I HAVE A CONFESSION TO MAKE. I LOVE WATCHING THE
Food Network on television at night. Do not ask me why, be-
cause I am not sure. I am not a great chef, nor do I pretend to
be. Nevertheless, I love watching shows that tell me how my
favorite foods are made.

Last week, for example, my family watched a show on how
to make pizza dough. Will I ever actually take the time to make
my own pizza dough from scratch? Probably not, but I was fas-
cinated by the show's host explaining the science behind pizza
dough and the specific ingredients needed for perfect dough.
Besides becoming hungry, I learned once again the reasons why
certain ingredients are imperative.

Two factors and foci evident in all the cooking shows I watch
are the right ingredients and the right preparation. Ingredients
do make a difference. Frozen pizza is just not the same as pizza
made from scratch with fresh ingredients. Like any great recipe,
the quality of any product at the end depends on the quality of
the ingredients at the beginning.

An internship is no different. The ingredients and the
preparation make all of the difference. In my experience, great
internships start with the following essential ingredients:
1. A proactive intern
2. A caring mentor
3. A beneficial internship site

Let me elaborate on each of these.

**Being a Proactive Intern**

I cannot emphasize enough the significance of your own initiative. *This is your internship.* This is not the school’s internship. This is not the denomination’s internship. This is not the church’s or organization’s internship. This is not the mentor’s or supervisor’s internship. *This is your internship.* You as the student need to pursue an active role in all aspects of the internship. You need to be the driving force behind the learning process—the motivational source—and own the mentoring relationship.

![Figure 3.1 Ingredients of a Healthy Internship](image)

**Learner-Centered Education**

For most students, not only ministry students, superimposed structures have dictated their entire educational career. As a result, many students have been passive participants in their educational development. The educational system tells them what classes to take, what pages to study for the test, how long their book report needs to be, and so on. This powerlessness of the learner causes the student to not pursue personal goals but instead to try to jump through the hoops of education, only caring about getting a good grade or making the teacher happy. Sadly, many ministry students approach their internship in the same passive way.

My experience working with hundreds of ministry students shows that the intern who takes the initiative is much more likely to have a fulfilling internship than the more passive intern is. You get out of the internship what you put into the internship. Proactive interns do not procrastinate. Taking the initiative will help you be assertive in assessing your developmental needs and goals even before the internship begins. By being proactive, you will also be able to find an internship site that meets these discovered needs and goals. Finally, by taking the initiative, you will be able to assimilate more quickly into the organization where you are serving.

Instead of the school or internship mentor taking you by the hand, you need to take ownership of the learning alliance created between you, the school, and your mentor. The mentor’s job or the school’s job is not to give you all the answers. Rather, their job is to ask the right questions to help you discover the answers. When you lead the relationship, you will generally learn more quickly and retain more. When you discover the answers rather than having the answers given to you, you are
also more likely to follow through on the needed action points because you came up with the steps first.

When my wife and I first became parents, we did not lack for parental advice and nuggets of truth from just about everyone. When you are a new parent, everybody you meet has a word of wisdom about raising kids or a hidden parenting fact to tell you. Do you know what my wife and I did with most of that advice? You guessed it—we ignored it. At the time, we thought that we had the entire parenting thing figured out. We did not feel the need to take any advice.

Thank goodness, our arrogance was whittled away as we learned on our own that we were not yet qualified to be the super parents we thought we were. Once we discovered we did not know all the techniques to get our daughter to sleep at night, we were much more open to listening to advice from others. Forced advice on an unreceptive person is rarely heard. However, once a need is met by well-timed advice, change happens.

Our experience as new parents is consistent with modern adult-education theory. Adults learn best when they have ownership of, authority for, and self-direction in their education, including diagnosing, planning, implementing, and evaluating, and when they have a readiness and eagerness to learn based on their perceived needs. If you are motivated, ready to learn, teachable, and willing to take ownership, then the internship experience will more likely be both enjoyable and educational. You are not pursuing an internship only to get a good grade or to make the school happy. You are pursuing an internship to prepare yourself for lifelong ministry. If you are proactive, then your mentor will be better able to help you articulate your passions and to help you clarify your purpose and goals.

