

ALUMNI MENTORS PAYING IT FORWARD

NJIT ALUMNI ALWAYS HAVE MENTORED STUDENTS AND FELLOW ALUMNI. From the day we were founded as the Newark Technical School, our graduates have kept in touch with faculty, students and each other; pursuing a goal of training and recruiting the next generation of engineers, scientists, architects and leaders. Today, we call it mentorship, and it takes many forms.

“Our honored veterans, for instance, return to offer their assistance and guidance to students in ROTC, and to other veterans returning to advance their education,” he explained. “Graduates of the Educational Opportunity Program have, from its inception, been integral to the support and success of their students. From a larger perspective, nearly all of our colleges, departments and student clubs invite graduates to network with students and fellow alumni during planned activities throughout the year. A mentor relationship also develops from the establishment of a personal connection. It might be a chance meeting at an event, or the introduction through a shared friend or family member, that sparks a conversation that leads to future success.”

However it occurs, the results are always the same: mutual benefit, tremendous respect and

enormous pride. There are so many alumni mentors and mentees, and so many stories of subsequent success, that it is nearly impossible to show them all. In fact, it is very likely that you yourself have mentored someone, or benefited from someone who provided you guidance when you needed it.

In this article, we have asked a small, representative group of mentors and mentees to share a little about their experience, and why it has been so important to them. We hope that their stories will inspire you to consider a mentorship role in the future.

*Left: Steven Saperstein '84
and Alana Dudley '17*

PHOTO: OSCAR MASCANDARO



“EVERYBODY, WHEN YOU THINK ABOUT IT, IS A MENTOR TO SOMEBODY; JUST BE SURE TO GIVE OBJECTIVE ADVICE AND LET THEM GROW AT THEIR OWN PACE.” - Marjorie Perry '05

STEVEN SAPERSTEIN '84

Chief Operating Officer
PGIM Fixed Income

ALANA DUDLEY '17

Senior Performance Analysis Associate
PGIM Fixed Income

NJIT: How did you meet your mentee?

SS: I was introduced to Alana Dudley by Billy McDermott at NJIT. Over the years, NJIT will refer its top talent to me to mentor and consider for hiring at Prudential.

NJIT: How did you decide to become a mentor?

SS: I have been mentoring students at NJIT for 10-plus years and always like to give back to my alma mater.

NJIT: What is the most valuable benefit or insight you've gained from being a mentor?

SS: Students at NJIT are very skilled, smart and well-qualified. Outside of engineering, recruiting of students is developing at NJIT. Students often need connections and insights to help them better determine their career path. Since I am not an engineer and work in Financial Services, I find I am able to greatly help students seeking careers in my industry.

NJIT: What advice do you have for others who seek to become a mentor?

SS: Do it! With a small time commitment you can really make a difference in someone's life. I did not have this opportunity and got lucky finding my job. I now realize the benefits I can give to someone starting their career.

NJIT: Has your mentorship helped you in your career?

SS: I recognized that Alana had strong leadership qualities and technical talent which I knew Prudential would benefit in having her join our company.

NJIT: How did you decide to become a mentee?

AD: My mentorship happened gradually over the years as I kept in contact with Mr. Saperstein. As I reached out, he would eagerly respond and give valuable insight. The more questions I asked, the more answers he would provide and his enthusiasm in doing so definitely made this mentorship opportunity possible.

NJIT: How did you meet your mentor?

AD: In college, I would take minutes for both the MTSM and CSLA advisory board meetings. I met Mr. Saperstein when I was a sophomore after one of those meetings. After briefly talking about my studies, campus involvement, and what I was looking to do after college, he gave me his business card and said, "Make sure you contact me before you graduate." The rest is history.

NJIT: What is the most valuable benefit or insight you've gained from being a mentee?

AD: One of the largest lessons I've taken away from my mentor is that I need to be more comfortable being uncomfortable. I need to put myself out there and show my skill set and really go after opportunities that may arise or that I have the ability of making happen. Even though I may not be in a leadership role, taking the initiative is definitely something that needs to be done in a corporate setting.

NJIT: What advice do you have for others who seek to become a mentee?

AD: One of the most important things is constant communication. A professional relationship needs to be first initiated, but then maintained over time. I would advise others to find a mentor who they look up to and see as a good role model both personally and professionally. The best type of mentor is one who is able to put things into perspective and offer both support and advice. Both Mr. Saperstein and I have similar interests and a love for basketball. Knowing that I was a college athlete, he has taken the time

to break down various situations using basketball terminology. In doing so, I was better able to understand his teachings.

