



**EDUCATION
FOUNDATION**
OF SARASOTA COUNTY

Mentoring Newsletter

November 2021

Effective Communication and Goals are the Keys to Success with Students

By: Jeff Blanchette, mentoring manager

During my time at the Education Foundation of Sarasota County, I have learned that there are two key ingredients to successful mentoring relationships—communicating effectively as well as setting and pursuing student-created goals.

Students are bombarded with emails from their school, colleges, promotions, and junk. It is easier for them to ignore it all than to try to sort it out. An email from their mentor can easily be lost or forgotten. Most students rarely use email to communicate with their friends, and even speaking on the phone has gone the way of the CD. Texting is their preferred method of communication. And even then, many do not always respond to text messages. Most students are experiencing an incoming-communication overload.

So, how do we engage young adults who are full-time students with part-time jobs who often have family responsibilities as well? Competition for their time is fierce. The answer is that we have to offer them something of tangible value that they get nowhere else. For high school students, this means that we must help them to create a plan for applying to and being accepted into a postsecondary program—and for financing their program.

It is key to establish goals with timelines. Is your mentee's current SAT or ACT score high enough to get into the college of choice? If not, what can your mentee do to raise it? Is

there a plan to improve that chemistry grade? How can your mentee better balance school and work? These are only a few examples of the many challenges that require a plan. You and your mentee can actively work together on crafting a plan with specific goals to create a pathway to their journey after high school. Most students aren't planning for college with their friends, and many families do not have enough knowledge about the college process to assist. Your support in creating and achieving access to college is critical to their success. Most are not receiving extensive one-to-one support that focuses on their dreams anywhere else. What you provide is unique and valuable.

Students new to college may also be challenged with academic rigor that they are not accustomed to as well as all that comes with being away from home for the first time. These students will benefit from working with a caring adult on their own academic and personal goals. As with high school students, it is best to meet college students regularly on a specific day and time, when possible. In the first months of college, I recommend weekly meetings. If your mentee is adjusting well, you may decide together to meet bi-weekly. Again, your meetings will be more beneficial if they are focused on student-created goals as opposed to a "check-in."

To work together on a plan, you must communicate effectively. When communicating with students, I send a text message that begins with something positive.



Then I ask the student for a convenient time to meet or speak on the phone, and I conclude with the topic for discussion. For example: "We had a great meeting last week. Let me know when you are available this week to chat by phone so we can plan more ACT prep work and talk more about FSU."

Some mentors have found that meeting with their mentee at the same time each week is effective. Whether you have a set time or not, always set specific goals that you work on together. You want to avoid vague messages such as this: "Hi, just checking in to see how you're doing. Give me a call when you have a moment." Many teenagers will ignore something so general. While you want to allow them to choose a day and time, within your schedule of course, you want to be as specific in your communication as possible.

Setting clear expectations will help your mentee to understand the responsibilities in the relationship. Ask your mentee how much time is required to respond to your texts. In most cases, two or three days is reasonable.

Most students find that a regular meeting day and time is easier to manage. However, in some cases students do require more flexibility, especially if they have jobs with varying hours.

Your relationship with your mentee will benefit more from in person meetings than virtual meetings. Of course, this will not be possible with many college students, but most students, like all of us, have Zoom fatigue. The value of person-to-person connection cannot be overstated. We all have serious health concerns as the pandemic churns on. We recommend following all CDC protocols, including meeting outdoors when possible. Weekly meetings for students in high school and bi-weekly or monthly meetings for students attending college seem to be optimal.

As always, Sarah Harding and I are here to assist you. Please do not hesitate to contact us. Thank you for all that you do as a member of the Education Foundation team!



Meet Renee Ryckman

“Learning Together” with Krystal Porlles

By: Sandy Chase

Renee Ryckman epitomizes Emerson’s quote. An Education Foundation of Sarasota County mentor to Sarasota High School senior Krystal Porlles, Renee is no stranger to helping others—given her past career in healthcare and nursing. Attesting to her compassion are staff and volunteers of Northwestern Memorial Hospital, where she served as the director of women’s health. Julie Evans, a registered nurse who reported to Renee, says: “Renee advocated for both patients and staff. Striving to provide the best care, she constantly encouraged her staff to engage and take

ownership—to be their best.”

