

The Mentoring Moments That Shaped My Career

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Agenda

- Mentoring moments
- Mentorship as a network (Six different types of mentorship)
- Lessons learned & reflections
- My takeaway

I didn't have one mentor.
I had moments.

And each moment came from a different kind of mentor in different formats.

What these mentoring moments had in common:

- Specific: tied to a real decision and a concrete next step
- Contextual: grounded in my goals, constraints, and values
- Timely: delivered when it could change my direction

My mentor “network”

- Different mentors helped at different inflection points.

Methods mentor

Improves your craft

Sponsor

Uses influences for you

Relational mentor

Sustains you
(Organizational
navigation)

Peer mentor

Peer support, day-to-
day problem solving

Collective mentor

Professional society
activities as mentor

Mentor beyond academia

Shows your blind spots

1) Methods mentor

“A strong manuscript leaves only what is impactful and what matters; editing is the iterative process of removing everything else.”

What they did:

- Made standards explicit (what “good” looks like)
- Trained my judgment about impact
- Helped me maximize the resources available
- Gave “why”-anchored feedback: every edit came with the rationale, so I learned principles—not just fixes.

2) Sponsor

A sponsor doesn't just coach you—they stake their credibility on you.

- I was unsure if I was ready. A mentor said, *“You’re ready for the next step—and I’m going to help you.”*

They did the following concrete things:

- Encouraged me explicitly that I was ready (and named why)
- Made warm introductions—actively connecting me with collaborators
- Recommended me for roles (talks, committees, leadership, fellowships)—and followed up
- Stepped up with support when I needed an advocate 💜

3) Relational mentor

Some mentors help you *begin* the work. Some help you *stay* in the work.

- I went through a stretch where I felt lost in my work—a mentor reminded me: “*The good thing about being in academia is you can build your own things.*”

What I learned to ask for:

- Ground me in agency (what can I choose/build right now?)
- Clarify my values (what trade-off am I really making here?)
- Name the next small step (what’s the test I can run to reduce uncertainty?)
- Protect my pace (what boundaries do I need to be sustainable?)

4) Peer mentor

Peers support each other by sharing experiences, challenges, and how to survive the week you're in.

Tactical mentorship

"Here's the template I used."
Grants, job talks, syllabi.

Norm-setting

"That's not a you-problem."
Clarifies what is normal vs
toxic.

Borrowed confidence

"I've seen you do hard things."
Mirrors strengths you can't
see.

One example practice I use:

- We run a small *teaching support group*.

5) Collective mentor

The field became a mentor.

- I realized professional societies offer collective mentoring: committee work, working groups, and repeated interactions.

What collective mentoring provided me:

- Tacit knowledge (funding, publishing, framing)
- Apprenticeship (committee work as teamwork and leadership training)
- Network effects (light connections -> collaborators, invitations)
- Belonging (an “academic home” you carry across jobs)

6) Mentor beyond academia

Some of the most important mentoring moments came from community partners who showed me my blind spots.

- A community partner emphasized, “*We are experts in this work. Our work is real work; coordination, outreach, follow-up, and translation all take time.*” They named a blind spot in our plan: language, timeline, and feasibility. That wasn’t criticism; it was mentorship.

How I learn from community mentors:

- Start with reciprocity: ask what success looks like for them
- Co-design early: shared decisions on process and outcomes
- Reality-check constraints: time, trust, staffing, competing priorities
- Close the loop: show the results + share credit for the work

Lessons learned (*still learning*) & reflections

- Build a “network” of mentors: it’s difficult for one person to meet every need (e.g., methods guidance ≠ sponsorship, and that’s okay)
- Stay gently on the radar: don’t “bother”, but do send periodic, lightweight updates so mentors can understand where you are and help at the right moments.
- Listen to their own journey: their lived experiences can help you see options you hadn’t named yet.

My takeaway: what I hope others take from this



- Mentorship is not just one perfect mentor. You can build a mentorship network.
- A network keeps expectations realistic and reduces the burden on any one mentor.
- Multiple mentors give you diverse perspectives, which improve judgment and reduce blind spots.
- And it builds community: relationships that make the work more sustainable and more human.

THANK YOU!

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