

Secrets of Highly Successful Mentors and Advisors

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By

Svetlana Vlady

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INTRODUCTION

A doctorate is the highest level of degree awarded by universities, for original research that offers a significant contribution to existing knowledge. Doctoral programs and degree requirements vary greatly around the world; in some countries, the standard doctorate is known as a ‘Doctor of Science’, while in other countries it is known as a ‘Doctor of Philosophy’ (PhD). The term ‘Philosophy’ does not refer to the field of philosophy, but to its original Greek meaning, which is ‘love of wisdom’.

A doctoral degree is the ultimate recognition of the educational and intellectual ability required to pursue many of today’s careers in research or university-level teaching. PhD graduates also act as a link between academia and industry, allowing knowledge to flow in both directions.

The PhD journey is not easy, as it cannot be achieved without passion, perseverance, and hard work. However, good mentoring and advice can guide doctoral students through the difficulties they may face, making their pursuits easier and more interesting. Under the guidance of outstanding supervisors, the PhD journey can even be pleasurable and exciting. An outstanding PhD supervisor plays the dual role of mentor and advisor, with demonstrated excellence in PhD candidate and graduate supervision. Supervisors can have a dramatic impact on the learning and professional development of their students. A key element of supervision lies in the relationship between student and supervisor, especially in the quality of the relationship.¹

The purpose of this book is to inspire PhD students and supervisors to collaborate and improve their relationships with each other, making the journey to a doctorate less stressful and more enriching for both. This book will disclose the secrets of how to be a highly successful supervisor and how to transform the PhD process into a wonderful learning experience. Students will find many useful suggestions in this book, including answers to many of their questions about the PhD process. Supervisors can learn from the valuable experiences of outstanding supervisors and discover some excellent examples to follow. Successful supervision can support masters’ and undergraduate research as well;

¹ Peter Hawkins and Robert Shohet *Supervision in the helping professions* (Open University Press: UK, 2007), 230.

therefore, this book will also be useful for graduate and undergraduate students, advisors, and mentors.

This book presents the findings of a qualitative study that identified the characteristics of successful students, qualities of outstanding supervisors, styles of supervision, and elements of a strong student–supervisor relationship. Data collection included open-ended questionnaires and semi-structured interviews. This approach enabled the discussion of sensitive issues, allowing the researchers to delve more deeply into the supervision process and develop an understanding of how professors supervise their students, and what makes them, their students, and the PhD process successful. The open-ended questions included:

- What makes a PhD student successful?
- How do you cultivate an independent researcher?
- How to produce high-quality research?
- How do you maintain a strong supervisor–student relationship?
- How do you maintain the relationship after the students graduate?

Additional questions were created during the interview according to the interviewees' responses, allowing the flexibility to probe for details or discuss certain issues. For example:

- Do you publish with the students?
- Do you encourage the students to attend academic conferences?
- What types of help do you provide in finding jobs or post-doctoral positions?
- What is your working relationship with the students?
- How do you approach your supervision of students?

The sample selection process was intended to ascertain the characteristics of outstanding supervisors, and the important roles they play in achieving research goals and supporting PhD and masters' students. Excellence in graduate and PhD supervision has many characteristics. Among the elements considered, which made up the inclusion criteria, is a reputation among students and colleagues for outstanding supervisory and mentoring skills, as well as the ability to inspire students and motivate them to achieve high standards. The sample selection process also recognized excellence in teaching practices, which refers to the highest standards in pedagogy, an outstanding record of teaching effectiveness, the ability to promote and sustain the intellectual development of their students, and skills in producing high-quality research.

Outstanding supervisors were selected from a pool of professors who had participated in research supervision towards the successful completion of doctoral programs of at least five students. The selected professors were

also recommended by their former students and colleagues (a minimum of three each). All the professors have superior accomplishments in the following categories:

- I. Teaching:
 - Communicates with students in a positive and productive environment;
 - Provides a critical analysis of work and timely feedback;
 - Encourages independence;
 - Facilitates the development of academic skills.
- II. Research:
 - Personal records of scholarship and research;
 - Ability to communicate their knowledge and expertise;
 - Publication history;
 - Journal editing;
 - Industry engagement.
- III. Student supervision:
 - Assists with networking;
 - Identifies opportunities to promote their students' research;
 - Provides conference and publication support to the candidate;
 - Demonstrates knowledge of the processes related to supervision;
 - Offers advice regarding job contacts and career paths.