Having relocated to Florida from Louisville, Kentucky, with her husband, Brent, and sons Dylan and Logan, Renee is a role model. She has earned an MBA from Belmont University and has graduated from the Gulf Coast Leadership Institute in 2018.

As Jeff Blanchette, the Education Foundation’s mentoring manager, attests: “Renee is a committed and compassionate mentor who believes in the power of



The purpose of life is not to be happy. It is to be useful, to be honorable, to be compassionate, (and) to have it make some difference that you have lived and lived well.

Ralph Waldo Emerson



education to change lives.”

Why have you chosen the Education Foundation to become a mentor?

Involved with the Education Foundation for many years as a volunteer grant reader, science-fair and scholarship judge, and fundraiser, I have watched the organization grow—investing in our teachers and students.

Great programs—like awarding grants to teachers—enable them to implement programs and use creative instruction in their classrooms unavailable without extra funding. Reading those grants has given me a new appreciation for how dedicated our teachers are to their craft and students.

I understand that you were hesitant to become an Education Foundation mentor. Why the change of heart?

I was thrilled when the Education Foundation first launched mentoring. When I recall my high-school years, I would have loved to be paired with a mentor to give me advice, share his / her experience, and perhaps, most importantly, just listen and help me figure out what path I wanted to pursue after graduating.

Having spoken with someone at the Education Foundation, I was hesitant to get involved because I wasn’t sure I’d have enough time to dedicate as a mentor. In addition to owning a business and working full time, I had a full calendar of volunteer commitments: Children First, Forty Carrots, Junior League, The Twig (foster care), Sarasota Chamber Board, and Leadership Sarasota County.

I was also hesitant because I wasn’t sure I had the expertise or knowledge to fulfill that role. Thanks to COVID, I now have more time and decided to contact the Education Foundation again. Around the same time, I had a few conversations with friends who made me realize that I had more to offer as a mentor than I gave myself credit for.

I now realize that what matters most is being willing to be there and listen. The Education Foundation is great about pairing a mentor and a student with similar interests. Krystal and I had an opportunity to meet informally to decide whether we were a good match.

I think I won the lottery by being paired with Krystal.

How does your career lend itself to mentoring?

I have had various positions, including over 20 years in healthcare management, before starting a business. During that time, I’ve interviewed hundreds of people, including many newly graduated RNs. As I listened to their stories, I found myself giving advice about starting their career, balancing work and family commitments, and focusing on their 401(K) early—a bit of financial advice they’ll need sooner than later!

Because my career path hasn’t been straightforward, I can advise others on being open to opportunities and not being afraid

of making mistakes. The career you think you want now won't necessarily be where you find yourself in 20 or 30 years. That's okay. Remaining open to opportunities and being a life-long learner have been keys to my success.

In the next issue, our readers will learn about the mentoring experience from Krystal Porlles' perspective. How do you believe you're making a difference in her life?

I hope that I can listen with an impartial ear. Krystal has accomplished so much, and by focusing on what's most important to achieving her goals, I think of my role as more of a cheerleader—celebrating her successes. She's an amazing young woman, and I look forward to seeing what she accomplishes in the future.

The Education Foundation mentoring provides training opportunities for mentors about the college application process, how to navigate the cost of college, and adjust to college life. I've also been watching webinars and reading about the college application process so I can provide better advice for Krystal. I have two sons, and my oldest will be applying for college at the same time as Krystal, so I understand the anxiety and pressure of the entire process.

What does a typical mentoring session look like?

We generally meet for lunch and catch up on what she's doing in school and work. We trade texts, and I forward her information on scholarships and community service hours. Because she's so busy right now—enrolled in the Advanced International Certificate of Education (AICE) program, attaining a stellar GPA, and working part-time at Publix—I adapt to her schedule.

What rewards have you both experienced?

I learn so much from speaking with her about what it's like to work while attending school and how she juggles everything. She helps me understand what the AICE program entails

and the challenges of a demanding class load.

Krystal and her family moved here from Peru a few years ago, and I had the opportunity to travel there, so it's fun to talk about her birthplace.

What are your favorite pastimes?

I love to read, cook, and travel, especially with our sons—having been to more than 45 states and 60 countries like Peru and many other South American countries as well as Scotland and Australia. Although COVID has put a damper on traveling, I hope to resume my passion.

Besides traveling with another couple, one of our goals has been to introduce the boys to other cultures, especially when they were very young. Interestingly, during our South American trip, our boys didn't speak with another English speaker, yet they learned that there's no language barrier when you're playing and enjoying one another's company.

