Syracuse University

Faculty Mentoring in a Networked World

Section 5:

Sensitivity to Differences

The complete version of the toolkit, each section and individual forms are available to download at http://suadvance.syr.edu (look for Mentoring Resources). The complete printed version of the toolkit is available for order also at the website.

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Sensitivity to Differences

Attending to gender, race, ethnicity, disability. and other differences

Background

Everyone brings to the mentoring relationship their own experiences and values which vary according to cultural affiliations and background. There are inherent challenges to mentoring across gender, race, ethnicity, disability and other differences that need to be recognized and addressed. Our social behavior is driven by schemas that operate automatically - and therefore unconsciously - when we interact with other people. Briefly, schemas or mental short cuts are assumptions about objects, processes and people that we hold and utilize, consciously and unconsciously, to form opinions, and guide our decisions and actions. We use these to reserve mental energy for more critical tasks. Virginia Valian (1999) points out that gender schemas can influence our perceptions, often causing both men and women to view women in ways that give them an accumulation of disadvantages and give men advantages. These behaviors and consequences also hold true across all differences making it important that we monitor our assumptions and how we use them as filters. Check out the references and resources section to learn more.

Stereotypes

Stereotypes are categories or sets of beliefs that we associate with members of a group. They can be positive or negative and/or benevolent or hostile. Our behaviors can be unconsciously biased unless we deliberately seek to check and amend the assumptions.

Implicit Bias

Implicit bias explains why behavior persists even in people who value objectivity, equity and inclusion. Implicit bias is hard to recognize in oneself or prove because it is often unintentional: without conscious awareness (Kang, 2009).

Stereotype Threat

Roberson & Kulik (2007) described this as a reduction in performance because of the expectation or application of bias based on stereotypes rather than actual performance and potential.

Differences and Developmental Obstacles

Potential obstacles for faculty

Adapted from David A. Thomas (2001):

Negative Stereotypes about Ability: A mentor who questions ability based on negative stereotypes might, for example, withhold support until the mentee has proven her or himself. Or the mentee may feel that s/he must over-prepare before reaching for the next step because of their experience with past bias or because of stereotype threat. People from underrepresented groups may also get polarized evaluations from students or peers. Expect all mentees to succeed.

Prove It Again! Studies show that, in jobs historically held by men in the majority group, men are presumed to be competent, while women, underrepresented minorities or those with disabilities often have to prove their competence over and over again. Mistakes by people in underrepresented groups are more likely to be remembered. One of the most common examples of "Prove it Again!" is the double standard that men are judged on their potential, while women are judged strictly on what they already have accomplished.

Lack of Identification with Peers and Few Role Models: Strong mentoring relationships are more likely to form when you can see commonalities in each other. Explore common ground and actually share experiences. Help the mentee to connect with role models and mentors on campus who are similar in gender, race, ethnicity, disability or other differences to help counter isolation.

Skepticism about Intimacy: People may question the relationship. For example, people may think the mentor has an ulterior motive for mentoring such as "feeling sorry" for the person. Or, some might think the mentee is selling out their culture by having a mentor from another group.

Public Scrutiny: If cross-differences mentoring relationships are rare in your organization, they may draw undue attention.

Peer Resentment: Mentee's peers may question whether a mentee has an extra benefit by being paired with strong mentors only because of their gender, race, ethnicity, disability or other difference. This is especially true if mentoring is not accessible to all, or mentoring is one-to-one.

Protective Hesitation or Exclusion: Occurs when either the mentor or mentee refrain from discussing differences or when a mentee is not referred for an assignment because of differences. Mentees from underrepresented groups advance further when mentors understand and acknowledge potential barriers caused by bias. The trust developed through caring and honest discussion can be rewarding.

Assumed Similarity: The assumption that our values, beliefs and behaviors are similar to others leading to expectations about how people should act and feel. An example is being "color blind" or the well intentioned idea of treating everyone equally but ignoring the differences that shape experiences.

Assumed Generalizations: The assumption all individuals of the same group have identical beliefs and behaviors.

Double Jeopardy: When two or more stereotypes apply, the individual bears negative consequences for each. Female faculty who are parents, for example, experience stronger (negative) reactions to their parenting responsibilities combined with gender than male faculty.

