

Three Ombuds, Two Books, and One Tip Sheet

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ABSTRACT

Three ombuds from different academic institutions organized a book group to read *The Mentor's Guide: Facilitating Effective Learning Relationships*, 2nd edition by Lois J. Zachary and *The Mentee's Guide: Making Mentoring Work for You* by Lois J. Zachary and Lory A. Fischler. This article reviews both of the books together and demonstrates one way in which book groups can enrich communities of practice with an example resource for ombuds.

KEYWORDS

Mentoring, book review, ombudsman

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INTRODUCTION

Mentors. Mentoring. A simple search reveals a variety of approaches to mentoring, from informal to highly structured, from ad hoc to programmatic, for personal and professional environments, and with an emphasis on particular populations and specialized situations.

Ombuds are familiar with situations when mentoring relationships have soured: the student who complains that the mentor is unavailable; the faculty mentor who struggles with a demanding student mentee; the junior faculty mentee who is seeking a mentor or complains that the senior mentor does not understand her difficulties; the well-regarded researcher who has been “adopted” by an enthusiastic graduate student; and the manager who regrets being assigned to an underperforming employee. Mentoring is central to faculty, employee, and student development, but most people have not received training on how to mentor.

While an ombuds may respond to individual cases, is it enough that the ombuds can recognize the traffic, or that the ombuds knows how and why it is occurring? What is the role of an ombuds in addressing problems in mentoring relationships? Can an ombuds enhance these unique professional relationships and reduce the likelihood of such situations occurring in the first place and, if so, how? It is with these questions and an interest in information about principles of mentoring that we read two companion books, *The Mentor’s Guide: Facilitating Effective Learning Relationships* (Zachary, 2012) and *The Mentee’s Guide: Making Mentoring Work for You* (Zachary & Fischler, 2009).

In this piece, we review the companion books together, reflect on our experience reading these books, and suggest an approach to providing useful resources for our visitors and organizations that may encourage successful mentoring relationships.

REVIEW

The Mentor’s Guide and *Mentee’s Guide* are two books about cultivating the relationships that are so central to professional development and success of peoples’ careers. Zachary, a seasoned human development professional, organizational consultant, and adult educator, sees mentoring as only partially concerned with the transfer of knowledge. Rather, her focus is on a process-oriented relationship encompassing critical reflection and personal growth for both mentor and mentee. Relying on principles of adult education, Zachary describes mentoring, “as a reciprocal and collaborative relationship between two or more individuals who share mutual responsibility and accountability for helping a mentee work toward achieving clear and mutually defined learning goals” (Zachary, pg 28, 2002). The emphasis on mutual responsibility and accountability is evident throughout the books through a series of exercises, vignettes, and narrative all demonstrating the mentor has as much to gain from the relationship as the mentee.

Both books are structured according to the phases of the mentor-mentee relationship. Sequential chapters entitled *Preparing Yourself*, *Establishing Agreements*, *Doing the Work* (or *Enabling Growth* in the mentor book), and *Closure of the Relationship* make up the bulk of both books. Throughout these chapters Zachary inserts thought-provoking checklists and reflective questions that encourage both mentor and mentee to individually assess and monitor the relationship. For example, in the section, *A Working Plan for Achieving Learning Goals* within the chapter on establishing agreements of the *Mentor’s Guide* (entitled *Negotiating: Establishing Agreements*)

describes the following suggested steps: Identifying the learning goals and success criteria, Lay out the objectives, Identify the learning tasks, List potential resources, and Set a target date. This discussion is followed by a worksheet to assist mentors in articulating the plan.

Zachary's emphasis on reflective practices is evident through most of the lists and worksheets provided. In the Mentee's Guide, the chapter, Preparing Yourself to Make the Most of Mentoring, asks the reader to examine their own milestones, accomplishments, liabilities, and false assumptions in a personal reflection exercise. Other helpful examples from this chapter include a self-directed gap analysis examining the differences between one's vision and one's current competencies, a guide to inventorying one's skills, and a primer to assist a mentee in finding their own learning style.

The point of all these tables, lists, and exercises is to bring both the mentor and mentee into an awareness and dialogue about one another's individual goals of the mentoring experience and to then negotiate the best method for each to accomplish those goals. In support of this journey, Zachary devotes a good deal of time to addressing obstacles and distractions to effective mentoring practice in both guides. Vignettes, though mostly set in a corporate environment, are generally applicable to other sectors and present the reader with stories where mentees and mentors cross personal boundaries, violate ground rules, press "hot buttons," or break assumptions of confidentiality. Although dialogue in these stories is occasionally contrived, overall the vignettes present easily imagined scenarios that disrupt the mentoring experience. Zachary's intention with these examples reinforces her philosophy of critical reflection, identifying needs and goals, and negotiating process as a means of both preventing and correcting unfulfilling mentoring relationships.

The final sections of both guides discuss closure of the mentor-mentee experience. Zachary advocates for closure protocols that are ideally developed at the onset of the relationship. Acknowledging the emotions, discomfort, and anxiety that attend unplanned conclusion of the mentoring process, Zachary provides the readers with vignettes, scripts, and importantly, guidance for planning closure that is based on learning goals originally negotiated at the outset of the relationship. Many experienced mentors and mentees who have been troubled with this phase will find practical advice in these chapters. Both guides are supplemented with an extensive list of resources for further reading and reflection on mentoring, adult learning styles, effective communication, and goal setting.

