

Strategies to Enhance Interpersonal Relations in Academic Advising

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The relationship between interpersonal skills is positively correlated with effective academic advising. Professional academic advisors feel significant pressure to meet a wide array of student needs, increase retention rates, help students in their efforts of academic achievement and career exploration, and support institutions to excel in scholarship. These demands make the skills needed for effective academic advising more professionally demanding than ever before. An advisor's skill level in interpersonal relations is critical to advising success. In this article, I share the foundation for interpersonal relations proficiency, communicate the challenges in interpersonal skill areas, and provide strategies with examples designed for advisors to enhance their proficiency in their relationships with advisees.

KEYWORDS: advising competencies, communication, interactive advising, relational advising, tools for advising

The role of an academic advisor is to engage in a “series of intentional interactions” with students for the purpose of facilitating student-learning outcomes (National Academic Advising Association [NACADA], 2006). Hughey and Hughey (2009) discussed the important role of academic advisors in “supporting and facilitating students’ career and academic planning and development” (p. 1). An advisor’s skill in interpersonal relations either enhances or is an impediment to his or her advising success. An advisor’s ability to communicate and develop a relationship with a student provides a foundation for meaningful dialog and interactions. Habley (2005) stated, “Advising bears the distinction of being the only structured activity on campus in which all students have the opportunity for ongoing, one-to-one interaction with a concerned representative of the institution, and this fact is a source of its tremendous potential today.” The National Academic Advising Association (2005) Statement of Core Values of Academic Advising emphasizes the importance of effective advising that addresses the individual needs of students:

Academic advising is an integral part of the educational process and affects students in numerous ways. As advisors enhance student learning and development, advisees have the

opportunity to become participants in and contributors to their own education. In one of the most important potential outcomes of this process, academic advising fosters individual potential. (p. 1)

NACADA (2005) further discussed the role of the advisor with the responsibilities to the individuals they advise as follows:

Advisors introduce and assist students with their transitions to the academic world by helping them see value in the learning process, gain perspective on the college experience, become more responsible and accountable, set priorities and evaluate their progress, and uphold honesty . . . , encourage self-reliance . . . develop lifelong learning and self-management skills. Advisors respect students’ rights to their individual beliefs and opinions. (p. 3)

Finally, the NACADA Statement of Core Values of Academic Advising addresses the responsibility of advisors to practice active listening skills and respond with sensitive and appropriate interventions that “teach students to accept their responsibilities” (p. 3).

Data from the Noel-Levitz (2009) *National Student Satisfaction and Priorities Report* indicated that college students consistently rated academic advising as one of the most important aspects of their college experience. Students at 4-year public colleges and universities rated academic advising as first in importance, students in 4-year private colleges rated advising second, and those in community colleges and private schools rated advising as third and fourth in importance, respectively. In the 2005 National Survey of Student Engagement students ranked academic advising as the most important factor in determining student satisfaction, which further emphasizes the importance of interpersonal skills, the role of the academic advisor, and the mission of postsecondary institutions. Habley (2005) emphasized the connection between college retention and the nonacademic factors that involve a relationship when a student feels a connection with another person on a college campus. In addition, according to Lotkowski, Robbins, and Noeth (2004), the nonacademic factors of institutional commitment, academic goals, social support,

academic self-confidence, and social involvement have a strong correlation to retention. The Lotkowski et al. (2004) study identified academic advising as a best practice in efforts to enhance retention. Relationship and communication factors directly relate to the role and interpersonal skills of the academic advisor.

Nadler and Simerly (2006) conducted a study regarding the relationship and importance of listening, an interpersonal skill, to the student's willingness to trust and work with an academic advisor. They found very strong positive correlations between listening and trust, competence, benevolence, dependability, likeability, and honesty. Furthermore, they suggested that when a student "perceives the advisor as being concerned with his or her specific situation" (p. 216), the opportunity is enhanced for a relationship to be built based on trust and mutual respect.