NJIT: Has being mentored helped you in your career?

AD: Being mentored has profoundly helped me in my career. Mr. Saperstein has helped me gain years' worth of knowledge over the time that I've known him. He has been influential in my journey after college and my pursuit of a rewarding career. He continues to push me to perform at the best of my ability and gives me motivation toward achieving higher goals. I look forward to all of the future lessons that my mentor has to share.

NICHOLAS M. DeNICHILLO '73, '78

President and Chief Executive Officer
Mott MacDonald

VATSAL A. SHAH '08, '14

Senior Project Engineer
Mott MacDonald

NJIT: How did you meet your mentee?

ND: We met 10 years ago when Vatsal, a recent graduate, began working for Mott MacDonald. I recall having a conversation about starting a career as an engineer and the importance of continued education. It didn't take much to convince Vatsal to pursue advanced degrees in your chosen profession while also learning your trade in the course of your work. I recall telling Vatsal that a good engineer knows his or her limitations and doesn't ever feel insecure or intimidated about asking for advice. Getting to know Vatsal over the past 10 years, it's no surprise that Vatsal pursued and received his master's degree and doctorate at NJIT while working full time at Mott MacDonald.

NJIT: How did you decide to become a mentor?

ND: Becoming a mentor just comes naturally to me. My wife, Linda, and I have raised four sons who I'm proud to say are



Nicholas M. DeNichilo '73, '78 and Vatsal A. Shah '08, '14

all doing well in their chosen professions. My personal experiences as a dad enable me to take a paternalistic approach when mentoring others. At times you need to be willing to have the difficult conversations and challenge each other's thinking and actions, thereby building alignment which enables one to grow. I was very fortunate in my early years to have good mentors who have helped me along the way. We can all benefit by seeking advice and support from others.

NJIT: What is the most valuable benefit or insight you've gained from being a mentor?

ND: I get a tremendous sense of satisfaction in knowing that I may have had a small part

in advancing someone's career. In Vatsal's case, it's an absolute delight to see how this young graduate that I met about 10 years ago is now an emerging leader and shareholder at Mott MacDonald. Being a mentor and supporting mentorship at Mott MacDonald enables me in my role as CEO to unclog the leadership pipeline by preparing others to take over when you are no longer leading the business.

NJIT: What advice do you have for others who seek to become a mentor?

ND: It's a great experience in helping one along in his or her career. It's also a role that one must take very seriously as you are serving in a role where your guidance and advice will hopefully

influence positive outcomes.

NJIT: Has your mentorship helped you in your career?

ND: Absolutely. By engaging with others in a mentor/mentee relationship, you at times become the mentee, thereby enabling you to learn and grow. You get a chance to understand and appreciate different points of view and learn from each other. My engineering career began in 1973, and a day doesn't go by where you can't learn and grow through the experiences and support of others.

NJIT: How did you meet your mentor?

VS: One week after finishing undergrad and graduating from NJIT in 2008, I kicked off

my engineering career at Mott MacDonald (then Hatch Mott MacDonald), a global consulting engineering firm with U.S.-based headquarters in Millburn, New Jersey. Sitting in Human Resources waiting to be on-boarded on my first day, I met Nick as he was passing by to drop off some forms. I was wearing a suit for my first day and he made some quip that if I kept dressing for success, I'd end up the CEO one day. I noticed he had a friendly demeanor and sense of humor, so I struck up a conversation with some small talk which eventually snowballed into a full-on conversation about being a fellow Highlander, his fond memories and stories about his time at NJIT (it was then Newark College of Engineering, he reminded me), and his experience as a civil (water resources) engineer. I immediately saw Nick as someone who was not only a sharp, technical professional, but was someone who enjoyed sharing his experiences — he had two of the important ingredients that make up a good mentor in spades. Nick and I eventually parted ways after 15 minutes, but it was over a month later that I met him again and realized he, himself, was the president and CEO of our firm!

NJIT: How did you decide to become a mentee?

VS: I was looking for advice early in my career, and knew I wanted to get in touch with someone who had years of wisdom. I didn't necessarily think I was becoming a "mentee" — just a young, new grad with an appetite for learning, success and (luckily) the self-awareness that I couldn't learn and experience everything life had to offer on my own.

NJIT: What is the most valuable benefit or insight you've gained from being a mentee?