For people seeking a comprehensive exploration of how effective mentoring relationships are built and maintained, both of these guides will be satisfying. Readers with a more narrow interest in specific aspects of mentoring will be rewarded by the guides' structure. Certainly, experienced mentors will find reading an individual chapter enhancing to their own mentoring practice though they may find reading the entire book redundant in parts where the reader has already developed their own style. Mentees struggling with a particular phase of mentoring will be similarly rewarded relying on the Mentee's Guide handbook format.

Ombuds will appreciate having these guides on their bookshelf or quick access to ready-to-use charts and checklists to use with visitors. The guides' focus on clarifying the distinct goals of mentors and mentees will provide ombuds with insights for probing sources of conflict and possible solutions for ombuds whose caseloads include problems arising from mentoring relationships. In particular, the mentee guide is replete with reflective approaches that ombuds will find helpful in assisting mentees to self-advocate with their mentors. Whether coaching individual mentees or mentors or facilitating discussions to clarify and reappraise the interactions characteristic of their relationship, ombuds can enhance their expertise and agility with these unique, sometimes difficult, but common relationships. They may also find that the guides provide a useful starting place to customize materials for their organizations.

The two-page resource which follows, *Mentoring Keys for Success*, has been developed for use by those who wish to promote the development of mentoring relationships at their institutions. This simple, accessible guide can assist mentors and mentees as they develop their own mentoring relationships.

REFLECTION

This book review is the second time we have undertaken to read a text and write a review for the JIOA. Our first reading project together was such an enriching professional experience, we thought to do it again. As before, we established a plan to read and discuss the books, arranged conference calls to discuss our observations and reflections, and circulated running notes to digest our conversations.

In this second reading project, the books seemed to parallel each other and were quite practical. We decided to read them simultaneously, allowing us to see how the authors presented the same information to different audiences. The books provoked practical discussions about our work, which led us to produce a practical and useful guide, based on the essential elements of both books.

APPENDIX:
MENTORING KEYS FOR SUCCESS

Topic	Joint Responsibility	Mentor's Responsibility	Mentee's Responsibility
Establish the learning partnership	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Define and agree on scope and nature of relationship • Work out 'ground rules' for interactions • Develop a written agreement, include schedule of meeting dates • Plan for contingencies 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Assess capacity to mentor • Determine how to structure meetings • Identify role and goals • Consider term of relationship 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Develop timeline of major events, accomplishments, challenges • Assess capacity to be a mentee • Identify purpose and goals of mentoring relationship
Communication	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Identify primary means of contact • Teach and learn in every interaction • Search for the true and useful • Include opportunities for reflection 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Set and adjust as necessary for effectiveness • Include regular check-ins 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Seek out and consider opinions different from your own • Be curious • Analyze and attach meaning to data and interactions
Feedback	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Create opportunities for reflection, getting and giving feedback • Consider frequency, means • Revise as needed 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Ask mentee how they like to get feedback • Work to find optimal means and frequency 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Identify feedback preferences, e.g. how much, when, form • Share feedback about mentoring experience
Overcoming obstacles	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Commit to dealing with problems as they arise • Consider consulting with your organization's ombudsman 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Check in with mentee at each meeting to monitor and assess • Clarify a follow up plan 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Share problems and concerns openly • Ask for help when you need it
Concluding the relationship	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Set a tentative date to conclude • Check in with your partner 2 months prior 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Allow time in the last couple of meetings to wrap up, consider next steps 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Share insights, and highlights • Cover lessons learned / challenges

MAKE A PLAN FOR MENTORING

If you are interested in having — or being — a mentor to a student or colleague, consider developing a plan to help make sure that you both get what you want out of this experience.

A learning partnership can benefit both people. Adult learners can build skills and take advantage of a colleague's experience and expertise through a customized plan designed to fit their specific needs and availability to engage.

Before beginning, it's helpful to reflect on one's path to date by plotting a timeline with major events, accomplishments, and challenges. A review of these data points will inform your personal development — where your personal and professional goals, values, and commitments overlap or diverge. And perhaps act as a guide to future possibilities.

As someone who is looking for a mentor, it will be helpful to recognize what kind of experience you are looking for, what you are hoping to accomplish, and who might be able to provide you with that kind of support. Knowledge about your own personal learning style will help you and your mentor play to this strength.

As a mentor, understanding what experience and skills you bring to a mentoring relationship will help determine if you are a good match; it's also helpful to think about what you might learn from serving as a mentor to someone.

This brief guide is intended as a place to start, with a template to help open the discussion around logistics and goals. It can also help gauge the interest of both parties and help you come to a mutual understanding on key topics.

You may also find the following resources helpful:

Mentor's Guide: Facilitating Effective Learning Relationships, by Lois J. Zachary

The Mentee's Guide: Making Mentoring Work for You, by Lois J. Zachary with Lory Fischler

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