The characteristics of being a good communicator as well as genuine and caring are conducive to productive advising sessions and result in successful student outcomes. The evidence indicates the skill of listening should be better addressed in academic-advising educational programs (Hester, 2008). Furthermore, in a study of student evaluations, Hester (2008) found that good listening was valued as a priority and best professional practice. The extant research underscores the importance of interpersonal skills development or enhancement for new and veteran advisors (Nunley, 2010). The 2005 NACADA Statement of Core Values of Academic Advising declaration reiterates the significance of the responsibilities academic advisors have to the students. It highlights that students

- have diverse backgrounds,
- are responsible for their own behaviors and their outcomes,
- can be successful based upon their individual goals and efforts,
- have a desire to learn,
- have learning needs that vary based upon individual skills, goals, responsibilities, and experiences, and
- use a variety of techniques and technologies to navigate their world.

Postsecondary institutions feel significant pressure to meet a wide array of student needs, increase retention rates, and excel in scholarship on shrinking budgets. The responsibility to meet these demands is often assigned to the academic advisor, making the skills needed for effective aca-

ademic advising more important than ever before. Professional academic advisors feel compelled to positively impact academic achievement and retention, enhance the critical thinking and reasoning skills of students, and produce a globally aware and socially responsible adult. In addition to these areas, students request assistance for a variety of other endeavors including decision-making processes, such as those for career choices, and issues of cognitive dissonance experienced due to a changing world or challenges in their own situations. These topics are integrated as student learning and development outcomes, with their related dimensions, in the Council for the Advancement of Standards in Higher Education (CAS) (2008) comprehensive description of categories and competencies. One of the CAS (2008) Standards articulates "interpersonal competence" with dimensions of "meaningful relationships, interdependence, collaboration, and effective leadership" (p. 3). The CAS Standards are addressed in advisor educational-preparation programs specifically reflecting concern with interpersonal skills, relational topics of active listening, coping skills for stress, setting boundaries, conflict resolution, teaming and collaboration, suicide, and the emotional needs of students (Beres, 2010).

Through my experiences, and as expounded by Beres (2010), I have found that relational competencies are among the most challenging for advisors to learn and in which to gain self-confidence. Advisors find these skills intimidating and have difficulty demonstrating professional self-efficacy in these areas, in part, because they require advanced interpersonal proficiencies. In addition, feedback from advisors and graduate students provides strong evidence that professional development and advanced strategies on interpersonal relations are needed for advisors.

Therefore, I share with academic advisors the foundation for interpersonal relations skills and communicate the challenges in the interpersonal skill areas as expressed by current academic advisors and students studying to be academic advisors as well as provide strategies with examples designed to enhance proficiency in interpersonal relations. In this article, by sharing specific strategies focusing on advanced interactions, I provide information intended to promote professional self-efficacy of academic advisors. When advisors are more self-confident about their own skills and credibility, they are more prepared to nurture the success of students.

To encourage improved advisor-advisee rela-

tionships, advising leaders need to initiate a variety of professional development activities to meet the need of current academic advisors and individuals studying and preparing to be academic advisors. Engaging in graduate courses that focus on skill enhancement in developmental communications and interpersonal relations, including the factors research indicates influence advising and helping processes such as personal characteristics, listening skills, verbal and nonverbal responses and behaviors, appropriate interventions, and addressing change, enhances interpersonal relations skills. Other activities include attending in-services and seminars, reading journals and other written materials on the topic, and mentoring with other advisors.

Foundation for Effective Interpersonal Relations Skills

Interpersonal relations skills are built on an alliance between the advisor and advisee. Regardless of the theoretical framework used by the advisor, their successful employment is considered to be a critical predictor of whether the advisee (helpee) will benefit from the relationship with the advisor (helper) (Young, 2009). Coll and Draves (2009) concluded that a positive correlation exists between the time students and advisors engage in discussions related to personal values and possible areas of study and positive feelings of satisfaction related to advising. They also found that by engaging in developmental rather than prescriptive practices, advisors generate greater opportunities for effective advising outcomes. Coll and Draves (2009) emphasized the point of quality rather than quantity advising sessions with students. Hale, Graham, and Johnson (2009) found that approximately 80% of students categorize their advisor as implementing a developmental advising style and more than 95% would prefer the developmental style. Students perceived the relationship with their developmental advisor to be “more involved than the mere act of selecting classes” (p. 85). Students described more satisfying and rewarding advising sessions with developmental advisors who regularly would meet and be intentional about establishing a relationship with them to assist with their career, academic, as well as personal and social goals (Hale et al., 2009).