The “Dream” Intern

Mentors and teachers want to see a student who is self-motivated and who takes responsibility for his or her own growth and development. The simple fact is that the more eager you are to learn, the more eager the mentor is to teach. As my colleague Howard Hendricks at Dallas Theological Seminary describes,

I prefer to invest [my time and energy] in people who essentially burn on their own once the match has ignited their kindling. . . . If you’re not eager to learn, there are very few people who are willing to . . . invest the energy that it takes to light a fire under your curiosity and imagination. . . . Those who have something to teach you will invariably find a way to let you drink from their wealth of knowledge if you convince them that you are genuinely interested. . . . As a mentor, the last thing I have time to do is to set someone’s agenda. . . . I’m more than happy to hold his feet to the fire for the agenda he sets.

You and your mentor are active collaborators in the internship. Nevertheless, you ultimately need to be the one setting the agenda. The school or your mentor can help influence your developmental agenda, but they should not set it. Your mentor’s job is not to chase you down. Your mentor’s job is to make sure that the agenda does not get lost during the internship.

Working alongside a Caring Mentor

We have already established the central role you as the intern play in your own development, at the same time recognizing that your development does not happen in isolation. The second ingredient in the internship recipe is a caring mentor. The direction of a mentor is priceless to a promising leader. As in athletics where growth and change do not happen without a relationship with a coach or trainer, so too in preparation for ministry a person needs someone who is able to provide resources, assessment, motivation, and accountability. Spiritual
formation and personal growth happen best in relationships. Regina Coll in *Supervision of Ministry Students* says that mentoring is an interpersonal partnership where the mentor “takes on the responsibility of cooperating with the student in the pursuit of ministerial skills, in the development of a ministerial identity, and in bringing book knowledge into dialogue with the life of the community.”

Educators Keith Anderson and Randy Reese, in their book *Spiritual Mentoring*, offer the following reminder: “Spiritual formation, education of the heart, in other words, requires something more than traditional Western forms of instruction. It requires a mentorship of the heart, a relationship with a teacher of life who is able to convey what was learned from the teacher’s own faithful mentor, a way of life that is formed, not merely instructions that are given. . . . We come to the realization that we need help, that we are not meant to make this journey solo. We learn to listen to the voices of mentors, not as absolute experts with the final authoritative word but more as the shrewd and discerning expressions of those who have traveled this way before.”

**Qualities of a Mentoring Relationship**

Where you serve as an intern and selecting an appropriate site are certainly important to your internship experience; however, your ministry mentor at the internship site is more important than the actual location. A fantastic internship site with a poor mentor is worse than an adequate internship site with a great mentor. In directing the internship program at my school, the number one complaint of students who have had a poor internship experience is the lack of a relationship with their mentor. One-on-one time with a caring mentor is the key to the internship’s success or failure.

A word of clarification: the individual student at our school selects his or her own internship site and mentor based on his or her degree track—pastoral leadership, cross-cultural ministries, educational leadership, women’s ministry, and so forth. We give our students the freedom to pitch their internship ideas to our department for approval. But I know that other schools have very different methods of matching students with mentors and internship sites. At some schools, the student will have a limited number of approved internship sites and mentors to choose from. And at other schools, the school or the denomination will actually place the student in an internship site and with a mentor, with the student having limited input into the process. But no matter the system, the same mentoring qualities are vital for success.

So, are you supposed to look for Superman or Wonder Woman in a mentor? Of course not. No mentor possesses every ideal quality and characteristic. Mentors are as unique as the individual relationship. A mentor does not have to be perfect or an expert to have an impact on your life, but some basic qualities do exist. A caring mentor exhibits the following:

1. Actively teaches and serves as a resource
2. Attentively listens
3. Creates an environment of trust
4. Courageously loves

A CARING MENTOR ACTIVELY TEACHES AND SERVES AS A RESOURCE

Think of your internship as you would any other class. Just as you would sit under the tutelage of a Greek or church history professor, you need to see your mentor as a teacher as well. However, instead of being in the formal classroom on campus, you are now in class in the field. The purpose of the internship is not for the church, the denomination, or the ministry organization
Actively Teaches and
Serves as a Resource

Courageously Loves

Attentively Listens

Creates an Environment of Trust

Figure 3.2. Qualities of a Caring Mentor

to get cheap summer help for their projects. Its purpose is to
help you reach your God-given potential, and your mentor’s
role is to help create an environment for your learning and
growth. Find a mentor who is focused on your growth, not on
using you as a gofer.

