

First of all, my sincere apologies for missing this afternoon's zoom/phone call re: experiences with mentors.

Below are a few notes re: my experiences of finding and working with my FSLI mentors. I took the new leadership position (dean of AgResearch) at the University of TN that started this past April. I accepted the new position last November, which impacted my decision/choices on mentors.

In contemplating about and approaching to the potential mentors, my thought was to find highly regarded leaders who will help guide my transition into and success at the new job. With that as the guiding principle, I decided to approach the following individuals, each with a specific reason(s).

Dr. Wendy Wintersteen, president, Iowa State University. I chose Wendy because of her wealth of knowledge and skillsets in successfully leading a land-grant university. She had previously served as the dean of College of Agriculture and Life Sciences at ISU. She also has a proven track record of working effectively with a broad spectrum of external stakeholders.

Dr. Jimmy Cheek, former chancellor, The University of Tennessee in Knoxville. I chose Jimmy because of his wealth of knowledge about UT – culture, environment and academic programs, and his continued active engagement with the UT community and the state.

Dr. Cathie Woteki, a member of the National Academy of Medicine, former undersecretary of USDA Research, Education and Economics (REE) mission area as well as the department's chief scientist, former dean of CALS at ISU, and currently a Distinguished Institute Professor at the University of Virginia. I chose Cathie because of her perspective and thorough understanding of U.S. government policies and her vision about agricultural research and education in US and abroad.

In each case, I simply made the contact (phone call or in person conversation), explaining the FSLI program to them and how their knowledge and guidance would be beneficial and appreciated as I transition to my new leadership role. To my delight, each of the three highly regarded leaders/scholars answered "yes" without hesitation.

We set a schedule to meet (1 hour) every 2-3 months, or as situations arise where I need their advice/consultation. In particular, soon after I joined UT, I was asked to serve on the UTIA-UTK Reunification committee that met weekly for more than two months, collected input from various stakeholders, and prepared the report for the central administration. In the meantime, I was asked to serve on the UT Budget Allocation Model steering committee. All of these happened as I was familiarizing myself with the Institute/University and the stakeholders by traveling across the state, conducting on-campus meetings with department heads and faculty, and forming partnerships to launch a university-wide new research initiative. As you can imagine, the experiences and insights of the mentors I was able to draw on were remarkably valuable.

To respect the time of my mentors, I would come to the meetings with a specific agenda for discussion. More often, the meetings led to email follow-ups for additional/supplemental information.

Meeting/interactions with the mentors have been extremely beneficial to the transition and functioning of my new job. In addition to the formation of academic mentor-mentee relationship, I feel like we have nurtured/strengthened our personal friendship. It is a relief to know that you always have someone you can turn to for consultation when the situation gets “tough”.

Please feel free to share these notes with Cohort 15 Fellows. I wish them the best!

Once again, my apologies for the absence today.

Hongwei

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