Several studies have linked a personal connection to an advisor, professor, or another relationship with a college professional to postsecondary retention (Habley & McClanahan, 2004). Carl Rogers (1967) is considered the primary author of the core facilitative conditions and attitudes present in

a relationship that promotes positive change and growth. Rogers discussed three personal characteristics as being critical for the helper (advisor) to exhibit: congruence, positive regard, and empathy. Mahoney (2009) described relational competencies, comparable to Rogers’s characteristics, as building rapport, interviewing, and influencing development. For advisors to be effective in establishing and maintaining a nonjudgmental relationship for the purpose of meeting the needs of students, they must be able to set an environment for advisees to feel comfortable to share their stories, ask their questions, and engage in self-discovery. It is within this environment that the advisor is able to communicate using the interpersonal skills of advanced reflecting, probing questions, challenging and confronting, and implementing appropriate intervention skills to address change.

Rogers’s (1967) core facilitative conditions and the CAS relational competencies provide the foundation for building empathy and robust interpersonal relations skills. *Congruence* is the consistency between an individual’s feelings, the behaviors demonstrated, and speech (Rogers, 1967). Advisors should demonstrate all three features of congruence. For example, an advisor might provide a home phone number to advisees and invite them to call as needed; however, the advisor is acting incongruently if she or he does not answer the phone or return a callback request. Rogers defined *unconditional positive regard* as the belief that every human has worth just because the individual is a living person. He advocated that helpers communicate to helpees that having worth translates to deserving respect and being treated with dignity. This sense of unconditional positive regard is powerful when one attempts to help another person; it sends an advisee the message: “I value you regardless of your low grades, poor decisions, or undecided major.” Imagine the relief of countless advisees who have made poor decisions!

Empathy, as described by Rogers (1967) as a critical core facilitative condition, is the ability to understand another person’s feelings and have a heart for the pain he or she might be experiencing. It is an understanding of the worldview, perspective, feelings, and values of another person. Demonstrating empathy is about understanding, but not necessarily agreeing. Rogers (1967) contended that the more helpers used empathic responses the less they would feel inclined to be judgmental in their responses. Advisors must be faithful and consistent in demonstrating caring. One of the most effec-

tive strategies to demonstrate caring is to become acquainted with and develop professional relationships with advisees.

Skill Enhancement

Reflecting

Reflecting responses are effective, basic, verbal skills that include active listening and responding. These responses bring specific focus to the advisee's reactions in the affective domain and in thought processes known as the cognitive domain (Young, 2009). Reflecting requires an observant advisor engaged in active listening, which includes processing the messages and feelings advisees are communicating and responding to check for understanding, asking questions, probing for clarity, and challenging advisees to consider different significances or worldviews. To be most helpful to advisees, advisors must learn to identify and respond to the emotions being expressed and weave that awareness into a meaningful exchange (Egan, 2009).

Some of the most intense feelings are hidden in nonverbal messages and not cognizant to the advisee. Mahoney (2009) discussed the central goal of effective advising that requires insightful questioning to help students discover their strengths, abilities, gifts, passions, and values. Active listening to responses inspired by challenging questions leads to advisor insight into the experiences, feelings, and emotions of their students. An appropriate response to these feelings requires accuracy in reading the type and intensity of the emotion. To enhance an advisor's skill in reflecting feelings, one can consider the use of metaphors. Analogies can be effectively employed to compare feelings to an environmental event ("When I saw my mid-term grades, I felt like I'd been hit by a tidal wave") or to sensations to parts of the body ("Receiving the news that I was ineligible to compete felt like a kick in the stomach").