The following professors (males and females) were invited to participate in the interviews and discuss their supervision styles:

1. From Australia:
 - 1) Professor Tom Smith, Macquarie University, Sydney;
 - 2) Professor Keitha Dunstan, Bond University, Gold Coast.
2. From New Zealand:
 - 1) Professor Michael Bradbury, Massey University, Auckland;
 - 2) Professor Judy Brown, Victoria University of Wellington, Wellington.
3. From Russia:
 - 1) Professor Vycheslav Sokolov, St. Petersburg State University;
 - 2) Lyubov Tchaikovskya, Plekhanov Russian University of Economics, Moscow.

4. From Ukraine:

- 1) Academician Peter Vlasyuk (1905-1980), Kiev, Ukraine;
- 2) Professor Olga Tsokur, Odessa National University, Ukraine.

(Information about Peter Vlasyuk was collected from publicly available sources and his students).

5. From the United States of America:

- 1) Professor Kamal Bawa University of Massachusetts-Boston;
- 2) Professor Merih Uctum, The City University of New York, Brooklyn College; Graduate Centre.

(In addition, the author's US supervisors were interviewed, during which they, and the author shared their strategies and thoughts on improving the student-supervisor relationship).

- 3) Professor Emeritus, Morris McInnes, Suffolk University, Boston;
- 4) Professor Joseph Szendi, Towson University, Baltimore.

This book highlights the following four characteristics of the findings:

First, each interview is interesting, and presented in the form of a story, in which each outstanding supervisor shares their strategies for success, and discusses their supervision styles. Moreover, each interview was extended using publicly available information, personal opinions, and discussions. Second, each of the outstanding supervisors represents a different country; therefore, their individual styles of supervision and relationships with their students could be affected by the social norms and cultural traditions of their surroundings. Third, a range of male and female supervisors is selected, as each gender could have a different supervision style. Finally, each supervisor represents the larger academic community. To unlock all their secrets, all the interviews were compared, contrasted, and analyzed for patterns, which were complemented by the author's and other PhD students' experiences. In the book, these findings are combined into descriptive statements, and all secrets are revealed for the students' and supervisors' consideration.

PART I:
STORIES OF SUCCESSFUL PHD SUPERVISORS

CHAPTER ONE

AUSTRALIAN PROFESSOR: TOM SMITH



Professor Tom Smith is one of Australia's leading scholars of finance, and currently serves as Head of Department in Applied Finance and Actuarial Studies at Macquarie University. His prior appointments include the Fuqua School of Business at Duke University in the USA, the Australian National University, the Australian Graduate School of Management, and, most recently, the position of Frank Finn Professor of Finance at the University of Queensland Business School. He also studied at the University of Queensland, graduating with a Bachelor of Commerce (Honors and University Medal) and a Master of Financial Management. He received his PhD in Finance from Stanford University.

Professor Smith is ranked the number one finance academic in Australia and New Zealand, and, over the past 25 years, has remained in the top 100 worldwide in Tier 1 publications since graduation. Professor Smith's research interests are in the areas of environmental finance, asset-

pricing theory and testing, market design, market microstructure, and derivatives, and his work has been published in leading financial and economic journals. During his academic career, Professor Smith has won several awards, including the Australian National University Vice-Chancellor's Award for Excellence in Research Supervision.

As Chair of the Delegated Ethics Review Committee and Associate Dean of Research for the College of Business and Economics at the Australian National University, Professor Smith has implemented training in ethics, as well as several novel courses and events for the university's PhD students. He also established the Finance PhD program at Duke University. According to research,² this program is rated second-best in the nation, surpassed only by Harvard's program. Professor Smith also participated in, and successfully organized, many doctoral symposiums and workshops at local, national, and international levels.

Professor Smith is particularly proud of all his PhD students. During his tenure, he has supervised several dozen PhD students, who now work in academia or the industry, with remarkable achievements and amazing publication records in top journals. His students have published more than 50 articles in high quality (Tier 1) journals and those who are employed in academia have landed positions at leading universities in Australia, the US, and other countries overseas.

What Makes a Professor Successful?

Professor Smith graduated with a Bachelor of Commerce (Honors) degree in 1980, received his master's degree in 1982 from the University of Queensland (UQ), and, 30 years later, has returned to UQ as the Frank Finn Chair of Finance. Regarding his experiences as a student, he said: "What I remember about my professors at UQ is that they had a passion for teaching as well as research."

