Making the Most of Mentoring
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Session Overview

1. About me.
2. Why this session?
3. Aims?
4. Particular Questions/ Queries?
What is Mentoring?

There may be leading experts in your field with whom you work, scholars who are superstars, whose recommendation would mean the world. But if they make you feel anxious and crap, then they aren’t your mentor. They might be your boss or your supervisor, and that’s that. But they are not your mentor (or at least not a good one).
What is Mentoring?

Be alert to the difference. A mentor should not see you, instrumentally, as a way to get what they want. A mentor will help you work out what you want—or work out that what you think you want might not be what you actually want, or what you need.
Why do we need mentors?

A good mentor will not gaslight you. That is, their version of reality will dovetail somewhat with yours, and they will respect your version of events. This is not to say that they won’t tell you to pull your head in if you are displaying grandiosity, paranoia or unnecessary self-abnegation. I’ve been nurturingly managed through the performance of all three by caring mentors. But it is to say that they will always take your account of things with the respect and the gravity that it deserves.
Why do we need mentors?

This matters a lot, particularly when if you encounter the academy from a position of marginality, whether for reasons of class, gender, disability, mental-health, and, cultural/racial background. It is of upmost importance that you find a mentor who sees, with you, the forces that preclude your full participation, and helps you navigate them as dextrously and self-preservingly as possible.
Why do we need mentors?

Practical?
Emotional?
Political?
Intellectual?
How do you find mentors?

Think about relationships that you have experienced in the academy where you have felt properly seen and supported. Think about the people who have made you feel valued and energised and safe. Hopefully there are a few at least. A good mentoring relationship will instil those feelings in you.
How do you find mentors?

- Colleagues?
- Managers?
- Reputation?
- Supervisors?
How do you approach mentors?

If you have identified someone that you trust and admire, and from whom you would like to be mentored, offer to buy them a coffee and tell them what you admire. Tell them how their work has influenced yours. Or, tell them that you respect the way that they conduct themselves in meetings.

Express precisely what it is that made you seek them out. If you say to someone ‘mentor me’, that is a demand. But if you convey to someone that you have registered them, and thought about their capacities and generosities, then that is a much warmer and relational start.
How do you approach mentors?

- Always ask them something specific at the first meeting, but nothing that asks them to do extra work. Just ask for advice. Should I publish here or here? How would you handle this thorny intellectual problem?

- Now that I am an experienced lady of middle age (44), I am delighted if some of my hard won experience can save someone some time and stress. And I think many academics are the same.
Good mentors love to mentor because it helps them make sense of their own experiences. It also enables them to protect younger scholars from some of the mistakes they made, as well as some of the more pernicious aspects of the academy. So, your job as a mentee is to have your radar on, to ascertain whether this person has your interests at heart, and whether they want you to flourish on your own terms.

If you find that person, the other part of your job as a mentee is to be appreciative. Let them know that you recognise their labour, and let them know that you are paying it forward to other scholars, who are coming up in your wake.
What’s in it for them?

- Say Thank You
- Nominate them for Awards
- Use notes and acknowledgements judiciously
- Ask them to launch books
- Festschrift (humanities)