

## Philosophy of Supervision – Megumi Makino-Kanehiro

I had been a supervisor for a few years before I realized that I needed a guiding philosophy in order to better do my job. Articulating a philosophy was the first step towards reaching my goals, creating a vision for our team to achieve, and defining my role as a leader.

Working with a strong team of 6 primary role advisors and 8 peer advisors, I started to evaluate my philosophy of supervision. As Sinek (2011) pointed out, it is so important to start with “Why.” You must have a road map so that you know where you are headed. My road map came down to five main ideas. The more I thought about it, I realized that my philosophy aligned with the NACADA (2017) core values that encompass ideals that we can all embrace and strive for, not just in advising but also in supervision. I believe that the first four core values -- inclusivity, integrity, professionalism and respect -- are essential and non-negotiable. As a result, I focus on 3 intentions of caring, commitment, and empowerment.

**Intention #1: Caring.** One of my favorite sayings is by Maya Angelou, “I've learned that people will forget what you said, people will forget what you did, but people will never forget how you made them feel.” As a former English composition instructor, I believe in the power of intention and positive messaging. The Appreciative Advising approach creates a truly caring, supportive approach that focuses on creating a positive co-creative, reflective, iterative space that is meant to improve both the advisor and the advisee. (Bloom, Hutson & Ye, 2013). These same principles can be brought to bear on supervision. At the Mānoa Advising Center, our main goal is to assist our Exploratory students. As a result, as paradoxical as it may seem, my main goal as a supervisor is not to support the students, but to support my team. I fully realize that there is no way that I can help hundreds of students by myself. Focusing on my team enables all of us to assist hundreds of students together.

**Intention #2: Commitment.** When the MAC was established and I was asked to be its director, I was lucky that my supervisor told me, “Your job is to nurture the next generation of advisors for the entire campus.” I was puzzled at first, but over time I learned what he meant. Many supervisors work to actively retain their employees, to try to keep them in their jobs. My commitment to each member of my team is to support them to find their way, to help them as fully as I can to develop to their fullest potential, to provide them with opportunities and the resources and support they need to do their jobs well and grow as individuals. I serve as a guide or mentor. This, in some ways, feels like an extension of my work in advising with our Exploratory students. Each Exploratory student is unique and has different needs. Similarly, each team member is an individual requiring distinct support.

**Intention #3: Empowerment.** A session on appreciative administration reminded me that empowering means actually delegating power and sharing responsibility. As a result, I have set up our advisor meetings in a way that we all take turns running meetings and taking minutes, too. This allows everyone to gain experience. A hidden benefit of this is the realization by the advisors that running a meeting is not so easy. At the end of the day,

micromanagement may seem easier and faster, but it does not allow anyone to grow. While my job may sometimes require being firm to make the decisions that must be made or to discuss backup plans, a lot of the time, my job is also to trust my team members and know when to get out of their way.

The intentions of caring, commitment, and empowerment all are reflected in the Hawaiian word, kuleana. Kuleana roughly translates to responsibility, but also implies a connection that is born out of deep caring and commitment. Kuleana compels and empowers an individual to act on behalf of that community.

In addition to these three intentions, I employ two strategies:

Strategy #1: Communicate. Communicate what is good, what is bad -- everything. Communicate as much as possible and as transparently as possible, but be open and listen more than you speak. I not only reflect on what I am communicating but how I am communicating. I have read that it takes 4 positive comments to balance out one negative comment. I use constructive criticism sparingly, and try to spend time focused on what they are doing well.

- I have 1.5-hour standing weekly meetings with the advisors. I meet with each advisor for a rotating advisor meeting once every three weeks. One of the main reasons why I do this is to be able to really work with them individually and to better understand how to best support each of them as individuals. We also hold a retreat every semester.
- I hold 2-hour training meetings with the peer advisors. I also meet with each peer advisor at the beginning and end of each semester to get to know them and their goals, and to share observations on their progress.
- Our entire office has an end-of-semester gathering to connect, to celebrate our work together, and to thank the peer advisors who are leaving us that semester.

Strategy #2: Act authentically. Actions always speak louder than words. A colleague once reminded me that my actions set the tone for my office both in good and bad ways. As a result, I am mindful of the messages my actions send.

- I do not expect the advisors or peer advisors in my office to do anything that I myself am unwilling to do. Even though our office has grown and I can probably give up student appointments as part of my responsibilities, I deliberately set aside time in my schedule to see students. I do this for a number of reasons: I enjoy working with students. I want to be sure that I have first-hand knowledge of what my advisors are experiencing, to experience why a certain form or policy does not work, so I can understand (and share) their concerns, frustrations, and successes.
- Advisors are givers. They give of themselves at home, at work, and in the community. As a result, they often need to learn to set clear limits and boundaries. On the first day of work, I have a mini-talk that I give to each advisor. I explain to them that they should resist the temptation to work late as much as possible, because despite any wishes otherwise, the work will always still be there when they

return to the office. Whenever the situation calls for it, I will say, “Family and health first.” This has become a mantra in our office.

I have served on a number of NACADA’s commissions and committees, served as an e-tutorial moderator, and a panelist. I have chosen to focus on work with peer advisors and issues of race, ethnicity, and inclusion. I feel honored to serve on the NACADA Board as Vice President. I have selected opportunities related to things I feel passionately about and see as personal challenges that will make me a better advisor and person. I often am scared that I am biting off more than I can chew, but what I have discovered is that it is important that I do it anyway. Brené Brown (2020) explains that it is courageous and necessary to feel the vulnerability of being new at things and pushing through the discomfort of trying things for the first time. In the past few years, I have done a lot of what I do to show others (especially advisors from historically marginalized groups) that they can do what I do, too. I have made a commitment to learn as much as I can about how to get involved and pass on and share that knowledge with the advisors in my office and colleagues around campus.

### References

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