Emeritus Professor Frank Finn is among the group of outstanding professors employed at UQ. Professor Finn also had a considerable influence on Tom. Tom took several subjects with Professor Finn, describing him as incredibly passionate about research and saying that, "all of his students would hang on his every word. Frank would challenge you to 'get your hands dirty', meaning we shouldn't just talk about

² George Karolyi and Andria Silvestrini (2005), "Comparing the Research Productivity of Finance PhD Program Graduates."

theories; we should go out to the marketplace and see how they work in real life.”³

When Professor Finn retired, many of his former students, colleagues, and professional associates, established the Frank Finn Scholarship. They gave generously to launch an endowment fund to assist Commerce students to continue their studies.⁴ For Professor Finn, the scholarships he won as a young student helped him tremendously, so the Frank Finn Scholarship reflects his own wishes to support future students of UQ.⁵ Professor Finn’s abilities to engage with, and influence, students are remarkable.

Reg Gynther is another educator who influenced and encouraged Tom’s decision to become an academic. Tom recounted that, “[Professor Gynther] wrote to me at the end of each semester, congratulating me on my results and suggesting that I consider doing Honors. After three years and six of those letters, I took him up on his offer.”⁶ In Tom’s eyes, Professor Gynther is a “textbook model of a professor”, who is “well dressed, hard-working, scholarly, [and] obviously loves what he does.”⁷

Tom learned from Professor Gynther, “that it is okay to adamantly defend a viewpoint and doubt another’s and that healthy debate, if done in the right spirit, can be influential in advancing the field.”⁸ As the Greek philosopher Plato (427–347 BCE) once said: “The best method of learning is the critical discussion in which one moves from mere opinion to true knowledge.”⁹

Professor Don Anderson was Tom’s honors program supervisor, who helped him see research as a series of wonderful mysteries. “I still feel that sense of mystery and fun when I do research,” said Professor Tom Smith.¹⁰ He hopes to pass on this profound sense of mystery to his students, as the world is full of unsolved puzzles.

³ Tom Smith, “100 Years of Great Professors,” *University of Queensland*, December 2012.

⁴ *Ibid.*

⁵ Professor Finn won the University of Queensland Evening and External Students’ Scholarship to complete his Honors degree in 1967. This scholarship was an enormous help to Professor Finn during his early career, (something he has never forgotten).

⁶ Smith, “100 Years of Great Professors.”

⁷ *Ibid.*

⁸ *Ibid.*

⁹ Andrew Gregory. *Plato’s Philosophy of Science*. (London: Duckworth 2000), p 336.

¹⁰ Tom Smith in discussion with the author, May 2014.

Of this group of educators, Professor Allan Kleidon had perhaps the largest influence on Tom's academic career: "He was my teacher in Introductory Accounting, in Honors, and later during my PhD at Stanford University. I remember going to his classes and having every assignment question wrong, but rather than being dismayed, I was inspired."¹¹ We must strive to learn from our mistakes, because in every challenge encountered lies the opportunity for growth. When we overcome our difficulties and grow, this is what makes us stronger and makes life so exciting.

From all his teachers, Tom learned that all things are possible and there are no limits to what can be achieved. He concluded: "They all gave me the idea that we have to believe in what we are doing; you have to stand for your research and be prepared to passionately defend it."¹² Great teachers have the ability to challenge students and motivate them to learn deeper, encouraging and influencing them to become great students.

Tom was very fortunate to complete his PhD degree at Stanford University. There, his PhD coursework helped him immensely, teaching him the language of the finance field and how to read and interpret papers. Tom had good supervisors, but he thought that they spent too much time talking about editing and writing, and not about the substance of the papers. Of course, he later found out that editing and writing are very important issues. The old saying—that an average paper, wonderfully written, might be published, but a great paper, badly written, might be rejected—is very true.

Tom also learned a great deal from his classmates, saying: "I think this goes to show the importance of a cohort. It is not a journey that you would want to take on solo!"¹³

What Makes a PhD Student Successful?

Professor Smith has supervised more than 50 PhD students, and he believes that each one brings something unique to the field of finance, as well as a fresh and interesting perspective to his life and work. He wants to produce researchers who will go out and change the world of finance. He believes that his role as a supervisor is "to plant seeds, to nurture them,

¹¹ Tom Smith, "100 Years of Great Professors."

¹² Ibid.

¹³ Tom Smith in discussion with the author, April 2014.

and let them do the best for themselves to grow.”¹⁴ It is the students’ words and deeds that have inspired him to love research supervision.

