

Ways of Mentoring: The Impact of Peer Mentoring on Student Success

Cassandra Brooks

Salisbury University

It was once said, “at the end of the day, people may not remember what you said or what you did, but they will always remember how you made them feel.” I believe there is no better quote that can be applied towards peer mentorship. By the time a mentee is walking across the stage at graduation, they may not remember exact words or actions from their mentor, but they will remember all those difficult moments their mentor helped them through throughout their collegiate career. Mentoring not only provides the mentee the feeling of confidence in all courses throughout their undergraduate degree, but it is reciprocal in the sense that the mentor is also given a gratifying feeling when seeing the students succeed.

A Supplemental Instruction Leader is someone who was successful in a historically difficult class, who then assists students in the class to reach their full potential. I have had the privilege of fulfilling this position for a year and a half, in a general chemistry course. In this role, I help guide students’ thought processes to achieve the best grade possible for the individual. Many people compare this job to the job description of a Teacher’s Assistant, but I do not see it like that. I never teach students or instruct classes, but I help them find studying techniques that work for them, and can then be applied to other courses. I believe my approach is to guide the thought process, and then allow students to be able to answer questions for themselves. This thought process then comes back to them at the time of the quiz or exam, rather than memorizing the steps to a question. As a Supplemental Instruction Leader, I am able to guide the students in a group setting two nights a week, where they can bounce ideas off each other, and only use me as someone to keep their ideas flowing.

Although it is not the only way to be successful as a mentor, I tend to find that the best way to facilitate a Supplemental Instruction session is without standing in front of the chalk board the entire time, writing equations and doing chemistry problems, but instead sitting in a circle with a small white board that can be used for when the students get stuck. When this approach is used, the students are more likely to talk to one another to work a question out, rather than wait for me to go over it on the board. This reinforces the idea of students working together and forming thought processes, rather than memorizing what someone wrote on the board. With these new established thought processes, students are able to leave Supplemental Instruction and apply study skills to other courses. I also think it better creates an environment in which the mentees see me on their level, rather as a superior. When this relationship is established, I believe they are more likely to come to me with any of their problems, including ones from other classes, and even from their personal life, that they need to talk to someone about.

Contrary to what many would expect, a mentor gains as much as they pass forward. Peer mentoring has allowed me, as the mentor, to gain more skills than I ever could have imagined. Not only have I gained and strengthened vital leadership skills, such as communication, positivity, time management, and responsibility, but this role has also given me the chance to stay up to date with my basic general education knowledge, which keeps me from falling behind on the basics in other classes. There is no more rewarding feeling than when I continually help struggling students in classes, and they come back and tell me they received an A on their exam, or that a student that I mentored in the previous semester has now been asked to join the Supplemental Instruction Leader team as a mentor. I may not remember exactly how I explained the complicated concepts

of the exam, but I remember the rewarding feeling of helping another feel empowered by their knowledge.

Peer mentoring is a vital aspect of Salisbury University that helps students become better leaders, thrive in the classroom, and reach their maximum potential. I am honored to be a part of such a program that guides students on their way to their path to success.