Be on the lookout for growth opportunities at the internship
site and beyond it. Some learning will come naturally from the
given job description for the internship, but some opportuni-
ties for growth will need to be created as the two of you serve
together. This might be especially true in a smaller church or
organizational setting. Explore with your mentor potential
learning opportunities that will expose you to new experiences
as well as reinforce new learning. Also work with your mentor
to identify opportunities that might accelerate learning.⁴

Besides being a teacher, a mentor acts as a resource. With the
unbelievable amount of ministry information available, being
aware of the vast resources for ministry is impossible for you

as a student. A mentor brings his or her professional expe-
rience and personal network to an internship that connect you
to developmental resources and ideas.

What kinds of resources? Consider asking your mentor all
of the following questions:

- What professional organizations does your mentor re-
  commend joining?
- What publishing organizations focus on your particular
  ministry area?
- What books, magazines, and journals does your mentor
  recommend reading?
- What Web sites have relevant information devoted to
  your particular ministry area?
- Who are the local, national, and international leaders you
  need to meet?
- How do you get to know these leaders?
- What conferences, retreat centers, and training opportuni-
ties do you need to attend?
- What tricks of the trade do you need to learn that you
did not learn at school?

So, what does a mentor look like who takes the role of an
active teacher and resource person seriously? Let me illustrate.
Suppose you are at school preparing to be a music minister. For
your summer internship, you are working with a local music
minister at a church. Your job description might include assisting
in the summer worship services, supporting the church’s pasto-
ral staff in directing the worship team or the choir, coordinating
the church’s children’s summer music camp, and organizing the
church’s Fourth of July musical community outreach. With such
a busy summer, you will have plenty of learning opportunities
built into the process simply by the nature of fulfilling the job
description. Among them will be learning about public worship
leadership, leadership of teams, interpersonal skills, budgeting, and vision casting.

While much learning will take place automatically during this busy summer, a mentor can help you in several ways. You might already possess good worship leadership skills, and a mentor would be able to help you refine those skills throughout the summer. When you are asked to do something that you have never done before, a mentor can direct you to appropriate resources, help you brainstorm possibilities, or be a sounding board for your ideas. When you observe the music minister handle a complicated situation with relative ease and you wonder how he or she did that, your mentor can take you through the mental steps he or she went through to arrive at the solution. While assisting in your first funeral, your mentor helps you process your theological reflections. Through your mentor, you are introduced to other local music ministers from a wide variety of denominations and worship traditions. Your mentor might take you to a national worship conference and introduce you to a worshiping network or to publishing resources you were unaware of. That is how a mentor can turn a good summer of learning into a great summer of learning.

Remember that sometimes the ministry superstars are not the best teachers of how they do what they do. These leaders are excellent at what they do (preaching, teaching, managing), but they may not be able to articulate their process to you. You need to find a mentor who can clearly explain why and how they do what they do. You want to learn certain information from your mentor. A mentor is one who is established in the foundations of ministry and can impart both the content skills and the people skills of ministry in a clear way.

A CARING MENTOR ATTENTIVELY LISTENS
Hand in hand with the role of teacher, a mentor needs to be an attentive listener. A mentor does not have to have all the answers to every question. The mentor is not there to “lecture, opine, or pontificate.” Many times the vital role a mentor can play is as a sounding board or a mirror for you. A mentor asks, listens, affirms, shares, and empathizes with you in a timely manner.

To truly be heard by another person is a powerful experience, but it is a rare experience because most people do not listen at a deep level. Admittedly, all of us are guilty of being distracted, half-listening and half-thinking, at times during a conversation. Great mentoring “requires masterful listening, attuned and adept, with the ability to maximize the listening interaction. Interaction is the right word, too, because listening is not simply passively hearing. There is action in listening.”

Active listening occurs when the hearer intentionally focuses on the speaker to truly understand what is being said. Active listening involves hearing verbal content (word choice and structure), perceiving nonverbal content (posture, tone, eye contact, timing, gestures), discerning the underlying emotions, and recognizing the context of the communication. An active listener can repeat (in his or her own words) what was said by the speaker to the satisfaction of the speaker for the purposes of mutual understanding, not necessarily for agreement. But beyond the spoken words, an active listener also can sense the underlying emotions being communicated (such as anger, confusion, joy). Instead of racing ahead to think of the next response or assuming to know the answers, an active listener allows him- or herself time to process what is being communicated. Poor listening makes good communication almost unattainable.