Appreciative advising is an additional approach often used to encourage advanced reflection. Bloom and Martin (2002) introduced "appreciative advising" as an intervention designed to enhance college retention and student satisfaction with four phases, which were most recently described by Bloom, Bryant, and He (2008) as Discovery, Dream, Design, and Don't Settle. Table 1 shows ideas based on Larkin's (2008) description of the stages of appreciative advising and how advisors could infuse reflection into the stages. The example features a student who has studied abroad. In general, Larkin suggested advisors encourage students returning from international and study abroad

experiences to share their thoughts and opinions about their trip. Advisors can help advisees clarify their experiences and consider how they might have changed their worldview.

Through meaningful interaction, led by the advisor's reflection skills, advisees can experience self-discovery that will lead to clarification of priorities, strengths, career options, academic success, self-regulation, and perhaps a widening of their worldview for a lifetime. McClellan (2007) reported the positive influence of advisors on student growth development. Graduate students, including current advisors, in the course *Interpersonal Relations* report experiencing difficulty transitioning with advisees from surface topics, such as grade difficulties and scheduling matters, to more important issues including the reasons behind the grade difficulties and the life conflicts making the scheduling problematic. Challenging an advisee to delve deeper into her or his story has the potential to provide valuable personal insight to the advisee and to the advisor. An advisor can reflect meaning by restating the "personal impact and significance" (Young, 2009, p. 167) of the experiences the advisee shares during an appointment. An effective advisor helps advisees make connections between past content and behaviors and the possibility for change in future behavior.

To make the needed changes for improvement and success, individuals need to discover patterns in academics and personal schemas. Advisors could consider using the following formula for reflecting meanings: "You feel (emotion) because (the personal meaning behind the situation that accounts for the feeling)" (Young, 2009, p. 169). More specifically, an advisor may say, "You feel nervous about taking Algebra II because Algebra I was not a pleasant experience for you." However, in general, an advisor should not tell an advisee the actions or decisions to take. The advisee needs to own the decision, the behavior, and ultimately the consequences of the decision.

Ask Probing Questions

To move from mundane conversation, in which advisees may reveal only that which they believe is expected of them, to the issues and impediments keeping them from achieving their maximum success, advisors should ask probing questions. The following are modified for advisors from a list of original questions by Egan (2009):

- What is it about the academic situation that is now concerning enough to compel the advisee

Table 1. Example reflection questions per appreciative advising stage for study abroad student

Appreciative Advising	Phase Interaction
Discovery	Engage students in open-ended questions using active listening. Look for opportunities for students to elaborate on experiences. Examples of Discovery phase questions include, “What have you seen that has been demonstrated in your thinking or behavior since you returned?” “What experience had the most impact on you personally? What were your expectations? How has this experience changed you?” (p. 2)
Dream	Nurture students to become aware and appreciate the ways that their talents and gifts might have been strengthened by their international travel. Help students to consider how their learning experiences might directly impact a resume, academic courses, and future professional careers. Questions that could be asked in this phase might include, “How do you think your international experience will aid you in the future? What transferable skills did you learn from being in that country? How have your future career and life plans been altered due to this experience?” (p. 2)
Design	Help students develop goals related to their career aspirations influenced by life experiences and international travel. Encourage students to continue engaging in a cultural experience by volunteering or enrolling in a foreign language class. Consider facilitating a group activity to maintain excitement and discussion regarding items following the international trip. The following questions might be included: “How do you plan to continue to use the life skills that you have gained while abroad? How can you incorporate other international experiences into your career plans?” (p. 2)
Don't Settle	Provide ongoing services to students upon their return to campus from international and study abroad experiences. The transition is sometimes more difficult than anticipated and advisees find that opportunities to discuss these changes are helpful. Questions in this phase might include, “You planned to become involved with our international student population as a mentor; how is that going? You had a goal of attending graduate school to further your knowledge about a particular topic; what steps have you started to take to achieve your goals?” (p. 2)

Note. Quotes from Larkin (2008). See also Bloom et al. (2008).

