

CCAL's BMO Mentorship Program: The Mentors: Their Experience and Thoughts about Mentorship

Subtitle: CCAL's BMO Mentors in their own words reflect upon their mentorship experience.

The BMO Mentorship Program is a keystone program of the Canadian Centre for Advanced Leadership in Business (CCAL). Students who register for the first time in the program are extremely curious about the mentors and what the mentor-mentee relationship looks like. To give the "mentor perspective" CCAL asked current CCAL mentors Shannon Bruce, Steven Paget, Elyse Tomie and John McCarthy to respond, in their own words, as to why they participate in the Mentor Program, why mentorship is important for students, what are some key themes and goals of a mentor-mentee relationship and how they as mentors benefit from the mentorship experience.

Shannon Bruce (advertising, business administration)

Describe your motivation for being a BMO Mentor?

It is such a privilege and pleasure to be a source of information, guidance, life experience and hopefully, reassurance to someone who is starting to chomp down on life. Anything that I can do to help is a thrill! Also, there were no resources even close to resembling the mentorship program when I was progressing through my Bachelor of Commerce degree and as an alumnus, I am very proud of the (fmr) Faculty of Management / Haskayne School of Business / CCAL for nurturing and leveraging resources that manifest in the mentorship program.

Why is mentoring important for students?

The opportunity to freely discuss workload, priorities and ambitions is an invaluable building block to understanding yourself and making informed decisions. Throughout your life, you will be doing your homework, reaching out to friends, family and other resources as sounding boards to assist you in understanding your next challenges and celebrating your achievements.

What are some key themes in a mentoring dialogue?

Organizing resources (resume, LinkedIn, networking opportunities, all program or associations that expedite student introductions/internships/co-ops with potential employers) in preparation for short- and long-term goals, particularly in the very challenging economic environment of Calgary and Alberta.

What you have learned and what interests you when speaking to students?

Without fail, in virtually every single conversation, I am reminded to re-think/reconsider something I am managing at work. Whether it's approaching a challenge from a different angle, asking different questions of team members as we work towards finding a solution, reorganize information so I am viewing something differently. It is refreshing because it frequently feels like 'rebooting'.

I love learning and find the mentor/mentee exchange fills that love.

Steve Paget (petroleum technologist, equity research, corporate strategy, securities, finance instructor, Haskayne/MRU)

Describe your motivation for being a BMO Mentor?

I've provided what's called "industry mentorship" to students from MRU and U of C in the CFA Institute Research Challenge for the last six years now and found it to be a very satisfying experience - and I wanted to expand on that by participating in the CCAL mentorship program. Why is mentoring important for students?

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My experience has been that students like to hear about working life - about the highs and the lows, about how we got our jobs, about the culture of the different businesses where we have worked.

What are some key themes in a mentoring dialogue?

I think some analysis of their own experiences would be helpful - under what circumstances are they successful? Comfortable? When do they find they really connect with people? And when do they find connections to be difficult? With what sorts of people are they successful? What holds them back?

What you have learned and what interests you when speaking to students?

I've learned so much from every student with whom I've had interactions. Every one of them has his or her own passions and interests and experiences that they bring to the table. I love it when students dig in and work hard and show they want to succeed.

Elyse Tomie (real estate – development/leasing, retail leasing)

Describe your motivation for being a BMO Mentor?

My decision to volunteer as a mentor came from a desire to be more connected to the student community and to provide an invaluable advocacy resource to students exploring how best to transition from an academic to industry setting; I'm motivated by the reciprocal benefit of a mentor-mentee relationship – as a mentor, I am energized by helping students break-down walls of uncertainty, and elevate their curiosity and enthusiasm for subjects that they are passionate about.

Why is mentoring important for students?

I always tell students to enjoy every moment...it's a license for barrier-free learning. However, I think students find that while access to knowledge is exciting, it can also create a lot of confusion and uncertainty. Mentorship provides students with a GPS system to help navigate – there is no destination and so they learn to take off blinders and build an awareness for their own personal framework to help make informed decisions with confidence.

What are some key themes in a mentoring dialogue?

Key themes of discussion I have encountered are i) building a strong resume, ii) interview prep questions and mock interviews, iii) managing teamwork and group projects, iv) tools for decision making, v) figure out and following a passion, vi) communication (i.e. making a cold call, following up), vii) networking.

What you have learned and what interests you when speaking to students?

Having a mentee has provided me with a new lens of thought; I find that I look back on decisions that I have made with a new appreciation for what I did right and what I could have done differently. In engaging in discussions with students, there are a lot of "things I have done" that I can provide insight on, but there are also a lot of experiences that we draw parallels on....i.e. teamwork is teamwork, the same challenges that a student may be experiencing as part of a group project are often no different than the challenges that I've experienced in an office setting. We work together to find solutions. It's not all about advice, sometimes is just listening and understanding...I like to think, 1 cheerleader is often enough.

John McCarthy (Engineering, MBA, consulting, international public policy)

Describe your motivation for being a BMO Mentor?

Mentoring gives students (and others) an excellent neutral resource to explore and better understand their environment, test their assumptions and help in their own reflection on their goals and their approach.

Why is mentoring important for students?

Mentors are not a technical resource...Google (and your profs) do a much better job! However, there are a lot of unwritten rules related to business and careers and mentors can provide a neutral thoughtful and experienced commentary. When I think about the folks I have had the opportunity to work with, I am surprised how often the conversations move to some common things: how to set goals; developing business relationships, how to balance work and life commitments, how to plan for the short, medium and long term. Sometimes it is just talking about the business and office climate.

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What you have learned and what interests you when speaking to students?

I am always interested in understanding perspectives, I've had the opportunity to work with several international students, many in the process of a mid-career shift and appreciate the chance to learn a little bit about their background and perspectives regarding starting over in a new environment. I enjoy their enthusiasm and energy. Mentoring also helps me to sharpen my communication skills and to better understand how I interpret the world, it does indeed go both ways.

Shannon, Steve, Elyse and John were also asked how students could be prepared for their meetings with their mentors. Their responses were quite consistent with key suggestions provided below.

- Contemplate in their own way what the relationship might bring to them and then communicate those expectations to us.
- Establish 1-2 top goals s/he aims to achieve over the course of all of the meetings and at the end of each meeting, check to see how we did and set next steps.
- Conduct a personal SWOT analysis. Think about your weaknesses and strengths and challenges and opportunities. The university offers a number of self diagnostic tools for students related to personality types and communication style.
- Articulate the challenges you are managing.

For more information about CCAL's BMO Mentorship Program and other business leadership development opportunities, visit <https://haskayne.ucalgary.ca/ccal>