Professor Smith feels that he has a special vocation for running a PhD program and nurturing outstanding researchers. He totally enjoys this work and, in fact, does not think of it as work. He believes it is his calling, saying, “It is something to which I am absolutely committed, something about which I feel very strongly, and something to which I have devoted my entire academic career.”¹⁵

His students come from various places, are at different stages of their lives, and have distinctive amounts of background knowledge. In his opinion, each student is different, but they all have the building blocks for success. As such, each student needs a unique approach to reach their potential. Professor Smith’s approach respects the diversity of his students, and his goal is to release the true potential within each student. He strives to treat his students with respect, fairness, and dignity and be a constant source of encouragement, support, and guidance. “I will stand by them throughout this process, providing, at every step, encouragement, ideas, help, friendship, and time. I strive to be there for them at every step, but also to have the wisdom to step aside when that is needed,”¹⁶ he said.

As his students come from all backgrounds, they are not simply the ‘cream of the crop’.¹⁷ For Professor Smith, early academic achievement as an undergraduate or honors student is not the only way to establish a career as a researcher. “My students have come through many doors to end up with me,” he said.¹⁸ The qualities that Professor Smith looks for in PhD students are curiosity, passion, and stubbornness. In his experience, these characteristics are the best predictors of success as a PhD student. He believes that being intelligent is not sufficient for good research; even highly intelligent people find it hard to succeed without these three elements.

A good researcher must navigate through all difficulties, conventions, and criticisms. Curiosity creates ideas, but being passionate, and sticking with one’s research ideas, brings success. It should be expected that relationships with stubborn and passionate students are not ‘a lovely bed of roses’; they could be ‘a very rocky highway’. However, as Professor Smith pointed out, “this is just the nature of people.”¹⁹

¹⁴ Ibid.

¹⁵ Ibid.

¹⁶ Ibid.

¹⁷ Ibid.

¹⁸ Ibid.

¹⁹ Ibid.

In his view, building a high level of confidence in students is essential, as, “the confidence to tackle any problem relates to the curiosity needed to be a good researcher. Lack of fear makes curiosity a powerful tool for discovery. Building confidence is an important part of good supervision, with guidance provided at crucial times. With confidence comes good judgment, sound decision-making, and profitable lines of enquiry.”²⁰

How Do You Produce an Independent Researcher?

Topic selection is the first stage of a research project, and an essential element of its success. There are many approaches to selecting a topic for PhD research. Most common is selection by a supervisor, while other approaches involve students coming up with their own ideas. Professor Smith’s approach is to focus on the student’s idea and offer his expertise, narrowing the idea down to a feasible and publishable research topic. In his view, the best approach is for students to create their own ideas, as they will work on their research for several years and therefore should be interested in and enjoy the topic.

Professor Smith’s philosophy is to produce a fully independent researcher. In his opinion, the fully independent researcher is capable of:

1. Coming up with their own ideas;
2. Doing research independently;
3. Publishing their work.

Professor Smith encourages his students to conduct research independently. He believes that the freedom to explore is critical to the development of good research habits, and his students appreciate and value the freedom they receive in forging their own paths. He states that, “for some, what is needed is, simply, broad advice to point them in the right direction, and then the courage to let them do their own thing.”²¹ This usually makes the PhD journey smoother, less difficult, and more successful.

“Guiding but not overbearing, suggesting but never demanding, encouragement, help, and friendship”²² are strategies that Tom Smith has employed throughout his career. Countless students have benefited from ‘the invisible hand’, which nudges them here or there to bring their research into sharper focus, but allows them to develop the main ideas themselves. He expects a high standard from his students, continuously

²⁰ Ibid.

²¹ Tom Smith in discussion with the author, April 2014.

²² Ibid.

striving to stimulate student interest in research, building ideas, teaching theoretical knowledge, and guiding students in writing and publishing their work. As Greek philosopher Plato (427–347 BCE) said: “Do not train a student to learn by force or harshness, but direct them to it by what amused their minds, so that you may be better able to discover with accuracy the peculiar bent of the genius of each.”²³

Professor Smith is very keen to pass on his intimate knowledge of the processes involved in getting work published, and expects his students to independently produce high-quality articles. In terms of research ethics, he insists that all his students take ethics training and follow university ethics guidelines to the letter. He also believes that the decision to include or omit the supervisor’s name from the paper is very important for the supervisor–student relationship and should be worked out in advance. There are two extremes to this decision, as well as a continuum in between:

1. The supervisor’s name appears on every student paper;
2. The supervisor is not listed as a co-author of any student’s paper.

