



Mentorship Mutualism

~ Lessons Learned from Both Sides of a Productive Mentor/Mentee Relationship ~

Student and Young Professional Work Group Member, Shyanne Eustace, and her mentor

Clayton T. Russell reflect on their time together and the lessons they have learned.



My name is Shyanne Eustace and I am currently a senior at Northland College in Ashland, Wisconsin, where I am majoring in Natural Resources. I am from the reservation of Pueblo de Co chiti which is located in New Mexico along the Rio Grande. I grew up in a very traditional Pueblo household where I was taught the value of nature. I choose to attend Northland because of the small community and its focus and commitment to the environment.

As a first-generation college student far from home, I've had to learn to navigate new obstacles with little to no knowledge of what would be the outcome. After joining Wisconsin Green Fire, I was honored to be in a room full of knowledge and wisdom in which I wanted to learn more.

I first met Clayton through Dolly Ledin and it has truly been an honor to learn from him. We started our mentorship just before COVID-19 so we were able to meet in person then we transitioned to online communicating through emails and phone calls. Clayton has provided me with professional development by sending me educational resources such as readings on ecological restoration projects in Indigenous communities, environmental books, and random

posts from Facebook. He has also been able to check my resumes and cover letters during “job hunting season” and connected me to leaders in the environmental world like Robin Wall Kimmerer.

After my undergrad I plan to gain in the field experience while working with tribal communities to aid in the revitalization of traditional ecological knowledge.

As a mentee some things I have learned are:

- 🍁 Don't be afraid to ask questions, even if they seem stupid because you are a student and you are still learning.
- 🍁 Your mentor has been in your shoes in one form or another. Listen to their stories.
- 🍁 Be open minded. You might think you know something, but take it into consideration.

I am greatly appreciative of this mentorship program and I am excited to see the future of this program.



My name is Clayton T. Russell and I have been privileged to work with Dolly Ledin in setting up some of the framework for a Green Fire mentorship program. It was because of Dolly that I have had the good fortune to meet Shyanne. I am retired after teaching outdoor education, environmental education and Native American studies at Northland College for 27 years. Prior to that I directed a nature center and worked as an Interpretive naturalist. It has been an honor to meet and talk about career opportunities with Shyanne. My thoughts about mentoring come from a variety of sources and experiences. I have highlighted some gleanings below in the hopes that it may be of some help as we all work for a greener future.

In one of his last book tour lectures, author Barry Lopez opened with some excellent advice on how to mentor upcoming generations. He said, "If you are looking for something to do, make common cause with young people". He suggests we help younger generations know their thinking is on the right track and it may just need some additional shaping. Encourage young people to find the language to tell their stories. Help them to know and act on what is calling them into the future. I believe this is sound advice for mentors, as well as bosses and elected officials.

As for serving as a mentor, allow me to add a few more guidelines to help keep the mentor/ mentee roles well defined.

- 🌿 Be available and approachable, but don't hover.
- 🌿 Listen, really listen to the mentees needs, concerns and interests.
- 🌿 While a mentor is expected to offer advice from our storied careers and experiences, don't take offense if it is not followed. This is a different time and generation.
- 🌿 Offer connections, links, resources and make introductions where appropriate.
- 🌿 Be open to learning new things and world views.
- 🌿 Be encouraging and supportive! We all have the opportunity to learn, be amazed and have fun with every new breath.

Finally, as a mentor, give serious consideration to what is calling you into the future and is that future safe, equitable, inclusive, compassionate and meaningful.

Postscript:

In the introduction to his 1998 book, *About This Life*, Lopez also gives the following advice: "Read. Find out what you truly believe. Get away from the familiar." In this way, we can discover what we truly mean as human beings, not just career professionals. I also wish someone older had shared with me V. F. Cordova's insights into the larger questions of life. "How is it, this beautiful, mysterious, powerful and vulnerable world? Who am I in this world? And how shall I then live?"

Plenty to consider!

Clayton T. Russell