The crux of much of the mentoring relationship is listening, especially the mentor listening to you. The questions your mentor needs to ask you are:

- Is this intern on the right track with his or her vision? What evidence do I see?
• Is this intern honoring his or her values? What evidence do I see?
• What is this intern experiencing emotionally?
• Where is this intern going with his or her development?

Real listening in mentoring occurs at a deep level. A caring mentor listens for the “meaning behind the story, for the underlying process, for the theme that will deepen the learning.” A caring mentor listens for your vision, values, and purpose and for your struggle, trepidation, backtracking, and “fleshy sabotage”—that is, selfish decisions made in the moment. The influence of mentoring increases as you and your mentor get to know each other better and as your mentor begins to be aware of your strengths, passions, and ministry vision.

Your mentor needs to be listening for signs of life, for the choices you are making, and how those choices are affecting your growth. The mentor is also listening for “resistance and turbulence in the process.” As he or she listens to you, your mentor makes changes in the internship to fit your developmental needs. Sometimes those changes will be made on the fly as you and your mentor work together throughout your internship. A good listener will be able to pick up the signals that indicate the need for change.

What does attentive listening sound like? Consider the following. Suppose you have a semester-long internship with a mission organization in another country. While you have traveled to other parts of the world a few times before and arrived at school intending to become a missionary, your internship is your first extended period in a cross-cultural environment. You start off the internship with high expectations of how God will use you this semester.

After a few weeks, the exotic excitement of being in a foreign land has subsided and reality begins setting in. First, you feel the frustration of not speaking the language well enough to communicate clearly with the people you are supposed to be working with. You can catch short phrases and smile in return, but that is about all. As a result of the language barrier, you have not participated in as much hands-on ministry as you originally anticipated. And on top of this language issue and the resulting frustration, you are having a difficult time relating to one of the team members. So, on the outside, things may look great, but inside you are slowly getting more and more agitated. When asked, you tell everyone you are just fine and nothing is wrong.

A good mentor, however, would not be satisfied with your one-word answers and would try to listen to the communication behind the words. Watching your body language and unspoken countenance, your mentor might begin to sense that you have been unsettled the last week or so. With some gentle questions from your mentor, you are finally able to share your frustrations and concerns with a caring recipient. Because of the mentor’s willingness to listen, this one exchange could change the direction of and the way you experience the remainder of your internship.

A CARING MENTOR CREATES AN ENVIRONMENT OF TRUST

Recall when you learned how to ride a bicycle? What about the first time you jumped off the diving board into the deep end of the pool? How about your first attempt at ice-skating? Was it scary? Absolutely, but you also probably had a parent, an older sibling, or a friend helping you along the way with these and thousands of other first-time accomplishments. The key to your trying these things in the first place was probably preceded with the words, “Don’t worry. I have got you if you fall.” These words helped create an environment of trust for you to try, and if you failed a few times, you failed safely.

A good mentor can do the same thing in helping create an environment of trust. This is an environment where you can
feel safe to try new things, to explore underlying emotional responses, and to ask the questions you have been dying to ask about ministry and life. In many ways, working in a trusting environment is closely related to having a mentor who attentively listens, described above. In this environment of trust, a dumb question doesn’t exist and failure is seen as a pathway to long-term growth. Paramount to this environment of trust is that your self-worth and value are not brought into question.\textsuperscript{14}

A trusting environment is foundational to much of the work that will take place in the internship and in the functioning of the mentoring relationship. If you do not feel safe, how will you ever try new things? If you do not feel safe, how will you admit your shortcomings? If you do not feel safe, how will you change? A mutually committed relationship characterized by trust and hope is necessary for change and growth to take place.

Going back to the example of you serving a mission field in another country, you would feel comfortable sharing your frustrations about the language barrier and concern about the other teammate only if the mentor had been intentional in creating a trusting environment from the start. If you did not feel safe, you would try to protect your own self-interests and not say anything. The environment of trust and the action of listening go hand-in-hand in great mentoring.