Professor Smith has supervised more than 50 PhD students, and his name has never been on any of his students’ papers, based on doctoral dissertations. Regarding this, he said: “It is my job to help the students to write and publish their work, [and this aligns] with my philosophy to produce a fully independent researcher.”²⁴

Professor Smith strongly believes that it is an excellent practice for the student to be the sole author of their work, as it teaches them to take responsibility and exercises their self-discipline. It is also a great advantage to start a new career while having your own published papers. On this note, he said:

A lot of the time, the students want me to be on their papers, [but] if you are a co-author of a well-known researcher, some people would think that it should be the world-class researcher’s work. Sometimes, students may think that it would help them to get a research paper published, but in fact it is just opposite. I could help them by twisting the editor’s arms if it’s a good paper and I am not on the paper.²⁵

To date, over 50 journal articles supervised by Professor Smith have been published in Tier 1 finance journals, such as *The Journal of Finance*, *The Journal of Financial Economics*, *The Review of Financial Studies*,

²³ A. Gregory, 2000. *Plato's Philosophy of Science*, p 62.

²⁴ Tom Smith in discussion with the author, April 2014.

²⁵ Ibid.

The Journal of Financial and Quantitative Analysis, and *The Journal of Business*. These are remarkable achievements by his students.

How to Produce High-quality Research?

Professor Smith believes that another key element of a successful PhD journey is to build fundamental skills, and that program coursework can help students achieve this. He designed a PhD program in which students have coursework in addition to working on their theses. “The old British system requires just the production of a thesis, while the United States system involves a lot of coursework; I favor a compromise,”²⁶ he said. Professor Smith designs and teaches all the major PhD courses in the Finance program at Macquarie University, which offers its students a solid foundation in the discipline and prepares them for advanced studies. He takes pride in his program being an open and inviting place where ideas can be freely discussed, and where everybody is treated with fairness and respect.

Professor Smith has initiated a large number of events and workshops for PhD students and researchers on a variety of thesis-related topics, such as how to get published, how to go through the thesis examination process, how to deal with referees, and how to apply for research grants, as well as topics dealing with the many other features of an active life in research. Indeed, these workshops encompass the entire research process, including developing ideas, gathering data from a variety of sources, organizing and using the data, formulating research hypotheses, carrying out the research, writing the research, and preparing it for publication. These workshops are intended to help students develop their research skills and prepare them for a career in academia.

Each November, all his PhD students present their work in front of their fellow students and faculty, which Professor Smith believes is a great practice. His students are also encouraged to attend school seminar programs and social functions. He never pushes them, as they already know how important such contact and participation is to their future careers in research.

²⁶ Tom Smith in discussion with the author, May 2014.

How Do You Maintain a Good Supervisor–Student Relationship?

The working relationship between supervisor and student is another vital element in the PhD journey. Professor Smith believes that attention to detail is critical, but fast feedback is also essential. In his view, feedback, promptness, and fearlessness, form the lifeblood of effective supervision. He tries to summarize the essence of what each student needs as quickly as he can, and communicates it back to the student without delay. All questions received from his students are replied to immediately, or within 24 hours. “I can give students my expertise, for sure, but one of the greatest things I can give my students is my time. Fast feedback also lets students know that I respect them and give them priority in my life. This fosters great relationships with my students, boosts their confidence, and gives them encouragement to work hard,”²⁷ he says.

It is important to note that Professor Smith’s students are also his friends. He meets them regularly, not because he must, but because he wants to. For him, his students are a very important part of his life, as “given the special nature of the supervisor–student interaction, a good relationship, which maintains clear and open lines of communication, is essential.”²⁸ [...] Every student is guaranteed regular weekly meetings, supplemented by his open-door flexibility. He encourages his students to meet with him in an unlimited way. His door is open to everyone, and he is always ready to help others. His supervision has ensured that his students’ research progresses smoothly, and in the right direction.

Professor Smith actively liaises with many of the most well-known figures in finance, and they help him by reading and critiquing his students’ work. As a leading member of the field, Professor Smith also has access to a major network of contacts in universities throughout the world. His students are brought into that network and encouraged to participate in, and contribute to it, which he believes has been a very successful initiative.

Professor Smith encourages his students to attend and present their work at national and international conferences. He tries to ensure that all his students have the opportunity to participate in the largest North American conferences about finance. At these conferences, he introduces his students to important contacts who can have an impact on their futures. Many of his students have gone on to enjoy influential academic careers, becoming integral in making his network a welcoming one for current and

²⁷ Tom Smith in discussion with the author, May 2014.

future students. “I also discuss my students with my colleagues at these conferences, and the response has typically been very enthusiastic and welcoming. My students go on to get good jobs at top Australian, US, and other overseas universities, partly because of their ability to participate in the broad network in which I am able to operate,”²⁸ concludes Professor Tom Smith.

How Do You Maintain a Good Relationship After the Students Graduate?

