

National Leadership Workshop on Mentoring Women in Biomedical Careers

**Office of Research on Women's Health
and NIH Working Group on Women
in Biomedical Careers**

**Julia E. Brittain Ph.D.
BIRCWH Scholar***

***NICHD, OD-ORWH, and NIEHS**

WHAT IS A MENTOR?

“Every man has within himself a continent of undiscovered character. Happy is he who proves the Columbus of his soul.”- Goethe

“A mentor is a special type of **volunteer**. A mentor is an individual committed to helping a student, identified as an at-risk, and a potential dropout, get his/her life -- **academically, socially, mentally and physically** -- back together. He is committed to expending the time and energy necessary to put the student on the right track. The role of the mentor is **multi-faceted**. A mentor is a **big brother/sister, role model, and most of all a friend to the student.**”

What is a mentor?

Lessons from the San Diego Zoo



Chimpanzee

1. Learning is quite loud (screeching)
2. Lots of things get broken
3. Frustrating trial and error

Mentoring
→
"show me
how"



Orangutan

1. Thoughtful approach
2. First attempt is usually correct
3. Efficient at task mastering
4. Fewer things get broken

What I've learned from my mentors

How to write
How to speak
How to be successful
How to handle failure
How to persevere
How to do research
How to teach someone
to do research
How to be a mentee
How to go after what I want
How to conduct myself
How to stay positive
How to shut up
How to ask for advice
How to follow advice
How to use time
How to love what I do
How to think
How the data usually don't lie
How to make others successful
How to take the high road
How to handle politics
How to promote myself
How to invest in an individual

How to balance
How to create a positive place
How to build a team
How to be fearless
How to publish
How to be absolutely still
How to respond in a crisis
How to recognize a crisis
How to avoid a crisis
How to pick a good mentor
How to say NO
How to say not now
How to say yes
How to let go of the past
How to set goals for the future
How to take responsibility
How and when to take control
How to get a free lunch
How to ask the best questions
How to interact with colleagues
How to make people think about me
How to get left alone
How to hire someone really good
How to take the time I need

How to tolerate IRBs
How to cut through red tape
How to *really* take action
How to challenge paradigms
How to get out of a bad spot
How to transition your career
How to go where the data take you
How to use the administration
How to not go it alone
How to know this is up to me
How to end a project
How to be patient
How to push and push and push
How to recruit people
How to prioritize
How to use punctuation
How to proofread
How to lead
How to read and read and read
How to be political
How to take credit
How to stand up for those that can't
How to tolerate incompetence
How to simply be the best.

How they taught me the “how” of my career

1. **Modeling modeling modeling**

Not your traditional parenting paradigm of the 50's
Male and female mentor – co-mingled roles

2. **“Shut up and listen”**

Give me the whole picture “you don’t know the whole story”
Drill sergeant “Don’t get upset, just fix it”
“Julie, finish your dissertation”
“Julie, you gotta quit making the phlebotomists mad”
Constructive criticism

3. **This is out of my league – go here**

Point me to resources

How they taught me how to mentor

1. Modeling modeling modeling

2. Gave me opportunities to mentor, in a mentored fashion

Rotation students

Medical students / fellows

My own technician

3. Mentoring workshops, exposing me to new mentoring opportunities

Summary

Yes – mentoring can be taught!

Yes – you can turn a chimp into an orangutan, by showing them HOW to be an orangutan.

Acknowledgements

Leslie V. Parise
Eugene P. Orringer
John M. Thorp
Patricia Byrns

Vivian W. Pinn
Joyce Rudick