From your experiences at work, at school, at home, and with friends, you may have learned firsthand about unsafe environments. These kinds of environments are where everything you say or do is held against you. These are environments where you are cut down instead of built up. These are environments where you learn very quickly to become self-protective and not to share too much or not to get too close to others. Like a turtle in a shell, you expose just enough to get where you are going in life but no more.

Look for a mentor whom you can trust. A key is to find a mentor who has been trustworthy in the past with others. Remember, though, that the trust between you and your mentor does not happen overnight. Trust is developed in the little things and over time, as both you and your mentor are able to see this trust played out in real situations.

A CARING MENTOR COURAGEOUSLY LOVES

Do you remember the Hans Christian Andersen fairy tale “The Emperor’s New Clothes”? The fairy tale is about an emperor who loved his royal clothing. One day he heard about two tailors who could make the finest clothes from the most beautiful cloth in the world. These tailors, who were really swindlers, said that their special cloth had the special characteristic that it was invisible to anyone who was either stupid or not fit for his or her position.

Well, not to appear either dim-witted or unfit to be a ruler, the emperor did not say anything when he tried on his new wardrobe of nothing. Moreover, all of the townspeople were too scared or embarrassed to say anything either. No one wanted to speak the truth, and instead they lavished lies about how beautiful the emperor’s new clothing of nothing was. Only in the end did a child point out the obvious truth that the emperor had nothing on.

In the end, did it really do the emperor any good for the people not to speak truth to him about being naked? Of course not. The same is true for you. Constructive feedback is essential for you if you are to ever develop beyond your existing levels of knowledge and skill. While praise is nice to hear and can give you satisfaction, constructive feedback is what helps you know which direction to move for further development.

Having someone speak loving truth to you now is much better than for you to get fired from your first job after graduation for something that everybody knew about you but were too afraid to mention. Or worse, nothing was said because no one wanted to hurt your feelings. This is the lack of courageous love.
One of the marks of a good mentor is a man or woman who loves courageously. Courageous love speaks truth into the life of another. A mentor has the necessary perspective to look into your life and ministry to see where the gaps are and where God is at work. A mentor must be relational, empowering you in a safe but challenging environment and speaking lovingly and courageously into your life to correct imbalances. This requires patience—both yours and the mentor’s—knowing that change is difficult and does not occur quickly.

Encouragement is an aspect of courageous love and an essential practice of biblical community. Consider the following verses: “Therefore encourage one another and build one another up, just as you are doing” (1 Thess. 5:11). “And let us consider how to stir up one another to love and good works, not neglecting to meet together, as is the habit of some, but encouraging one another, and all the more as you see the Day drawing near” (Heb. 10:24-25).

Courageous love can be seen in the mentor’s initiative, a response to the Holy Spirit’s leading in the relationship, to risk personal rejection and address what is holding another person back from experiencing God’s unconditional love. Courageous love involves a relational, intimate, and often confrontational service to others that leads them into a closeness with God they may never experience any other way. This kind of love recognizes the flawed foundations of people’s character and the supernatural nature of the task. It takes another person’s initiative, empowered by the Spirit, to enter the messes in people’s lives so that they can experience deliverance from sin and participate in God’s purposes for them.

Factors that Can Make or Break a Mentoring Relationship

In addition to your mentor’s qualities and abilities, several other factors contribute to creating a mentoring relationship characterized by loving care:

- Consistent mentor meetings
- Clearly defined relational expectations and boundaries
- Attention to and respect for cultural differences

CONSISTENT MENTOR MEETINGS

Every experience for you during the internship has learning potential. With consistent meetings between you and your mentor, the ministry experiences become life changing. Some schools may call this meeting a supervisory conference, reflection meeting, formation meeting, or another name. This meeting with your mentor may also involve other people, such as members of the lay committee or other interns at the same site. While I refer to the mentor meeting that takes place between a mentor and an intern, please understand that these meetings with your mentor and others may serve a similar role. The primary concern is that you have consistent interaction with others at the internship site for supervision and reflection.

This consistent meeting with your mentor, and in some cases others at the site, is the heart of the internship experience and needs to be a sacred priority for both you and your mentor. These meetings are the backbone of the internship because they provide regular opportunities for communication and instruction.