Professor Smith’s supervision is not restricted to his students’ research but influences their entire lives, which is an important concept in pedagogy. According to Professor Smith, “it is important that mentoring does not end once students finish their PhD. The good supervisor works extremely hard to: (1) get his students placed in good jobs post dissertation, and (2) ensure their ongoing success through continued support as a colleague who is ready and willing to read and comment on any work you may have.”²⁹

Regarding the post-graduation relationship, Professor Smith again provides two extremes for the role of the supervisor. One extreme is ‘no support’, and most supervisors take this approach after they get their next paper from the student. The other extreme is ‘same support’.³⁰ He follows this attitude, in that his former students receive the same support as his current students. His students, who are placed in favorable academic positions, have his continued support as colleagues. He reads and comments on their papers and is their Professor in Perpetuity’.³¹ Professor Smith says, that once he takes on a student, he is their supervisor for life. The truth is, however, that if a supervisor has done a sufficient job of producing an independent researcher, the student does not really need much more help.

To conclude his thoughts, Professor Smith stresses that there is no one, true way to provide supervision. He has seen supervisors do just the opposite of what he does, and they are still very successful. He clarifies that the advice he shares is what works for him, according to his philosophy of producing fully independent researchers. He offers one final statement: “I really believe that research supervision is a special calling for

²⁸ Ibid.

²⁹ Ibid.

³⁰ Ibid.

³¹ Ibid.

me. I love doing it, and I benefit every single day from this most rewarding role.”³²

Great pedagogues often play the role of a ‘second parent’, taking care of their students and being totally committed to their development. In turn, such pedagogues earn the respect of all their students and could have an influence on their lives. One of Professor Smith’s students stated that, “...no exaggeration, it is because of him that I choose to be an academic. I am now teaching my students with every reference that he taught me.”³³ In his students’ view, Professor Smith is a brilliant teacher, but also a kind, modest, and generous man, who gives his heart to his students and to the pursuit of knowledge.³⁴ Another his students admitted that, “it is tough to be excellent; it is unbelievably hard to inspire excellence in others. Professor Tom Smith has succeeded in both respects.”³⁵ According to Swiss psychologist Carl Gustave Jung (1875–1961), “one looks back with appreciation to the brilliant teacher, but with gratitude to those who touched our human feeling.”³⁶

Professor Smith is also very popular among doctoral students attending symposiums and workshops around the world, who cite that he is an intelligent, ethical, kind, and helpful professor. Moreover, Professor Smith maintains a good relationship with most of them. Every one of his students and symposium delegates consider Professor Smith one of their favorite teachers, each with a wonderful story about their time spent working with him.

Professor Smith’s talents in building a strong supervisor–student relationship helps his PhD students feel confident about their research and enables them to be successful. There is also the fact that 14 of his PhD students moved from the Australian National University to the University of Queensland to continue working with Professor Smith, a clear indication that he is an outstanding pedagogue and top supervisor. More than this, Professor Smith is a truly great person who does the right things for the right reasons, without expecting grand external rewards. He does not pursue fame; he is just doing what his students and the people around him need the most.

What makes a supervisor successful? One of the Professor Smith’s secrets is simple: “Put your heart, mind, and soul into what you are doing, and let your passion be your guide!”

³² Ibid.

³³ Anonymous student in discussion with the author, May 2014.

³⁴ Anonymous students in discussion with the author, May 2014.

³⁵ Anonymous student in discussion with the author, May 2016.

³⁶ *BrainyQuote.com*, 2017.

CHAPTER TWO

AUSTRALIAN PROFESSOR: KEITHA DUNSTAN



At present, Professor Keitha Dunstan is the Pro Vice-Chancellor (Academic) of Bond University in Australia. From 2012 to 2016, she was the Pro Vice-Chancellor (Learning and Teaching) and Chair of the Academic Senate. In addition, she has served as Chair of the Bond University Women's Network from 2014.

From November 2009 to 2013, Professor Dunstan was Head of the School of Business at Bond University, and from 2013 to 2014, she was a Deputy Dean of the Academic Faculty. Prior to accepting these appointments, she held several positions at Victoria University of Wellington in New Zealand, including Head of the School of Accounting and Commercial Law, Professor of Accounting (2006–2009), and Research Professor (2000–2006), and was the founding Director of the Centre for Accounting, Governance, and Taxation Research (2001–2007).

Professor Dunstan is a Fellow of CPA Australia, and a Chartered Accountant, commencing her accounting career with Mann Judd Edmonds in Brisbane. Professor Dunstan transitioned to academia in 1989, when she joined the Queensland University of Technology in Australia, where she remained until accepting her appointment at Victoria University of Wellington. Her research interests include the areas of corporate governance and financial accounting. Professor Dunstan is often involved in organizing doctoral symposiums and international conferences.

