a graduation gown and cap, standing outdoors. They are holding a diploma in their left hand and have their right arm raised in a celebratory gesture. The background is slightly blurred, showing what appears to be a grassy field or park.

# MENTORS

## SPURRING A SPECIAL PROFESSION

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By Melissa Brock

Jessica Quintana Hess said there's no doubt in her mind that Julie Kerich, director of admission at Franklin & Marshall College in Lancaster, Pennsylvania, is her mentor.

However, Kerich insisted she hasn't been mentoring Quintana Hess over the past five years. "With people like Jessica, 'mentor' is just another word for friendship," said Kerich.

Kerich and Quintana Hess, director of admissions at Lycoming College (PA), have strengthened an already rock-solid professional mutual respect for each other by connecting both inside and outside the doors of an admission office. "As I've learned more about Jessica's life, where she is professionally and how that fits into her real life, I can better appreciate our conversations about admission and higher education," said Kerich.

Quintana Hess said there's a season for everything. "In my life, I've had academic mentors, social mentors, and certainly in the field, there have been mentors I have reached out to if I have a particular need that needs addressed." She credits Kerich for addressing those needs when necessary, and happily notes that despite the 123.4 miles between them, Kerich is still never too far away for a late-night dinner or a quick 10-minute phone conversation between meetings with families.

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## **"A MENTOR GUIDES YOU IN MAKING SOUND DECISIONS, WHETHER IT'S CAREER OR PROFESSIONAL WORK ETHIC. BASICALLY, IT'S SOMEONE WHO'S INVESTED IN YOUR SUCCESS."**

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Kristina Dooley, a certified educational planner, knows exactly what mentorship is not. She explained, "I think most people think of mentorship as giving the answers to someone, and in my mind, it's actually helping them discover their direction and purpose."

Dooley said independent counselors have unique mentorship needs, as about 50 percent are working as sole practitioners, "as opposed to working in a college admission office, where it can be easier to find a mentor on campus, they are truly by themselves," she said. It's imperative for those independent counselors, many of whom may be questioning a transition to independent counseling, to get a mentor. They may know how to be a professional in another profession. This one, though, may be alien territory—especially if they're working alone.

"I think back to the first time I started working as an independent counselor, who mentored me along the way. They directed me to the right resources," Dooley recalled. "They didn't do it for me, but helped me figure out what was missing in my professional toolbox."

Beth Gilfillan, a doctoral candidate in counselor education and supervision at Pennsylvania State University, can point back to her nine years of high school counseling experience when defining what mentorship means to her. "I think of it as a relationship, a supportive relationship. I think about someone who's there to champion you and to support you through your earlier years," she explained.

Juliet Johnson, dean in the office of recruitment and admission at Fisk University (TN), couldn't agree more. In fact, she's been in admission for 24 years, and her very first director of admission is still providing worthwhile advice every time she makes a career move. "She's never steered me wrong," Johnson said. She thinks of her mentor, Victoria Valle, when defining the word. "A mentor guides you in making sound decisions, whether it's career or professional work ethic. Basically, it's someone who's invested in your success."

### **ENCOURAGING CAREER PATHS**

Kirk Kluver, director of admissions at the University of Iowa, believes that those who start out (in admission in particular) seldom expect to develop a career in the industry.

He said more often than not, people stay in the profession because someone encouraged them to do so. "Somebody plants the seed early and says, 'You have a future in this profession. You're good at this,'" Kluver said. "In my own story, there were a couple of individuals who were the reasons why I stayed. For me, someone said, you need to get your advanced degree if you want to advance. I don't know if I would have done that without a mentor."

According to the 2016 Deloitte Millennial Survey, millennials who plan to stay with their employer for more than five years are twice as likely to have a mentor (68 percent) than not (32 percent). High levels of engagement, better retention and better return on investment strike a significant job satisfaction chord with millennials and managers, no matter the profession.

Individuals who start as admission counselors embark on a less obvious career path, Kluver noted, which is another excellent reason for those in admission-related fields to seek mentorship.

"In certain fields, in two years you become this, after four years, you do this; you can be handed a career ladder. It's less obvious with admission organizations, by and large," he said.