This time with your mentor is sacred; it needs to have a degree of privacy and be free of interruptions. The time set aside for the meeting needs to be long enough to deal both with the issues of your work and your reflection on it. Remember that your mentor helps create an environment where the Holy Spirit can work in your life so that you can focus on your development. That environment is one of safety, courage, confidentiality, trust, and space to breathe, experiment, and dream.

CLEARLY DEFINED EXPECTATIONS AND BOUNDARIES

A word of caution needs to be given concerning emotional entanglement in mentoring relationships. This unfortunate circumstance can potentially occur in any relationship but especially for
those in a mixed-gender mentoring relationship, where a male mentor is working with a female student or a female mentor is working with a male student.

Typically, mixed-gender mentoring involves a male mentor working with a female intern. The reality is that many times women students have a hard time finding women mentors. This is due in large part to the increase in number of female seminary students and the expansion of ministry opportunities for these students. Currently, the number of women in vocational leadership roles is not great enough to meet women students’ needs for mentors. In the world of church work, women can sometimes feel isolated.

In a mentoring relationship or any helping relationship, such as a pastoral relationship or a counseling relationship, interpersonal dynamics can get deep enough that the caring love experienced in the relationship can be misinterpreted in a sexual way. If the relational intimacy is greater than in other relationships the person has (either from family or friends) and is misread, the relationship can become emotionally and sexually confusing. Therefore, a clear understanding of expectations and boundaries is imperative.

No matter the level of intimacy, the mentoring relationship is still a professional relationship. Here are some things for both you and your mentor to take into account. First, consider body language. Both of you need to avoid any body language that might appear seductive to the other person. This can be the clothing worn, the physical arrangement of the room, the location of the meetings, and the invasion of personal space. Also remember to pay attention to what is said. Both of you need to avoid topics or humor that could be misinterpreted in a sexual manner.

The guiding principle in mixed-gender mentoring is respecting the other person and his or her feelings. If healthy boundaries and expectations are spelled out, I think it is possible for mixed-gender mentoring to work. In fact, it could be quite beneficial for both parties. Due to the fact that many women see relationships as a catalyst for development, recent research has shown that women learners thrive in a mentoring framework, whether the mentor is male or female. Both men and women can grow from mentoring provided by the opposite sex.

That said, I do not place a student into a mixed-gender mentoring relationship if either the student or the mentor is not comfortable with the situation. Because of values, beliefs, heritage, or past experience, such a relationship may be doomed from the start. Some women simply feel more comfortable working with women and some men simply feel more comfortable working with men. In every one of our program’s placements, the staff discusses this issue with our students at the beginning of the internship placement process.

Nevertheless, even in the best of circumstances in a mixed-gender mentoring relationship, both the mentor and you must avoid even the perception of inappropriate behavior. Nothing can destroy one’s ministry faster than the accusations of a sexually inappropriate relationship, even if there is no truth behind the accusations.

Finally, both you and your mentor must be sensitive to sexual harassment. Sexual harassment might be initiated by the mentor or someone else in the organization. Sexual harassment occurs when:

- Someone insinuates (hints or suggests) that a job or promotion will be made in exchange for sexual favors or insinuates the opposite—a job will be lost or a demotion will occur if sexual favors are not provided.
- An intimidating, hostile, or offensive work environment is created through the presence of offensive (sexual or otherwise) images, language, or behavior.

If either you or your mentor feel that sexual harassment is taking place, dealing with it immediately according to your
school’s, denomination’s, or organization’s policies or grievance system is vital. Do not hesitate to talk with the school’s internship coordinator.

ATTENTION TO AND RESPECT FOR CULTURAL DIFFERENCES
One of the joys on my campus is the opportunity to interact with future Christian leaders from all over the world. In a single day, I might have students from India, South Korea, China, Brazil, and Russia in my office for appointments. The world is coming to our campuses. Moreover, the world has become smaller through technology, communication, and travel. Therefore, we need to know how to interact with other cultures.

I also enjoy having the opportunity to work with a racially diverse student population. In a single week, I might have an internship site visit with a predominately African American church, an Asian American church, and a Hispanic church. In my classes I will have students representing a racial mix not present in Southern schools a generation or two ago.