Professor Dunstan is a former New Zealand President of the Accounting and Finance Association of Australia and New Zealand (2005–2007), a former co-editor of the *Pacific Accounting Review* (2002–2006), and a member of the editorial board of *Accounting and Finance*. Professor Dunstan also served as a Commissioner of the New Zealand Securities Commission, a position she held from 2003 to 2011.

Keitha Dunstan received her PhD from the University of Queensland, where she also completed her Master of Business Accounting, and she received her Bachelor of Commerce at the Queensland University of Technology.

What Makes a PhD Student Successful?

Professor Keitha Dunstan enjoys supervising and supporting her PhD students. She believes that good supervision maximizes the potential to produce high-quality research and successful doctoral students. She also believes that cultural, professional, age, and gender differences should be treated with care when supervising PhD students.

Professor Dunstan has supervised many male and female students with diverse national, cultural, and professional backgrounds. She is especially popular among female PhD students, not only in Australia and New Zealand, but also in many countries of the Asia-Pacific region. Professor Dunstan is well known as a careful and supportive supervisor who strives to support women, stating that, “it is important to inspire them and help to build their knowledge, independence, confidence, and self-esteem.”³⁷ In her opinion, female PhD students need more attention than male students, as they may face different challenges in their doctoral studies.

Professor Dunstan selects her PhD students from a pool of successful candidates, including honors students, and students who are keen to undertake research. In her view, a successful researcher should be curious, and well suited to advanced study at the doctoral level. Producing high-

³⁷ Keitha Dunstan in discussion with the author, May 25 2014.

quality doctoral research can take several years; thus, her students should enjoy, and be passionate about, research. One of the main benefits of a PhD is the freedom to follow your own interests and ideas. Moreover, the decision to enroll in a PhD program can be very expensive, and “just getting a job is not necessarily a good motivation” for doctoral students.³⁸

Professor Dunstan believes that to enjoy the PhD process, students should also enjoy their lives, families, and friends. Successful PhD students should be happy and protective of their free time, as well as their opportunities to have a healthy family life. If doctoral students sacrifice most of their time while pursuing their PhDs, their friendships, personal lives, and family lives will likely pay the price. In turn, this will affect their confidence, creativity, and abilities in completing a doctoral degree.

Professor Dunstan maintains a close relationship with her PhD students, but the foremost focus is on the PhD process, which clearly indicates a professional relationship. She sees her main role as stimulating a process of work improvement and helping her students grow as researchers. During the PhD process, she guides her students from dependence to independence, ensuring that her own experiences and knowledge are passed on to the next generation and beyond.

Although her relationships with students seem formal, Professor Dunstan also views supervisors and students as a ‘family’, comprised of wonderful ‘grandparents, parents, and other relatives’, who nurture, guide, and inspire the next generation, indicating a deep parental relationship.³⁹ She remembers feeling so happy with her supervisors when she completed her own master’s and doctoral degrees. They had different styles of supervision, but both worked well for different reasons. Her master’s supervisor was very helpful and supportive, with a ‘hands on’ supervision style, which greatly influenced Professor Dunstan’s decision to become an academic. Professor Dunstan’s PhD supervisor allowed her more independence, which suited her personality well. She believes that it is “helpful to have a number of students with the same interests so that they can help each other”, and in this way, she adds another family dynamic—siblings and cousins—to her ‘family tree.’⁴⁰

As supervisors, both as teachers and as people, have a profound effect on their doctoral students, and how these students will conduct themselves as professionals, it is important to recognize the reproductive character of research supervision. Excellent supervision reproduces excellent doctoral

³⁸ Ibid.

³⁹ Keitha Dunstan in discussion with the author, May 26 2014.

⁴⁰ Ibid.

graduates, who will, in turn, reproduce that model of supervision in an endless cycle, much like the branches of a tree that grow in different directions while the roots remain as one. Moreover, a well-supervised PhD student is likely to produce high-quality research that significantly contributes to the world of knowledge. All of this begins with the supervisor–student relationship.

How May a Researcher Become Independent and How to Produce High-quality Research?

In Professor Dunstan’s opinion, selecting a research topic usually takes some time. Quite often, students will develop a preliminary idea or decide to investigate an area that is already well researched. When dealing with these circumstances, her strategy is to suggest the area of research, and give her students sufficient time (i.e., 3–6 months) to read all the relevant literature. It is important that her students identify an interesting topic that they will truly enjoy.