> **For more information about these and other challenges, refer to the references, links, and resources section of this booklet, or seek out experts on campus through the SU ADVANCE office.**

Mentoring Across Differences

Creating effective developmental relationships

Everyone brings to the work environment the experiences and values of their culture(s), often gravitating towards individuals who remind them of themselves (Johnson, 2002). As a result, there are inherent challenges to mentoring across differences (gender, race, ethnicity, (dis)ability and other differences) that need to be recognized and addressed. The philosophy we use to guide our actions needs to be carefully considered. Best practices grounded in a strong personal philosophy of inclusion and equity will facilitate closer, fuller and more helpful developmental relationships .

- **Diversity is an asset for an organization and will make it stronger.**

- **Maintain helpful personal attitudes** including appreciation of differences and practicing genuineness.

- **Everyone is shaped** by their personal background and experiences.

- **Acknowledge that everyone is working across and through boundaries** that make it impossible for any of us to fully know and understand another's context and experiences.

- **Acknowledge that bias can pose significant obstacles** to a faculty member's career.

- **Disabilities can be visible or invisible.** The individual may or may not choose to reveal they have a disability. For example, someone with early stages of rheumatoid arthritis may not appear to have a disability but requires an ergonomic assessment to optimize their workspace to relieve stress on their joints. Psychiatric disabilities are also often invisible or hidden. Dr. Elyn Saks is an example of a top-flight academic (won the MacArthur Genius Award) who openly discusses her disability.

Adapted from Alford, 1998; Gender Equity Guide for Department Chairs 2008; Girves, et. al. 2005; Harley, 2005; Johnson, 2002; Johnson-Bailey and Cervero, 2002; Mentoring Across Differences, 2013; Moody, 2004; and Thomas, 2001.

- **Make a concerted effort to first listen and learn from a mentee who is from an underrepresented group.** This supports successful discussion of disability, race, ethnicity, gender and other differences throughout the relationship.

- **Practice self-reflection about mentoring, gender, race, disability and other differences.** Consider what you believe, what makes you uncomfortable and the assumptions you make that impact your ability to be a mentor. Look at your mental model of what makes a good scientist or engineer and ask if it needs adjustment. Frequently self-assess in this area.

- **Be continuously curious.** Act on what you know while also seeking insight and a broader perspective on bias, equality, diversity and inclusion.

- **Become gender/culturally competent:** Seek out opportunities to become more self-aware and skilled.

- **Advocate for fully inclusive work environments.** When policies and practice give advantage to one group over another, advocate for changes. Physical space should be accessible, alternate formats/media should be available, and clear messages about the availability of accommodations should be provided. Common use of these strategies creates an inclusive environment.

Mentoring at Different Career Stages

Rank and time-in-rank carry different support needs

Developmental networks can be an effective strategy for supporting goal achievement for faculty in various stages of their careers. Goals may change substantially from one stage to the next, and the members of a developmental network will as well.

Early Career Faculty

- Access to a Developmental Network Coach to facilitate networking and connecting to resources.
- Departmental and University Orientation
- Knowledge about department/university history, priorities, norms, structures, practices and resources
- Clear role expectations and performance criteria
- A plan for key career evaluation points (3rd year review, tenure, promotion)
- Grants and Publications: What are the early expectations?
- Research support and guidance to determine priorities and avoid pitfalls, for example in managing research assistance.
- Classroom management and advisement
- Service: priorities, when to say yes, when to say now, and appropriate time/energy to devote
- Facilitate campus and social engagement to prevent isolation and build networks
- Department citizenship – collegiality, negotiating workload, department culture
- Making time for work-life balance and personal well-being
- Skill development for collaboration and entrepreneurial work.

Senior Faculty

- Strategies for advancement from Associate to Full Professor
- University citizenship
- Advocating for equity in assignments, salaries and rewards for job performance.
- Pursing awards and recognition
- Mentor training
- Team leadership training
- Leadership development
- Staying motivated and productive
- Strengthening the department
- New research directions, entrepreneurial ventures and collaborative projects
- Family and health needs

Chairs

- Chair's role: expectations, deadlines, processes, and policies.
- Inclusive and innovative leadership
- Staff relations, performance, and support
- Difficult conversations, managing others, understanding your leadership style

- Balancing management and scholarship
- Mentor training
- Finding supportive and helpful mentors for faculty
- Building a developmental network of one's own: identifying resources and mentors