- to seek the assistance of the advisor?
- In addition to the advisee, who is feeling the consequences of the academic difficulties of the advisee?
- What strengths does the advisee have that could help to solve the problem(s)?
- What is keeping the advisee from engaging in her or his strengths to be more successful?
- What are the strengths of the advisee and how does the advisee explain his or her strengths?
- What is the academic difficulty costing the advisee or her or his family? What are the short- and long-term consequences of the advisee’s decisions?
- What are the ripple effects of the issues being discussed?

Other strategies for encouraging advisors to learn more about issues of concern to students and possible solutions to those concerns include questions that are designed to activate or motivate advisees. Scaling questions are generally associated with solutions-focused approaches (deShazer & Berg, 1997) and invite individuals to consider placing their concern or issue on a scale from 0 to 10. For example, a scaling question for an advisee could be, “On a scale of 0 to 10, with a 0 being no confidence whatsoever and 10 being completely confident, how confident are you that you will complete the semester with a 3.0 (B) average in your course work?” Adaptations to this question could include queries about the level of student motivation to attend class, graduate, gain employment,

and stop using or abusing alcohol, tobacco, drugs, or participate in other harmful behaviors. Once an advisee provides an initial (non-zero) response to a scaling question, the advisor has an opportunity to ask about strategies that work for the advisee. The advisor uses this opportunity to help advisees discover strengths and gifts for the purpose of building confidence and hope for the future. In a follow-up question, one might ask about ways to improve the situations: "What would make a 4 on the scale today a 5 next week?" Goals should always be concrete and observable. Berg (1994) recommended continuing by asking "and what else" would make the 4 a 5? A popular scaling and excellent probing question is "How do you anticipate life to be different after you meet your goals and you have reached the 10 on the scale of 0 to 10?" A specific example may sound like this, "How will your life be different when you have completed your degree?" The advisor acknowledges that lives and issues are complex and often take multiple solutions and strategies to resolve.

The miracle question characterizes another solution-focused approach. It is intended to move an individual toward meeting problem-solving goals (Young, 2009). An example for an advisee might be as follows: "A miracle happened and you woke up in the morning and found your problem has been completely solved. Reflect on that for a minute. What would be the first thing you notice about your life that is different? What will you feel that is different from how you feel today? What will you see? What in your life would be different? What is it that would make your life different?" The miracle question helps the individual determine preferences for the solution to the issue. The focus is positive and on the present situation, future goals, and areas that must be changed to achieve those goals (Young, 2009).

Advisors sometimes face challenges in bringing students from considering and connecting their present behavioral patterns and decision-making processes to the development of future-oriented goals and consideration of possible changes necessary to meet those goals. Future-oriented probes are positive oriented and included embedded questions designed to encourage a focus on outcomes: "What current academic patterns would enhance your life?" or "What will you be doing differently when you graduate with your degree?" or "What would this strength or strong interest look like if you studied and devoted time to it?" Egan (2009, p. 268) described these probes as encouraging individuals to respond to "What do I want?" and "What

do I need?"

An important role of the advisor is to help the advisee recognize the need for change, be motivated to change, and finally to engage in change behaviors. Skills effective in interpersonal relations require active engagement. These include appropriate probing to learn the stories of advisees and the resources that will help them to be successful.

Challenging and Confronting

Hughey and Hughey (2009) discussed the need for advisors to use and apply competencies such as listening, questioning, challenging, and goal setting for effective academic advising. Advisees gain in cognitive development when advisors challenge them to critically think about relationships and patterns between academics and their career and academic goals (Young, 2009, p. 167). For meeting this end, advisors must have the knowledge, competency, and confidence to confront their advisees when needed. Young (2009) stated, "Confrontations are interventions.... As a result of confrontation, client awareness of inconsistencies is stimulated, and the client moves to resolve them" (p. 194). Mahoney (2009) stated that challenging may not "be well received if the advisor has not established rapport and gained students' trust" (p. 63). Hackney and Cormier (2009) discussed four purposes of confrontations. In the role of an academic advisor, their purposes are as follows:

- Confrontations about discrepancies assist the advisee in becoming more congruent upon recognizing and following up with actions.
- Confrontation confirms for the advisee that the advisor is listening and addressing the issues of concern in a productive and helpful way, serving as a role model for conflict resolution using honest, direct, and open communication.
- Confrontation is action oriented. Advisees in college settings are adults or young adults that prefer action-oriented resolutions that initiate behavior change.
- Confrontation can be used to help advisees discover more about their own strengths and explore additional opportunities and resources for needed change and goal setting. (pp. 132–33)

Claiborn (1982) found that discrepant points of view are beneficial to encouraging varying ways of construing problems and solutions. I have adapted for academic advisors Young's (2009, pp. 194–204) recommended steps for confrontation:

- Use nonjudgmental listening and comprehend the issue being discussed.
- Determine presenting issues not being raised but contributing to the problem.
- Know advisees well enough to have established a professional relationship and well-developed open lines of communication.
- Monitor advisee's physical, emotional, and cognitive processes during confrontation sessions. When necessary, be prepared to retreat or move the advisee in another direction.
- Follow up with advisees in a subsequent session.

Advisors are in a position to challenge advisees in a safe and constructive environment. Mahoney (2009) acknowledged that advisors need to sometimes confront advisees with difficult feedback regarding academic options, career choices, or personal issues. Advisors sometimes must inform advisees that changing academic and career environments may have resulted in ineffective career and decision-making assumptions (Hughey & Hughey, 2006). Consistently, advisors in the Interpersonal Relations class express concern about confronting advisees regarding advisees' ineffective assumptions or dysfunctional behaviors. Advisors fear they will offend or upset advisees. The research indicates that confrontation should not be argumentative or discussed in raised voices (Miller, Benefield, & Tonigan, 1993). The most powerful confrontation occurs in an atmosphere of support and caring with the mutual goal of helping the student develop awareness, arousal, and insights (Young, 2009). Examples may be encouraging positive self-talk regarding success in calculus or confidence in furthering one's education in a graduate or professional program and providing evidence of opportunities for success in advanced courses, programs, or with resources that are available.

Alternately, if an advisee interacts with classmates in an offensive manner and is considering applying for a position requiring working as a team member, a different type of confrontation and discussion between advisor and advisee is appropriate. An advisor's role may be to question advisees about how they believe others perceive them. Depending on the response, the advisor may need to initiate appropriate, tactful follow-up queries that lead to honest dialog with advisees about their communication style. Examples of dialog might be, "What would offensive group interactions sound like?" or "How would you respond to someone saying the exact words and using the exact tone

of voice to you that you said to your group last week?" or "What is one change you could make in your tone of voice with your group this week?"

Often advisees give inconsistent verbal and behavior messages. For example, a student might report he or she is very concerned about passing a course required for graduation. However, the student has not attended any tutoring sessions that have been made available and has only attended 50% of classes this semester. In this case, the advisor might confront the advisee by saying, "On one hand you tell me you are concerned about passing this important course. On the other hand, you have not attended to the matters that would have contributed to your success in the course, such as attending class and the tutoring sessions. I am confused." The confrontation brings an awareness of the discrepancy to light, causes anxiety or an uncomfortable feeling, and compels the student to address the issue. Although extremely useful, the confrontation should be used strategically and in the context of a caring and supportive environment. The confrontation is not ever meant to serve as a judgment.

Confrontation is often used with advisees perceived as defiant and resistant. The following strategies assist advisors to more effectively advise individuals less inclined to fully engage in the advising process:

- Arrange the advisor's office to be nonintimidating and sharing friendly. For example, when visiting with these students, do not sit behind a desk. Have chairs or sofa that presents a friendly atmosphere, not décor that gives the appearance of a principal's office.
- Demonstrate Rogers's (1967) core conditions of empathy, genuineness, and positive regard. Be yourself and show your personality.
- Demonstrate a sense of humor according to your personality and when appropriate with the student.
- Avoid power struggles or becoming defensive with students. Acknowledge the student's ownership in the decision-making process.
- Stay calm, caring, and always use the same tone of voice that sends a message of respect (Brodsky, 2005; Egan, 2009; Hanna, Hanna, & Keys, 1999; Sommers-Flanagan & Sommers-Flanagan, 1995).