Professor Dunstan believes that it is ideal to give PhD candidates one year to explore their research topics before confirming, during which they can focus on their research questions, research design, methods of analysis, and writing and publication strategies. She also prefers a model of supervision in which students work with the principal and associate supervisors on an agreed-upon topic over a lengthy period of time, eventually submitting their doctoral thesis for examination. Having a team of principal and associate supervisors could make supervision more effective, thus maximizing the students’ chances of successfully completing their PhD studies.

The goal of supervision is to help students develop a strictly research-based thesis, because their ‘coursework’ will have been completed during the course of their honors programs or master’s degrees. In addition, a large number of workshops for PhD students are available at Bond and other Australian universities. Still, most research students need, want, and expect, support from their supervisors, such as direct instruction and regular contact, especially at the beginning of their doctoral studies. Supervisors, on the other hand, expect their students to be more independent. “Every student is different and has a different style. Some students write a little bit every day; some can write a large amount in a short period of time. Some students work independently. Some students are expected to have a detailed prescription, but every student should

understand that the PhD thesis is his or her own work.”⁴¹ Professor Dunstan gives her students the freedom to perform their research, but guides them in the right direction, allowing them to ask questions and develop their own ideas. In this way, she helps foster the independence and decision-making skills of her students.

By the end of the PhD process, students should be able to publish and present their ideas to different audiences in various formats, such as conference and journal papers, tutorials and lectures, and grant and other proposals. After completing their PhDs, graduates usually gain positions in industry or academia which require a range of skills and abilities, such as initiative, independence, and effective communication. To prepare her doctoral students for the research and academic community, Professor Dunstan teaches them how to write, present, and publish research papers. Of this role, she notes that, “some of the students have the capacity to write a research paper, but other students need help.”⁴² Her approach is to have her students write a chapter or prepare a presentation, then she provides them with her constructive feedback: “Sometimes, the students think I cannot do it, but I can do it quickly. I just want them to do it, and to know how to do it.”⁴³

Professor Dunstan also maintains that PhD supervisors should help students write and publish papers in a certain way. This process includes contributing to the paper, providing feedback on the draft, and suggesting some appropriate journals to publish in, especially those with peer-reviewed standards. Some of her students were able to write papers during the PhD process, but others could not: “It depends on the project. For example, the students run experiments, and only at the end of the project will the results be available. Thus, the papers could be written after the PhD thesis is completed. In another example, a student undertook research in the area of sustainability, and has already written five papers based on the PhD thesis.”⁴⁴

Also important, supervisors should discuss authorship issues with their students during the beginning stages of their research. Professor Dunstan has chosen to co-author papers with her students for the following reasons: 1) she met all authorship conditions, and 2) some universities require PhD candidates to co-publish with their supervisors.

Professor Dunstan further encourages her students to attend conferences and present papers. These experiences allow students to obtain feedback

⁴¹ Ibid.

⁴² Ibid.

⁴³ Ibid.

⁴⁴ Ibid.

on their research and receive good advice from others, thus helping them improve their papers and making a significant contribution to their theses. Conferences also offer students the opportunity to make new connections and gain valuable contacts.

How Do You Maintain a Good Supervisor-Student Relationship?

As with any relationship, building a strong and successful link between a supervisor and a doctoral student requires much effort. In Professor Dunstan's view, the key issue of any supervisor–student relationship is the clarification of roles and mutual expectations, as it may solve many problems throughout the PhD process. It is important that both the student and the supervisor clearly state the goals and objectives of the partnership: “Importantly, the students need to understand that they should complete their PhD, and should not expect a detailed prescription. However, they should be guided by supervisors [toward] the right direction.”⁴⁵

Professor Dunstan describes her relationships with her doctoral students as friendships with reasonable boundaries. As a supervisor, she treats her students with respect and dignity, and as a member of the school's leadership, she ensures that doctoral students are treated the same way as faculty members. She notes that “[doctoral students] are an important link between undergraduate students and the staff members.”⁴⁶

Professor Dunstan strongly believes that it is a good idea to have experienced principal supervisors and associate supervisors who have recently completed their PhDs. Associate supervisors can serve as positive links between PhD students and the more experienced principal supervisors. Having a team of experienced and ‘young’ supervisors will contribute to efficient and helpful supervision, improve communication, and reduce misunderstandings. With this practice, Professor Dunstan has produced successful PhD students and supervisors.

In addition, Professor Dunstan meets with her supervised students at least once every two weeks, which allows them to demonstrate their progress and maximize their abilities to complete their PhD studies successfully and on time. She also meets with students at their request, and provides them with constructive feedback on their emerging problems, which enables them to take timely corrective actions and stay on the right track.

⁴⁵ Ibid.

⁴⁶ Ibid.