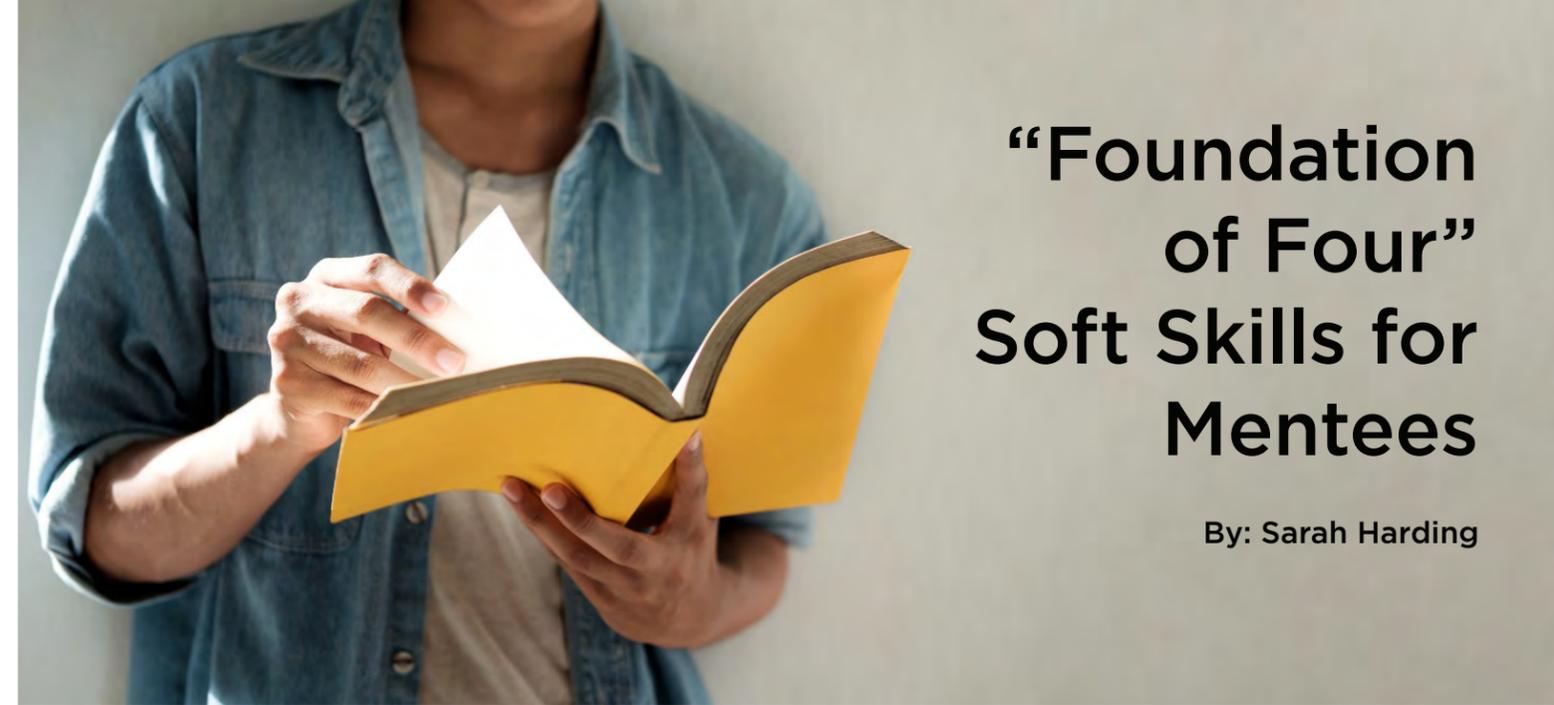
What would you tell others who are interested in mentoring?

Go for it! Don't let your concerns about time or experience deter you from volunteering. It's incredibly rewarding.



Please encourage your mentees to join our texting community to stay updated on deadlines, scholarships, FAFSA and more.

They can scan the QR code above or just text "**Education Foundation**" to (941) 263-0501!



“Foundation of Four” Soft Skills for Mentees

By: Sarah Harding

As mentees progress through the program, mentors can introduce new sets of professional skills. Soft skills are a core set of abilities that equip students with the tools needed for life, and we focus on the “Foundation of Four.”

