



Tell Your Story Newsletter (TYSN):

Specializing in Entrepreneurial and Organizational Storytelling

Let me tell your story!

Welcome Mid-August, 2019!

With Saskatoon's summer festival season now winding down and our sun-bleached days giving way to cool, fall wind, I'm delighted to be back in the office to pen another issue of this newsletter.

I hope that you have had a good summer, with plenty of time out of doors and in the company of family and friends.

In Jane Austen's *Mansfield Park*, the narrator observes says that "to sit in the shade on a fine day and look upon verdure is the most perfect refreshment." I'm especially glad for the friends who have shared such time with me (along with lemonade or watermelon)! And our mid-summer rain created the kind of lush, green landscape that Austen has immortalized.

In this issue, I discuss the meaning of mentorship--or, in particular, "mentorability"--as discussed by researcher Victoria Black (Texas State University) in a recent TEDTalk on the topic. I have only gratitude for my mentor, Monica Kreuger, as I discuss in the article, below.

I wish you well in these "dog days" of summer. And may you have a good start to the autumn season! As we all plan our schedules, I wish you a program year of good health, personal growth and (in every sense) prosperity.

Sincerely,
Elizabeth

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Article One: What is "Mentorship" really about? Some answers from two TEDTalk writers and speakers

Many artists, writers and entrepreneurs know that finding a good mentor can greatly alter one's life, often by helping to transform one's career. When we talk about mentoring, then, we often focus on the strengths of the mentor.

In a recent Ted.Com article, Lenora Houseworth-Weston suggests that it's long past due for us to consider what it takes to be a good "*mentee*" or *protege*.

She suggests that proteges should:

- (1) Appreciate the value of a mentor's time--by arriving on time and not missing appointments without notice;
- (2) By being clear about what kind of guidance we are seeking and articulating that as distinctly as possible;
- (3) By being open to new ideas and constructive criticism;
- (4) By periodically reflecting on how well we're doing with these expectations.

Houseworth-Weston cites a TedTalk by Victoria Black, director of a peer-mentoring and coaching program (Texas State University), who suggests that all proteges (or mentees) should ask themselves five questions before starting to work with a mentor, in order to take responsibility for their part, as proteges:

- (1) When were you last in a mentoring relationship?
- (2) What was the experience like?
- (3) Did you know what to expect?
- (4) Did you now how to engage in that partnership?
- (5) Did you understand your role and responsibility, as a protege?

Black suggests that we tend to think of mentoring as a top-down process in which the mentor looks down to the protege and in which the knowledge and support flow only in that one direction.

When studying 187 mentoring programs in four-year public training programs in Texas, Black found that these programs were four times more likely to address the role of the mentor than that of the protege, even when the stated purpose of the program was to help in the development of the latter.

No one was telling proteges what to expect or talking to them in any preparatory way.

In fact, as Houseworth-Weston writes, "Success is not just having a mentor tell you or show you what to do. It's a two-way relationship" that is mutually beneficial and rewarding.

And toward reorienting the focus on the protege, Black introduces the term "mentorability" as important.

"Mentorability" refers to "the willingness to understand that we grow from others, as others grow from us."

There are, Black says, (at least) three parts to mentorability that can enhance our experience of mentoring relationships: they are commitment, reciprocity and vulnerability.

Black suggests that these three components are needed, if both parties are to thrive in the mentoring relationship. Proteges everywhere would do well to consider these three components of the mentoring dialogue:

(1) Commitment--proteges need to be prompt in our responses, mentally attuned and proactive about how we engage in partnerships. Being committed means making in-person meetings very fruitful, doing our homework, asking how we can mentor our mentors and making our questions good ones.

(2) Reciprocity--as part of recognizing that our relationship is two-directional, proteges should add to the knowledge and/or strength of our mentors.

(3) Vulnerability and/or open-mindedness--as humans, proteges find it very hard to change our behaviours and attitudes. But if we stay open to a new strategy or way of operating, we can alter the course of our lives--both professional and personal.

Instead of merely falling into meeting as a mentor or a protege, Black suggests that we should "LIVE [our] mentorability."

Working with powerhouse mentor Monica Kreuger since 2014 through the Raj Manek Mentorship Program, I have experienced firsthand how committed, reciprocal, vulnerable and open-minded she is, whenever we meet. I strive to be the same, sometimes finding that the closest I get to true reciprocity may be "help," although offered openly and not (as the old idiom has it) as the "sunny side of control."

Do you agree with Black's comments on mentorability and on the components of good mentorly exchange?

What ingredients, if any, would you add to her prescription?

Listen to Victoria Black's TedTalk for yourself, housed within the TedTalk article by Lenora Houseworth-Weston:

<https://ideas.ted.com/are-you-mentorable/>

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STORYTELLER'S CORNER

STORYTELLER'S CORNER: Epigraphs on Writing that cross disciplinary divides . . .

When so much of the world today seems to groan under destructive and divisive politics and leaders, I've found that reading again some of our favourite writers, past and present, allows us to share in their wisdom and fortitude.

In this issue's mentorly vein, British novelist Doris Lessing has written:

“Whatever you’re meant to do, do it now. The conditions are always impossible” (*The Golden Notebook*)

And Nobel Laureate and late American novelist, Toni Morrison, wrote:

“In times of dread, artists must never choose to remain silent. This is precisely the time when artists go to work. There is no time for despair, no place for self-pity, no need for silence, no room for fear” (*The Pieces I Am*)

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