Mentorship: Part 3 of 3

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Speaker 1 (00:00): (GSA)
The Gerontological Society of America, meaningful Lives as we age.

Speaker 2 (00:05): (Jolie)
Welcome to today's episode of the Gerontological Society of America's podcast fields where we learn about the role of mentors from two experts in the field of gerontology research. I am Jolie Harris, Assistant Professor of Nursing at Louisiana State University Health Science Center in New Orleans, New Orleans, Louisiana, and I'll be your host for this session. This session is presented as a bonus excerpt from podcast one of the two part series on the interplay of research and policy in geriatrics and gerontology conducted in collaboration between the Social Research Policy and Practice section and the Health Science section of GSA. During the recording of podcast one, valuable insight was gathered from our experts on the importance of mentors and the role of mentors and mentees, which has been designed into this bonus podcast. The aim of this podcast is to explore mentee and mentor relationships from the perspectives of a retired researcher and an early career researcher.

Speaker 2 (01:10): (Jolie)
We are joined today by two experts in the field, Dr. Ann Kolanowski and Dr. Jasmine Traverse. Dr. Kolanowski is a Professor Emerita at the Penn State Ross and Carroll Nas College of Nursing and was the founding director of the Hartford Center of Geriatric Nursing Excellence at Penn State University. Her research which focuses on non-pharmacological interventions for symptoms of distress and delirium in people living with dementia in nursing homes has been supported by grants and multiple institutes and organizations, the National Institute of Nursing Research, the Alzheimer's Association, Hartford and Neuroscience Nursing Foundations, to name a few. Dr. Kolanowski has published over 190 papers on dementia care in scientific journals and serves on many boards and the scientific advisory consulting panels. Dr. Kolanowski was the recipient of the 2012 Doris Schwartz

Gerontological Nursing Research Award and is a fellow in the American Academy of Nursing and the Gerontological Society of America.

Speaker 2 (02:21): (Jolie)
Also, joining us is Dr. Jasmine Travers, an assistant professor of nursing and health service researcher at Rory Myers College of Nursing at New York University. Her career is dedicated to designing and conducting research to improve health outcomes and reduce health disparities experienced by older adults. Dr. Travers has published widely on the topics of aging, long-term care, health disparities, workforce diversity and workforce issues, vaccinations and infections. She has presented her work at regional and national health service research, gerontological, nursing and public health conferences. Currently Dr. Travers co-chairs, the Moving Forward Nursing Home Quality Coalition Workforce Committee, which is meant to move many recommendations from the national imperative to improve nursing home quality 2022 report. To begin, I'd like to hear from both of you, what would you offer as guidance to those coming into the field of gerontology to grow, flourish, and truly make a difference in the lives of older adults?

Speaker 3 (03:30): (Ann)
I would say right off the bat to have a good mentor. I think that's critical. I've had several in my career as a postdoc, as a junior faculty member, as a doctoral student, and I think it's important to look for someone whose passion for the care of older adult's match's yours. Somebody that can help you look for gaps in knowledge. The literature today is so expansive and to be able to jump in there and say, here's a critical gap in knowledge. It takes a lot of work. You want a mentor who's going to introduce you to other researchers so that you can build a strong interdisciplinary team.

Speaker 4 (Jasmine)
I agree with everything that Ann shared and just to give an example about the mentorship piece, that mentor that I had, I switched over to my PhD program. The topic that she was doing was unrelated to the topic that I was interested in, but she had a strong research team.
She was a strong mentor herself and she was a senior researcher, which smart people with a well-developed team are going to be able to guide you very well. And that's what she was able to do. And even help connect you with people that are particularly of your topic of interest like Ann was sharing. So that is something that is very important to and to think about as you are, are navigating mentorship and it's okay that have additional mentors across different universities and different disciplines as well as having mentors that serve different purposes and can be informal or formal. So that's something just to consider.

Speaker 3: (Ann)
Everybody needs a mentor. Even people who are in the last stage is the Gadfly stage. That's when you're retired and you can say anything you want, <laugh>, <inaudible>, that kind of thing. So I think that's, it's so important that you have someone to guide you rather than groping in the dark. But her book, I think is one of the classics in that area.

Speaker 2: (Jolie)
I'm going to direct this question to you, Jasmine. What has been your approach to seeking out opportunities for mentorship and growth?

Speaker 4: (Jasmine)
One of the things that was important as I was growing in this work was identifying what were the skills, what were the experiences and what was the knowledge that I needed to be able to make the

impact that I wanted to make, and specific to policy and translating evidence into policy. So some of that could have been courses that I wanted to take that were policy focus. It could have been experiences such as, I spent some time at CMS for the summer as an intern there, just really understanding how they move things along. That was CMS, Medicare and Medicaid is the big player of parts of the work that I do. So I wanted to be, there to see how things actually move on a day-to-day basis. I took visits to DC and New York in different, like policy places. I spent some time, I visited AARP for example in DC as part of my post-doc that was entirely policy focused. I was a American Academy of Nursing Jonas policy scholar that was focused on policy and just thinking about other skills, things like writing op-eds, things like communicating to impact things like public speaking, elevator speech, communicating to lay audiences and amazed that people will be compelled to listen to your story were skills that I needed in which I was able to either get that from the second postdoc that I had or during my first postdoc. I tried to piece together different skill, different classes or just knock on people's door to say, can I work with you on this?
Or can I spend time with you doing that? And there's other places in which you can acquire these skills. Academy Health is entirely policy focused where they have the policy focused conference, for example, or they have a course called Communicating for Impact. I've taking implementation science courses focused on policy and even GSA itself, depending on where you're at in your career. GSA has a student focused policy experience over the summertime. With that, like me, I'm the type of person who just all about training and just trying to continue to learn. I think that's the nurse in that as far as being lifelong learners. So that, that's how I really supported my growth in this space. And then being around people who were doing the work that I wanted to do, learning from them also between those mentors, collaborators.

