

Spotlight on a Mentor: Dr. Donald Baucom

Helen Z. MacDonald, *Emmanuel College*

ABCT'S SPOTLIGHT ON A MENTOR program aims to highlight the diversity of excellent research mentors within the organization's membership ranks. Our goal is to spotlight both promising and accomplished mentors across all levels of academic rank, area of specialization, and type of institution. We are excited to present ABCT's inaugural spotlighted mentor: Dr. Donald Baucom.

Dr. Baucom is the Richard Simpson Distinguished Professor of Psychology at The University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill. Since receiving his doctorate in clinical psychology in 1976, he has been actively involved in the development and empirical evaluation of the theoretical, basic research, and treatment interventions employed in cognitive-behavioral couple therapy (CBCT). This work has included focusing on interventions for relationally distressed couples, enhancing the relationships of happy couples, developing interventions for couples who have experienced infidelity, and employing couple-based interventions for couples in which one partner has psychopathology or a health problem. In addition to his research in the couple's area, he has co-authored two widely used books on CBCT. He holds an endowed chair at UNC for his research contributions to the field. He also has been an active clinician in private practice with couples for more than 40 years. Consistent with his active engagement in both an academic and applied world, an important part of his professional role is disseminating empirically based couple interventions to clinicians who are practicing in a variety of settings. Thus, he frequently conducts workshops for professionals in the United States and other countries around the world.

One of the most rewarding and enjoyable aspects of Dr. Baucom's professional life is working with and mentoring students at various levels of training. He has received a university-wide award from UNC for lifetime excellence in mentoring. The doctoral students in his clinical program have honored him as the outstanding clinical supervisor in the program for his supervision in the couple therapy clinic he directs. He also has received university-

wide and departmental awards for excellence in undergraduate teaching at UNC.

As Dr. Baucom's former student, Dr. Steffany Fredman, wrote, "Don is brilliant, but one of his unique strengths as a mentor is that he lets his students be smart, too. His manifest enthusiasm for research, teaching, and clinical work is infectious, and as a student, one had the feeling of being a junior colleague who had his or her own wisdom to share and that could be appreciated even though we lacked Don's depth of knowledge and experience. By modeling a spirit of curiosity and respect for others' opinions, Don had a profound influence on getting us to take risks in how we thought about things in the research lab, classroom, and clinical settings." Dr. Fredman further describes Dr. Baucom's mentorship qualities: "Don taught me that the process of mentorship is about motivating the student/mentee to join up with the mentor through encouragement and aligning of shared interests and common goals, rather than by invoking a power differential to compel the other individual to follow along. Through shaping and positive reinforcement, a good mentor helps students to challenge themselves to do things they might not have known they were capable of and, in so doing, to enjoy the process and sense of mastery that results from these experiences."

Dr. Baucom responded to questions from ABCT's Academic Training and Education Standards Committee about his history as a mentor, his mentorship philosophy, and his effective mentorship practices.

How long have you been a member of ABCT?

I joined ABCT 40 years ago as a graduate student, and it has been my major professional home since that time. It was an exciting experience to join the organization when behavior therapy was young and still defining itself. None of the faculty from my graduate program were members of ABCT, but I decided this is where I belonged and started coming to conferences knowing absolutely no one. Obviously, much has changed since then, but

ABCT has continued to be my academic home.

What type of mentor do you aspire to be? Do you have a mentorship philosophy?

Reportedly, Michelangelo once stated, "In every block of marble I see a statue as plain as though it stood before me, shaped and perfect in attitude and action. I have only to hew away the rough walls that imprison the lovely apparition to reveal it to the other eyes as mine see it." This phenomenon, known as the Michelangelo effect, embodies what I believe is the essence of mentoring: while always being genuine, I believe mentoring means seeing the potential in others that they might not even see in themselves and helping them to become the best versions of themselves that they can be—often, this means going well beyond what they thought was possible. Mentoring is about creating optimal long-term relationships, believing in your mentees, and helping them grow into who they want to be, not who you want them to be, including all the struggles and missteps that are so common along the way. For me, this means that I genuinely have to care for and be concerned about the people I am in a mentoring relationship with, be available to them, and commit to putting in the effort to help them grow.

While it is important that both people have a clear understanding of their relative roles, a mentoring relationship (like all others) works best if it is reciprocal. So I try to be open and learn from people I mentor, showing them that they have much to offer, that they can help me continue to grow and learn, and that within the context of our respective experiences and areas of expertise, we are on a common journey of growth and development. And I expect to have fun while doing all of this. Professional life requires a great deal of energy to do it well, and if I am not enjoying myself and having fun with the other person, it will not work long term. So it means working out the intricacies of a long-term mentoring relationship, respecting each other, and enjoying interacting around the various tasks before us. I am fortunate that my area of research and clinical focus—long-term relationships—helps to remind me of these issues on a daily basis and, hopefully, focuses me to maintain my own mentoring relationships in the real world.

What practices do you engage in that foster your mentorship style?