Initiating and Maintaining Change

Academic advisors connect with students in special ways to assist them in planning for their

academic and career success. To plan for change and interventions, they need to know students and understand the appropriate approach to each specific situation. Changes in today's world of work, globalization of employer needs, and dynamic academic standards require advisors to challenge advisees to embrace change (Feller & O'Bruba, 2009). Once an advisor has developed a relationship with an advisee, she or he can confront the advisee with suggestions for change in behavior or cognitive patterns. Individuals respond to interventions and adjust to them differently, depending on previous experiences and present schemas. An advisor's ability to motivate and navigate advisees through the change process is often a critical key of a successful advising program.

The Prochaska and DiClemente stages of change model is a well-known transtheoretical theory of behavior change (Prochaska & DiClemente, 1986; Prochaska & Norcross, 2007; Prochaska, Norcross, & DiClemente, 1994; Seligman & Reichenberg, 2010). The model is designed around core constructs used to assess stage processes including phases of readiness and maintenance of change. Based on empirical research and practice, this model provides an organized and methodical approach for advisors to use in considering an advisee's willingness to put forth the energy necessary to change (Prochaska & DiClemente, 1986; Prochaska & Norcross, 2007; Prochaska et al., 1994; Seligman & Reichenberg, 2010).

In Stage 1, precontemplation, individuals are not ready for change; however, they are often willing to learn about issues and topics of interest. Their openness gives advisors the opportunity and teachable moment to discuss student perceptions regarding the effectiveness of the decision-making process they are currently using, models of effective decision making, consequences of behaviors, and cognitive monitoring and self-reflection (Seligman & Reichenberg, 2010).

In Stage 2, contemplation, advisor discussions start having an impact on the advisees, who begin to recognize the need for change. Advisee language indicates that he or she is considering taking action within the next 6 months. For example, the advisee may say, "I will get serious about studying and attending every class next semester" (Prochaska & DiClemente, 1986; Prochaska & Norcross, 2007; Prochaska et al., 1994; Seligman & Reichenberg, 2010).

Stage 3, reparation, is characterized by advisees who are ready to change their behaviors to enhance their lives (Seligman & Reichenberg, 2010). Advi-

sors need to seize this time to inform students of networking and referral resources and encourage students to utilize all of the support services available to them. For example, students seeking to improve academic study practices need to learn and implement more effective strategies such as how to read for tests, ask questions, take effective notes, take advantage of tutoring services, and implement good time-management skills (Prochaska & DiClemente, 1986; Prochaska & Norcross, 2007; Prochaska et al., 1994; Seligman & Reichenberg, 2010).

In Stage 4, action, individuals are motivated and energized to execute their plans (Seligman & Reichenberg, 2010), and so advisors should nurture and encourage advisees to persevere and keep working hard at making progress toward their goals. In this stage, students may be implementing improved study strategies, using tutoring services, attending all classes, and becoming self-advocates by asking questions to clarify their own understanding. Students undertaking change need assistance and support to strengthen their changing positive behaviors. During this time, advisees need assistance in replacing previous dysfunctional behaviors with new healthy activities or better coping mechanisms and in surrounding themselves with positive support systems (Prochaska & DiClemente, 1986; Prochaska & Norcross, 2007; Prochaska et al., 1994; Seligman & Reichenberg, 2010).

During Stage 5, the maintenance phase, advisees tire of the novelty of change and feel pulled back to the previous and comfortable behaviors of old. Certain situations exacerbate the desire to return to previous activities: stress, illness, and proximity to individuals connected to previous behaviors. Therefore, advisors should discuss and plan for this maintenance time with advisees before advisees are tempted to revert to ineffective behaviors. At this time advisors work with advisees to develop self-reward and -management systems and attend appropriate support groups or referral agencies (Prochaska & DiClemente, 1986; Prochaska & Norcross, 2007; Prochaska et al., 1994; Seligman & Reichenberg, 2010).