Speaker 2: (Jolie)
Ann, you mentioned earlier that we all need mentors, but we also know there are not enough mentors available. How has your experience changed the way you approach mentorship for your mentees? How do you think that affects their connection to their work, and practice?

Speaker 3 (08:37): (Ann)
I'm doing a lot of mentoring virtually these days, and I think that it's not only faculty at Penn State, but faculty in other universities. And that's been a change since I've retired. And I think the perspective that I have now, one of the things that's changed is to help initially people see the bigger picture where they're going. And to be very conscientious about mapping out a strategy and going step by step and being very persistent. My late husband loved this quote and I have it in my kitchen. Success is when preparation meets opportunity. And I think I've really been trying to help people focus on being as prepared as you can. So when that opportunity comes, you're ready for it.

Speaker 2 (09:50): (Jolie)
And what about you, Jasmine, with your more recent role as a postdoc, what has your experience been with mentors in your career?

Speaker 4: (Jasmine)
So mentors have been very generous with me and that the same posture that I want to be with others, being generous with my time, my knowledge and my resources. So right now, I'd say for the most part, mentoring looks like a number of different ways. So it may be on- ongoing relationship or it may just be one off where we connect. You might be reaching out to me about a grant that you're applying to and asking me about any advice on what topic you're focused on or the actual mechanism that you're applying to, because maybe I had the same grant for example. So I, I do a lot of those types of

mentoring where people can reach out to me and I'm happy to meet with them on a, on a one off basis.
But then there are some mentoring relationships that I maintain. I'm mentoring two PhD students. Sometimes I'm mentoring master's students as well, research assistants. I think just navigating that for me, I have to be a little bit more discipline with my time and thinking about taking on more permanent mentees. So I love mentorship. I love mentoring others, starting to learn from how I was successfully mentored and thinking about even mentoring up. And it's like that preparation that, Ann was talking about not just the ways we view mentoring in some ways, but it's really supporting the individual to be able to be prepared to meet those opportunities that Ann said, and not necessarily handholding. You're doing a great job when you are equipping and enabling them to do what they can do. But in general right now, so my, continued mentoring relationships, I've also just created one day a week where all of my mentees, we will meet over the course of an hour or we have time to just check in and I can give a little didactic on something around a professional skill or something that they are, or resources or something.
And then just check in with them on a weekly basis so that they feel that they have those touches with me. But then depending on what kind of mentee you are, to me, if you're not my PhD student, I'm, I probably only have another mentoring meeting with me, one-on-one monthly, for example. But just allowing space for people to meet with me more regularly so that they feel that they're connected and are not in the dark. So that's how I navigated mentoring in this early portion of my career.

Speaker 3: (Ann)
I think another thing that Jasmine, just to elaborate on it, this idea of preparation is important that they come prepared to that meeting with the mentor and not just come with an open kind of agenda because that very often can use up a lot of time that isn't productive. And when I sit down with my mentees, as I said, we'll map out our strategy, be very strategic about what you're going to do next. And when you have that product, whatever it is, draft specific games or whatever, we'll sit down and meet to go over it so that both of us are feeling like we're being productive. And I think that's another way to make that relationship really work.

Speaker 4: (Jasmine)
I'll just add to that then saying it's, it's asking yourself what is the purpose of the relationship? It's not, it's just the same, oh, I need a mentor. Everyone else has a mentor, because that's not going to do much for either side. Like Ann is saying, what do I need? It's, and if like who you need to get from when I'm <inaudible> What are the different skills that I need or the different guidance that I need, and who can I get that from? And then clearly articulating the purpose of this relationship and the goals for that relationship. And then you can then identify how often do you need to meet? Is it just a one off or is it more routine, for example? So that really will help guide you in how you navigate those mentoring relationships. And that's in everything that you're doing really. When you're thinking about, policy, or when you're thinking about research, what is the purpose of this research? It's not just to do this study, but it's really to know what's next and who are you trying to translate that information to. And that's when we need to meet, really create these plans so that we don't just do the research. It doesn't go anywhere. And really identify who are the people that I want to know about the work that I'm doing? What kind of change do I want to make? And who are the people who can make that change? And how do I speak to those people? Really creating those plans across the board, whether it's identifying mentors, connecting with mentors, or with our research and translating research into policy.

Speaker 2: (Jolie)

Thank you so much, Dr. Travers and **Kolanowski** for allowing us to share your insight while mentoring and learn from your experience on behalf of social research, policy and practice, and the health science sections of the Gerontological Society of America. Thank you for joining us for this informative podcast.

Speaker 1 (15:11): (GS)
The Gerontological Society of America was founded in 1945 to cultivate excellence in interdisciplinary aging research and education to advance innovations in practice and policy. For more information about GSA, visit geron.org geer RO n.org.