

Hi folks,

In preparing this years workshop sessions, I came across this article from California State University. It comes out of their student mentor program through the Educational Opportunity Program (EOP).

Personally, I substituted the words boss, consultant, facilitator, expert advisor for mentor and realized that this was having resonance to me in the way I prepared, wrote, responded and mentored. Compared to a couple of much longer books I have read, this one simple article has stuck with me now for months.

Can I ask you to read this and consider the questions before or on your way to this years workshop.

See you all in Hobart

Matthew

Overcoming the “Super Mentor Complex”

One ancient Greek myth tells the story of a superhero who in every fight was able to conquer any opponent. This superhero gained his power from touching the earth. Thus, whenever he faced a strong opponent, he knew that he could triumph by touching the earth to gain an advantage. This superhero was finally defeated when a smart opponent lifted him up so that he could not touch the earth. In this way, the smart opponent overpowered the seemingly invincible superhero.

Like all ancient myths, this tale has wisdom for today. Specifically for mentors in our EOP community, this myth helps to dispel the “Super Mentor Complex” and reminds all mentors to stay “grounded.” Some beginning mentors aspire to become Super Mentors. Super Mentors are able to help everybody and are able to handle every situation. Super Mentors help others but do not need the help of others. Super Mentors are able to cope with their own serious personal and family problems by themselves and do not allow these problems to get in the way of mentoring others. Super Mentors see mentoring as competition, and they are determined to show that they can handle all challenges better than others by handling them by themselves. Super Mentors are self-contained individuals who believe that their power as mentors comes from within themselves and not from the community that surrounds them. Of course, there is no such thing as a Super Mentor. However, we can say that there are many examples of mentors “defeated” by the Super Mentor Complex. Sadly, they are not able to fool others for long, but some continue to fool themselves. How and why do some mentors become influenced by the Super Mentor Complex?

Within EOP, mentors become powerful only by reaching out to and “touching” their community. This community consists of their fellow mentors. However, under certain conditions, mentors may not reach out to their community and instead try to project the image of a Super Mentor. For Student Assistant Mentors, this can happen during times of stress, such as during midterms or finals or during family or personal crises. During these times, they project the image of serving as mentors even though others around them quickly see through this image. Thus, some of the early warning signs of the Super Mentor Syndrome are questions raised by others, such as “Why do you look mad?,” “Are you feeling tired?, or “Are you stressed today?”

The best ways to overcome the Super Mentor Complex are to recognize its early warning signs. Answer the questions on the following page to learn about which early warning signs may already be present in your life.

Early Warning Signs: “Super Mentor Complex”

When you face stressful academic situations such as midterms and finals, how do these situations affect your role as a Student Assistant Mentor?

- ☐ a. I handle these situations really well, and no one I’m working with knows that I’m under stress.
- ☐ b. I keep my feelings to myself and try to focus on doing my work.
- ☐ c. I know that others around me notice my stress, but I don’t want to talk about it.
- ☐ d. When I feel stress, I talk with mentors to get advice so that it doesn’t affect my work.
- ☐ e. When I feel stress, I want to learn how to use mentors in my community
- ☐ f. Other answer: _____

When you face stressful family and personal situations, how do these situations affect your role as a Student Assistant Mentor?

- ☐ a. I handle these situations really well, and no one I’m working with knows that I’m feeling stress.
- ☐ b. I keep my feelings to myself and try to focus on doing my work.
- ☐ c. I know that others around me notice my stress, but I don’t want to talk about it.
- ☐ d. When I feel stress, I talk with mentors to get advice so that it doesn’t affect my work.
- ☐ e. When I feel stress, I want to learn how to use mentors in my community
- ☐ f. Other answer: _____

When you face stressful situations (academic, family, or personal), what effect does your stress have on people you are interacting with, especially students you are helping?

- ☐ a. I don’t think it has any impact because I handle stress well and others don’t know that I’m under a lot of stress.
- ☐ b. People know that I’m under a lot of stress, but they would say that I still do a good job helping them.
- ☐ c. When I’m under a lot of stress, people don’t usually ask me for help.
- ☐ d. When I’m under a lot of stress, people say that I look angry.
- ☐ e. When I’m under a lot of stress, I don’t talk to people and only focus on doing work.
- ☐ f. Other answer: _____

Among mentors in your community, who do you think handles stressful situations well?

What do these mentors do that you feel is effective for dealing with stressful situations?

For the students you are mentoring, what do you want to teach them about handling stressful situations (academic, family, or personal) well?