Change is a complicated matter for advisors to address in the advising environment in part because it involves both cognitive and behavioral components. Kegan and Lahey (2009) found that individuals who struggle to maintain change perhaps have "hidden competing commitments" (p. 334). Therefore, advisors can help advisees identify and confront the connection between dysfunctional and self-defeating behaviors, mixed priorities, and

confusing assumptions. For example, the advisee states she would like to earn A's in Human Anatomy, which meets on Friday at 8:30 a.m.; however, she chooses to party with her friends on Thursday night and does not attend class on Friday morning. She wants to earn an A, but time with friends in a social situation offers a competing commitment. In this case, the advisor might engage her in a conversation that includes confrontation about the discrepancy in behavior.

The advisor caseload likely includes students addressing different types of change situations, including first-time college attendance and returning to college after time away. Resiliency and ability to positively address change are closely correlated characteristics. Resiliency greatly impacts academic and career achievement and can be encouraged and nurtured during advising. Resilience is an important factor to consider when assisting advisees' willingness to change. Resilience is divided into outcomes resilience, the return to a previous state, and process resilience. As an ongoing display of coping with stress, resilient individuals are those who "see the glass half-full" (Holaday & McPhearson, 1997).

Holaday and McPhearson (1997) reported characteristics that impact the ability to demonstrate resilience, including factors of social support, cognitive skills, and psychological skills. Egan (2009) suggested a positive correlation between a broadened worldview, being a contributing member of the society, and resilience. When advisors assist advisees in discovering a sense of purpose and identity, advisees experienced enhanced self-efficacy and a clarified form of self-confidence. Change then becomes more manageable because its purpose is more clear and enhanced with motivation. For example, students may find attending an 8:30 a.m. course easier if the course applies toward completing a major rather than serves as a general education requirement.

Recommendations and Conclusions

Although the experiences highlighted in this article show the importance of enhancing the interpersonal skills of professional academic advisors, the findings show limited specific empirical data. In the future, researchers should explore the dynamics and effectiveness of the advisor-advisee relationships and interactions. For examples, scholars of advising might conduct investigations on the number of advising sessions conducted with students; the number of reflection statements, questions, and responses given by the advisor; advisor skill

in effective confrontation; the level of intervention introduced and facilitated by the advisor; and the degree to which the advisor motivates change within advisees. Further research is needed to explore the professional quality of the advising relationship and the level of advanced interpersonal responses expressed by the advisor. Previous research conducted specifically on doctoral advising relationships indicates the importance of the depth of the advisor-advisee relationship and could be replicated or modified to study all advising relationships.

Data collected regarding best practices of academic advisors enhance the body of research of advising and provides specific strategies for advisors to implement in advising programs. Empirical data gathered with a large representative sample of a specific population, such as underrepresented or first-generation students, would contribute to the knowledge base in this field. Such research should be a priority in academic advising because the bond and connection between the advisor and advisee forms the foundation of a successful advising relationship.

The roles of a professional academic advisor are challenging and varied. However, the research indicates that successful advisors have well-developed interpersonal skills that demonstrate warmth and support (Mottarella, Fritzsche, & Cerabino, 2004). An advisor with effective interpersonal skills consistently demonstrates a positive and accepting view of others and responds nonjudgmentally to their issues, religions, cultures, values, and life styles (Young, 2009). Effective advisors are able to ask probing questions and challenge advisees' thinking and behaviors without offending them. Advisors perform these functions within the framework of nurturing intellectual growth and academic success. Finally, advisors stimulate and motivate advisees to learn ways to change and become effective problem solvers and to grow and adjust in a world of constant change. Their goal is to assist advisees to integrate positive academic and career growth into their daily lifestyle, and while the role of academic advisors in this endeavor appears to be daunting, success is achievable with well-developed and enhanced interpersonal skills.

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