The culture of a people affects how they express themselves, and appreciating the rich contributions of different cultures is important for this global community we live in. When confronted with a culture different from our own, we need to be able to interact with empathy and respectful discernment for perspectives that differ from ours. Cross-cultural experiences help us learn to be students of our own culture and of another person’s culture. Not everything in one’s own culture, or another culture, should be accepted blindly. Cross-cultural mentoring experiences can help you learn how to formulate and express Christian theology with appropriate engagement in diverse contexts.

Some of you reading this book have come to a new country to study in a culture different from your own. For others, your racial background is different from the predominant racial background on campus. For others, you may have an opportunity to be mentored by a teacher or a pastor who is culturally or racially different from you.

In a cross-cultural mentoring situation, time needs to be set aside to discuss areas where there may be cross-cultural misunderstandings. This is especially true in the areas of perception, communication, and values. For example, does one person’s culture value the individual over the collective or the collective over the individual? Is the person rewarded for taking risks or for avoiding risks in his or her culture? Is the greater cultural value to keep tradition or to break tradition? What about the role of power in relationships in his or her culture? Does a person’s culture stress hierarchy in roles or equality in roles? Is a person’s role in the natural and social world to master it or to be in harmony with it?21

Of course, the qualities of a mentoring relationship that have already been discussed—actively teaching and serving as a resource person, attentively teaching, creating an environment of trust, and loving courageously—are key to all mentoring relationships, including cross-cultural ones. But in addition to these foundational issues, it is important in a cross-cultural relationship for both you and your mentor to talk about how to develop a working knowledge of and appreciation for the other’s culture. Both of you need to come to terms with your own cultural bias and to read the other person’s culture as well. If English is not your or your mentor’s native language, constantly check for understanding to make sure the communication is clear.22

As a word of warning, do not try to place the other person into a fixed cultural lens. We all know that stereotypes are bad, but we also have to admit that it is easy to use the same cultural lens on every person from a particular culture. We can fall into the trap of thinking, “In my experiences, all Chinese students . . .” or “I know that all African American churches are like . . .” This happens to the best of us. The key is to become a student of both culture and of the other person’s uniqueness within an atmosphere of trust.
22. Schuurman, 142, 63.
24. Palmer, 49.
28. Smith, Listening to God, 22.

Chapter 3, What Are the Ingredients for a Healthy Internship?


5. As noted in the preface, I am using the word mentor to denote the on-site person who is responsible for the internship. Your school may use the term supervisor or coach. If your school uses another term for this on-site individual, please substitute that word as you read this book. Also, I know that individuals in addition to the mentor may be involved in providing oversight and direction during the internship. Some schools and denominations require the intern to have a lay committee, an advisory council, or ministry consultants on-site in addition to the mentor. If you are reading this book as a member of such a group, please understand that the qualities important for a mentor are also important for the members of this group. This group of individuals is a key component in the development of the intern.


13. Ibid., 39.

14. Ting, 17.

15. Coll, 76.


18. Ruderman and Ohlott, 82.

19. Ibid., 81.


Chapter 4, What Are the Goals for Your Internship?

Questions for Reflection

1. On a scale of 1 to 5 (1 meaning strongly disagree and 5 meaning strongly agree) rate yourself on the following indicators of being a proactive intern:

   1 2 3 4 5 I am a self-motivated person in my education.
   1 2 3 4 5 I take personal ownership in my educational development.
   1 2 3 4 5 I do not procrastinate in school or in life.
   1 2 3 4 5 I am teachable.
   1 2 3 4 5 I am eager to learn.
   1 2 3 4 5 I can identify some areas of growth in my past.
   1 2 3 4 5 I can identify some areas in my life where growth is needed.

2. Give some examples that illustrate your answers above.

3. What will you do the same or differently to be a proactive intern? Supervisor/mentors, how will you share your professional life with this student?

4. Outside of your immediate family, who is a person who has had a significant impact in your life and development? What were the qualities of that Person? What made his or her impact so significant in your life?

5. Review the section “Working alongside a Caring Mentor,” pages 41-58, and make a list of qualities and characteristics you look for (or have experienced) in a mentor. Identify three that are most important to you and your internship (or supervision) experience.

6. What attracted you to your internship site? For supervisor/mentors, what attracted you to being a mentor to this student?