1 Communication

- Listens actively
- Communicates clear ideas and appropriate responses
- Replies in timely manners

We encourage students to practice these concepts in preparation for in-person meetings or Zoom calls with their mentors.

3 Teamwork

- Collaborates on projects
- Employs communicative conflict-resolution techniques
- Shows dependability

The mentor-mentee relationship is based on teamwork and on a desire to assist the mentee in accomplishing goals in pursuing education after high school.

The Foundation of Four is a gradual learning process that can be guided by mentors or staff members by teaching these professional skills and actively discussing these concepts with personal examples.

2 Professionalism

- Emphasizes reliability
- Maintains proficient time management
- Uses email etiquette

Mentors can guide mentees by editing messages or suggesting a conversation that uses a professional tone.

4 Stress Management

- Uses calendars as guides for deadlines
- Schedules time for oneself
- Finds outlets for stress: exercise, essential oils, meditating, journaling

Mentees juggle rigorous course loads, jobs, sports, clubs, and additional responsibilities, so it is beneficial for mentors to monitor stress levels in the mentee.

Dr. Bianca Harris

Chief Program Officer



As chief program officer, you oversee the departments that have a direct impact on a student's future. What is your vision for the programs at the Education Foundation?

My vision is directly aligned with the vision of the Education Foundation, which is to ensure that our programs are providing

pathways for students to succeed in college, career, and life. It is important to equip students, particularly high school students, with the tools, resources, and skills they need to make confidently smooth transitions from high school to postsecondary. It is our hope that the foundations we are laying will aid in students attaining their dreams and aspirations beyond high school.

In your career, you have held several leadership roles in education that serve lower income families, including school principal. What do you see as the most significant challenges facing these students?

During my career, I've had the opportunity to serve students of diverse populations. What stands out most would be the significant disproportion between students with certain privileges and students from underserved communities.

Among the challenges underserved students face include lack of educational resources and parental influence and involvement. The most disheartening challenge in my opinion would be schools and teachers adequately preparing students from underserved communities for kindergarten. So many students begin pre-kindergarten ill-prepared, which puts them at huge disadvantages that are often never fully recovered.

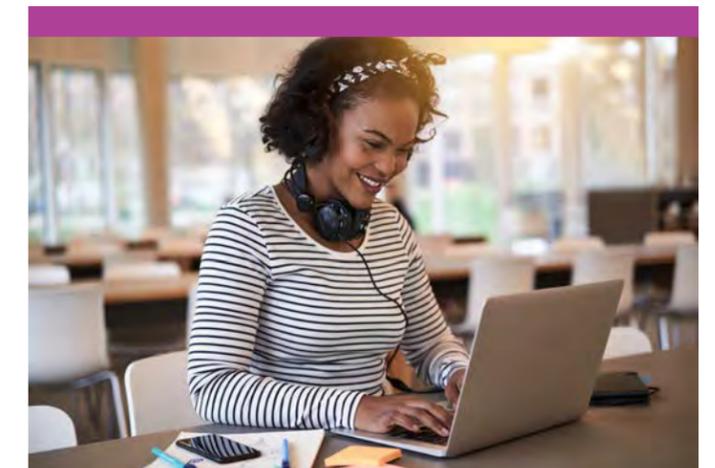
"It takes a village." Perhaps now, more than ever, this phrase has taken on an urgent call to action. How do you envision the greater Sarasota community becoming a partner in the Education Foundation's mission to enhance the potential of students, promote excellence in teaching, and inspire innovation in education, guided by strategic philanthropy?

I wholeheartedly believe it takes the support of communities and local businesses to produce outstanding students and successful schools.

The Education Foundation is a wonderful partner to Sarasota County Schools as well as various organizations that directly impact the students and teachers we serve. In addition, the Education Foundation is a wonderful steward of the resources we receive. We never waver from our mission of enhancing the potential of students through our programs. We continue to promote excellence in teaching through our grants and future Teacher Leadership Center. We consistently impact schools with innovation through immersive grants.

What hobbies or fun things do you like to do to unwind and relax?

I love to keep it simple and authentic. In my spare time, I thrift shop, bowl, watch movies, dine at local restaurants, and kick back at our world-famous beaches!



Remember that you can access our Mentoring Handbook, curriculum, and past newsletters **through our website**. Please do not hesitate to reach out to **[Jeff Blanchette](#)** or **[Sarah Harding](#)** if you have any questions or concerns.