I have written many times that in order for a relationship to work well across time, it needs to be responsive to (a) the needs of both individuals, (b) the relationship, and (c) how the two people interact with the environment. This remains true for a mentoring relationship. First, I need to be responsive both to my own needs and those of the other person. On a broad level, I need good self-care, which sounds trite but is important after decades in this profession; so I exercise regularly, eat well, try to sleep well, and enjoy myself in personal pursuits. Within the mentoring relationship, I need to conduct myself so that I give a great deal without feeling like a martyr, experiencing that the other person appreciates my efforts and gives in return in appropriate ways. I also need to be responsive to the person I am mentoring, so I check in almost every time we meet to find out how the other person is doing in general, not just addressing our current encounter. I need to know broadly how my mentee is feeling, progressing on various tasks, and so forth so that I can focus and adapt our current interaction accordingly. Second, on a relationship level, I need to be mindful and monitor if our interactions are effective, as well as having our current focus clearly in my mind, so that we both agree on expectations for our current endeavors, have a work plan, and monitor whether we are moving forward as expected. I also engage regularly in long-term planning with the other person, so that we can see and strive toward long-term goals, adapting as new opportunities arise and as the other person continues to grow and change. Third, we both need to be responsive to the environment in which we are operating. Often I ask much of the other person and convey the message that the mentee can ask much of me. Generally this works well, but the risk is exhausting ourselves, particularly if we are not attentive to other demands in our professional and personal environments that impact both of us. So we discuss these broader contextual factors on an ongoing basis.

Whereas the above pattern describes my frequent interactions with current students, I also have been blessed to continue my relationships with many former students. Some of these ongoing relationship involve frequent interactions around collaborative research or clinical training, whereas others are more infrequent yet still quite important. This might involve catching up once a year at conferences and con-

tinuing to encourage and affirm the mentee's development. Or I might get a message asking for a quick Skype call for input on career choices or difficulties in some area of a mentee's professional lives. The basic message is I am here if and when I can be of assistance in times of difficulty or to celebrate successes.

I believe the above process needs to occur within a developmental perspective based on the student's ongoing growth and change. Over time, a student takes on greater leadership in our joint endeavors and hopefully develops a sense of self-efficacy in doing so. Also I make strong efforts to provide opportunities for students that go beyond the walls of the university. The students in my lab and I have made many trips to visit colleagues and peers in other countries and have had major senior investigators visit with us. Not only do these opportunities expand their experiences, but also it is important that students develop relationships with other scholars in addition to me. I actively encourage my students to build meaningful collaborative relationships with other scholars, and most of them do so. In many cases, we collaborate on research or other activities together across universities and countries. In addition, it is crucial that students learn that they can be successful when they are working independently from me, so I encourage collaborations with other investigators without my involvement when appropriate. In addition to research collaborations, I also present many clinical training workshops in other countries. Students often accompany me and help lead the workshops, providing training to other professionals in interventions we have developed in our lab. I ensure that these activities and opportunities are individualized to a student's own career goals. Thus, being committed to nurturing a student's professional and personal growth is not just a statement of philosophy for me; it is a way of behaving and interacting long term that is lived out every day in a multitude of ways.

What do you tend to look for in potential mentees?

Every year, a large number of applicants are very bright and are likely to succeed in a doctoral program in clinical psychology, so this is an important requirement but does not differentiate among the many qualified applicants. Thus, I look for quality human beings to work with long term. I look for people who have true passion for our field and research on intimate relationships, and who are psychologically minded and

insightful. These qualities are important because they are hard to teach, and understanding human relationships in depth will shape their research questions in our domain of investigation, their clinical work, and their own interactions. I can teach students about the literature and help them learn about therapeutic interventions, how to be successful in the classroom, and how to supervise and train others. Those are skills I can help them develop. I want to do that with someone who is committed to doing this long term, is willing to do the hard work and put in the hours to be successful, and has fun while doing it. I want to work with people who have strong values, because they will conduct themselves honorably both as individuals and in interactions with others, and they will represent the field well. I want to work with students who are open to learning from me and others, and students who will push me, stretch me to learn in new ways, and take me into new domains. I interact with my doctoral students more than anyone else in academia, so I need to learn from them and continue to grow through our collaborative efforts. That is why after decades I feel as passionate about my work as when I began; it is because of the outstanding people I work with and the new domains we explore together. I look for students who want to go on that journey.

What advice would you give to others starting out as mentors?

Find something you are passionate about, work hard at it, and treat people well. If you do that, people will want to work with you, will learn from you, and will teach you as well. You have to be responsive to the demands of the situation, but be yourself in all of the settings in which you operate. There should be a constant essence of you that comes across in research meetings, clinical supervision, classroom activities, etc. While being appropriately professional, be open, have fun, and enjoy the people you are with. If you do, you will be a good model, and you will create an environment in which people will trust you, learn from you, and confide in you in ways that are appropriate. It will sustain you over many years and decades in our profession. Above all, enjoy the ride; it is awesome!

If you are interested in learning more about Dr. Baucom's work, other exceptional ABCT mentors, or to add your mentorship profile to the ABCT Mentorship Directory, please visit www.abct.org/mentorship/