Kluver highlights the importance for individuals to have a mentor to help them navigate the types of knowledge they should gain. While there may not be an obvious next two or three steps on the career ladder, there are benchmarks they can hit to develop as a professional.

Lesley Klecan, director of college counseling at St. Mary's School in Medford, Oregon, is bombarded daily by young teachers, school administrators, and students, and insists that in her field, mentors and mentorship opportunities are special. Klecan believes it's because she and her colleagues are working with students.

"Every day we work with kids and recognize their uniqueness and all the wonderful things that unique individuals have to offer the world," she said.



"When you work to validate people all day, that naturally extends to your colleagues. Your whole day is supporting people, which is different than for people who have to deal with number-crunching or complaints all day. You're dealing with hopes and dreams."

#### MENTOR PAYOFF

Robyn Lady, director of student services at Chantilly High School (VA), oversees all school counseling and is also in charge of performing arts. She supervises about 25 individuals and mentors them, too.

Lady believes the mentorship sweet spot is hit when she's managing her mentees in addition to growing them. She takes care to learn about each individual's strengths and personal goals, then tries to guide them in the direction where she can see their greatest potential. She works hard to cultivate a safe environment so the individuals who report to her can take professional risks or have the flexibility to take a different tack when confronted with a difficult situation. Lady herself tries to be a supportive presence and a good listener.

It's clear from Lady's example that mentoring has major professional benefits for mentees, but what about the other way around?

Klecan has been chatting with one of her first-year teachers about this very idea. "We were talking about the benefit for the old-timer of having the fresh insight in someone who is quite possibly more objective and asks the question, 'Why do you do it that way?'" She said, "It causes you to rethink why you do things."

According to *U.S. News & World Report*, acting as a mentor can serve individuals well in their own careers. Mentors can benefit by:

- Building their professional networks
- Developing leadership and management skills
- Giving back to their profession
- Learning new ways to tackle old problems.

Gilfillan agrees wholeheartedly that all of the above have benefited her, but also added that mentoring energizes her. "It makes me more excited and passionate about the field. I've learned from all of my mentees," she said. "It keeps me interested and involved, and at conferences, I get excited about meeting up with them and sharing ideas."

#### NATIONAL AND REGIONAL OPPORTUNITIES

Naturally, many individuals don't look past their workplace when seeking mentors, but for some, it's either necessary or natural.

#### PROFESSIONAL ASSOCIATIONS

For example, the Independent Educational Consultants Association offers IECA associate and professional members the opportunity to work with a mentor at any time during their consultancy. Dooley explained that it's a beneficial six-month formal program, and it's fairly targeted. Once a mentee requests a mentor, he or she has the option to identify areas where he or she needs mentoring, depending on previous experience.

"If they're coming from higher ed, they might need mentoring about how to research colleges. School counselors might need to know the admission process," Dooley said. "When I get paired with a mentee, more often than not, they are ones who are working with international or expat students." Right up her alley.

Western ACAC offers a Leadership Development Institute (LDI). During the year-long commitment, participants attend a two-day workshops every January and are paired with mentors. The pairs even meet in person a few times a year, at WACAC and NACAC events.

Robynne Royster, executive director of admissions at Mills College in Oakland, California, is one of the mentors for LDI through WACAC. She said because of workshops through LDI and at NACAC, she has intentionally made contacts and followed people through their careers. Not shy about making connections, introducing individuals, and making an impact, she credits this type of mentorship, along with personal connections she's made, for the entire trajectory of her career.

### SOCIAL MEDIA

She's also developed relationships at the yearly NACAC conferences, and mentioned that social media can be a great way to seek mentorship opportunities. For example, she has been deeply involved with two Facebook groups, ACCEPT: Admissions Community Cultivating Equity and Peace Today, as well as Wonder Women in Admissions.

According to Royster, the ACCEPT Facebook group focuses on diversity, equity, access, gender, identity and more, whereas the Wonder Woman group celebrates the work of female-identified admission professionals. The Wonder Woman group provides space to ask for help with workplace dynamics, salary negotiations, etc., as well as highlights the work of women in the admission profession.

"I get to share in the similar sentiments of the founder, Nikki Chun from Cal Tech, that in the group, I get to be a total fangirl of some pretty fantastic women," said Royster. "This is mentorship! Sharing our stories helps us to reflect the diverse paths we all are on and is so helpful in building professional confidence, partnership, and wisdom."

### AFFILIATES

Kelly Meyer, college counselor at Roncalli High School in Indianapolis, serves as one of Indiana ACAC's professional development co-chairs, as well as the leader of the Indiana ACAC Mentorship Program Subcommittee.

When new admission and school counselors attend the Indiana ACAC's Summer Institute, Meyer encourages them to think about participating in their Indiana ACAC Mentorship Program. "We've found that this is a great time and place to present it to them and many of them will fill out an application there before leaving our conference, or submit one to us electronically shortly thereafter," she said.

A fairly simple and casual program, Indiana ACAC's Mentorship Program matches individuals on a rolling basis. "We ask applicants what 'type' of mentor or mentee they'd like—college side or high school side? Public or private? Two year or four year? What are your interests within the industry? Responsibilities within your office? Hobbies? You get the idea," Meyer said.

After matching and sharing contact information with mentor and mentee, next steps usually include the following:

### IDEAS FOR MENTORS

- **Begin with an offer to help.** "Honestly, I think it begins with an offer on my part: 'Anytime you need anything, I'm here,'" said Lesley Klecan, director of college counseling at St. Mary's School (OR) on working with brand-new teachers. "I usually follow it up with, 'Your office is really bare. Let me show you where you can get coasters in the art room. Something useful, helpful.'"
- **Encourage mentees to attend conferences** to enhance professional development opportunities. Many states sponsor beginner-specific professional development opportunities. "For admission folks, we sponsor Admission Counselor University, which is a professional development opportunity for admission representatives who are beginning their admission careers," said Iowa ACAC president Terri Crumley. "It's focused on networking opportunities and secrets/tips of the trade."
- **Encourage peer-to-peer networking.**
- **Connect those who need connecting.** "If you have someone in your office who is a road warrior and someone else who travels in that same area, maybe this will be a nice person to connect with, have dinner with," said Brian K. Smith, dean of college counseling at Marlborough School (CA).
- **Encourage young professionals to get involved with formal mentorship programs.**

- **Get them out of the office.** High school counselors shouldn't miss out on professional opportunities, either. "For high school counselors, we sponsor the R.I.D.E., or Rediscovering Iowa's Diverse Education," said Crumley, who is also assistant vice president for enrollment and dean of admissions at Mount Mercy University (IA). "It's basically a three-day road trip where we have high school counselors learn about colleges in Iowa and foster work relationships and mentoring."
- **Work at the relationship.** Get coffee, actually sit down for extended periods of time. Make time for your mentee. Listen. Follow a mentee's career and offer support when asked. Kelly Dutmers, college counselor at Saint Viator High School (IL), said Beth Gilfillan has done that for her. "As I navigated my way through those first couple of years I found myself being able to connect with Beth on the smallest of questions to the larger, more complex case scenarios, to even organizational and procedural matters," Dutmers said. "During this time it was clear that Beth became the definition and embodiment of what we as counseling graduate students learned the traits of an effective counselor to be: empathetic, advocate, always willing to help, genuine, authentic, caring and professional. Ultimately, Beth's mentoring helped begin to shape the repertoire of college counseling information I continued on to build for myself and for that I will be forever grateful!"

1. Encourage the pair to contact each other in a way that is convenient, usually by email or phone.
  2. Encourage everyone to attend their state conference (known in Indiana as "Congress") and to make plans to meet up with his or her mentor/mentee sometime during the event.
  3. Encourage mentor and mentee to meet up any other time throughout the year when attending shared events.
  4. Plan at least one big event per year for program participants and invite mentor/mentee pairs to do something non-work related together.
  5. Invite individuals to their IACAC Mentorship Program Facebook page for periodic posts and event advertisement.
- Meyer's own experience in the program was excellent. "I'm so glad that we have it. I've been a mentee on the college side, a mentor on the college side, and now that I'm brand new to the high school side, I have a new high school mentor who has been incredibly helpful in my transition."

### **CREATE A PROGRAM**

Gilfillan said she joined the North Atlantic Region Association for Counselor Education and Supervision (NARACES) when she started her doctoral program because knew the advantages of being a part of professional associations like NACAC and Illinois ACAC. "We were talking about what graduate students need, and I asked, 'Does NARACES have any mentoring opportunities?' They didn't, but everyone in the committee thought it was a great idea, and I volunteered to start it up."

Gilfillan set guidelines for the program, sent a few emails, added info to the website, and during the NARACES conference in the fall, organized a graduate student lounge where she introduced the idea with the committee members. "We now have 20 mentor-mentee matches," she said.

Gilfillan said she was thrilled by the response. "It showed me, 'Okay, there was a need for this, and people were excited on both sides.'"

### **ORGANIC MENTORSHIP**

Don't give formal mentoring program up completely, cautions Royster, though anecdotally, she's seen a trend that moves away from formal programs. "I think especially the next generation, the sense that I get is that younger folks look for natural, organic relationships. They don't want to sign up for your formal mentorship program," she explained. "They don't have the same expectations of that kind of relationship if you and I were hanging out, getting to know each other and developing our natural gifts."

In fact, Royster's experience as a mentor has never been formal. "It has never been calendar requests and time set aside. It has been, when the phone rings, someone picks up," she explained. "When you're at a conference, you see one another, and one of you says, 'Can we just sit and talk?'"

Royster's very own mentee lives right in Oakland, and Royster never misses an opportunity to say, "If you want to have a hot meal, we can get together to talk about work—and not work. We are, of course, [well-rounded] people." She said her door is always open and even her Thanksgiving table isn't off-limits. She's invited people to her house for the holiday and mentoring has happened there, too, right over cranberries, turkey, and gravy.

Klecan has walked into a situation before where a prearranged mentorship really didn't work. Prior to her work as a college counselor, she taught at St. Mary's School. "I had a situation of walking into some classes I'd never

taught," she said. "The department head said, 'I'm here if you ever need me,' and I never made it a point to go see him because he wasn't approachable and I just figured it out for myself."

Natural mentors have an approachability that makes people want to gravitate toward them, she said. "It doesn't matter how busy I am, I have time for you. I'm not looking at my phone, I'm not dealing with anything open on my computer. You walk in and I'm here for you," she said.

Klecan believes a welcoming setting makes a difference, too. She wants to make the two young teachers who are in her office every day feel instantly welcomed. Her office has six lights that ring the outer edge of her office, and she keeps her overhead lights off, shunning their clinical-feeling nature. "We call it the vault. What's said in the vault stays in the vault," Klecan said. "I do not share people's struggles with administration. What's said here, stays here."

### **WORTH IT**

It goes without saying that mentoring takes time. According to Kluver, the best mentorships are developed when you have time to talk and get to know individuals for lengthy periods of time.

Unfortunately, when working with students, time is not something many of individuals have. "These days, people are often too busy to take the mentoring thing seriously as part of their jobs," said Lady.

Kluver agreed, "I think the hectic nature of the work we do in admission makes it a real challenge. You have to be really intentional to make time and space for open-ended conversations." He continued, "It's one thing to the next, one cycle to the next, one season to the next, one meeting to the next. There's not a lot of idle time for those types of conversations that can take place. The key is being intentional."

For those who do make time, mentors can cite umpteen feel-good moments to cherish.

"Honestly," Klecan said with a laugh, "The things that cracked me up this year, or as my mother would say, 'That tickled me the most,' I just became Snapchat buddies with a teacher I'm mentoring..."

The young teacher recently got a tattoo and felt she needed to Snap her about it. "She sends me these snaps, and I have to be about twice her age, right?" Klecan said. "But I'm not her mom, I'm her colleague, and I'm here for her, and I just think, truly, being Snapchat buddies with my colleague... that's a feel-good moment."

Being there for people allows mentoring to happen even without labeling it, according to Lady. In fact, she said her first director was incredible and she didn't even recognize the steps she'd taken to mentor her. "She pushed me out into traffic," she said. "She encouraged me to coach sports, work for a mentor freshman group, organize things like bowling outings. If I failed, she said, 'Okay, what did you learn? What do you try next?' That was huge for me as a counselor."

Lady now spends her time "pushing her colleagues into traffic." After all, she has mentors in the making. "If you're going to build future leaders, you have to build future mentors. You can't walk away. It's not professionally responsible." □

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