VS: I heard a powerful saying years ago that wisdom is either learned or earned. It's learned (the easy way) if you reflect upon, listen to, or are taught the successes and difficulties that others have experienced, but it's earned (the hard way) if you have

to go and sweat through the experiences all on your own. Some people do quite well going through the hard work of a self-taught career, but truly successful individuals know when smart work is better than hard work. With that mindset, I think the most valuable benefit of being a mentee is being able to learn the experiences of someone else who has gone through more than you might have. They may not all be good experiences, bad experiences, or even relevant experiences, but they're different experiences than yours. It would take several lifetimes to go through all the paths of a road in life, but being a mentee allows you to take the wisdom of one or even several people, condense this experience, and accelerate your learning.

NJIT: What advice do you have for others who seek to become a mentee?

VS: Mentorship is a two-way street, but it thrives on a give-and-take relationship.

A few bits of advice I've gathered over my decade-long relationship with Nick:

1. Be teachable: Be open to learning new things, see things from a different perspective, and be willing to step out of your comfort zone. Growth is the product of a new experience.
2. Value their time: Mentors are usually experienced professionals with more demanding schedules and responsibilities. For every 30 minutes they're willing to share, prepare two to three times that amount before your meeting. Think through your situation, focus your questions, and come prepared with a list of topics for the conversation.
3. Expect support, not miracles: Your mentor is there to provide insight and guidance, not solve your problem or make life's tough choices for you. Ask your mentor to provide perspective, feedback on your thought process, or identify and link you to other resources/people who may be of help to you.
4. Be grateful: Follow up each meeting with a thank you note. Text messages and emails for our digital generation are good; a hand-written note is better. Never forget

to appreciate your mentor's time.

NJIT: Has being mentored helped you in your career?

VS: I think being mentored has helped me tremendously in not just my career, but also my personal life. Early on in my career, I was focused on my technical skills and graduate studies. During this time it was mentors like Nick, my parents, and our Civil Engineering department chair (Dr. Taha Marhaba) who helped me make focused, smart decisions that allowed me to excel in my education and profession at a young age — I was a decorated, young Professional Engineer with a doctorate before my 27th birthday. Like most, years later into my career, my focus has shifted from managing my own goals to more responsibility and managing the needs of others. I've even become a mentor to several mentees of my own. As I go through this transition, I again lean on the perspectives and wisdom of mentors like Nick who are glad to share their experiences and who help connect me to resources (like a specific company-sponsored management training course or a friend or colleague who overcame a similar challenge) which I may find useful.

MARJORIE PERRY '05

President and Chief Executive Officer
MZM Construction & Management

RASHMI KAMKERI '18

NJIT: How did you meet your mentee?

MP: She did a cold call to my office in May, wanted to meet me and asked if I would take her on for an internship so she could gain work experience. That impressed me.

NJIT: How did you decide to become a mentor?

MP: I don't know if it was ever a conscious decision. I found myself going through so many trials and errors during my career, I just decided to give my best advice to the best students who are open to listening

Marjorie Perry '05 and
Rashmi Kamkeri '18

PHOTO: OSCAR MASCANDARO



and learning.

NJIT: What is the most valuable benefit or insight you've gained from being a mentor?

MP: I love watching the caterpillar become a butterfly; then I know I've done my job.

NJIT: What advice do you have for others who seek to become a mentor?

MP: You cannot seek to be a mentor; it is a passion you have to want to share and teach others. Everybody, when you think about it, is a mentor to somebody; just be sure to give objective advice and let them grow at their own pace.

NJIT: Has your mentorship helped you in your career?

MP: I would not say my career; I will say it supports my personal growth to be a strong, passionate leader who can never say she has learned it all. It keeps you open to learning from your mentee, which is a win for both sides that carries over into business.

NJIT: How did you meet your mentor?

RK: It was summer 2018 when I was looking for internships in the civil engineering field, as I wanted to gain some exposure to real-time projects in civil industry. One of the professors in my department suggested that I inquire about the opportunities at the NJIT Enterprise Development Center and he specifically mentioned MZM. After that, I read about her company and I was really impressed by her achievements. That's how I decided to send her an email and see if she had any opportunities for me during the summer.

NJIT: How did you decide to become a mentee?

RK: At the end of May 2018 after finishing my exams, I went to her company; it was around 4 p.m. I told her that I was a master's student looking for an internship in the construction field, and I was interested to

learn whatever I could during this summer, and I would be glad if she could train me as an intern. She was very welcoming, she liked my interest and asked me to come the next morning for the meeting. I was surprised but happy for the fact that she gave me an opportunity and told me that she would be giving a taste of everything that she does in construction project management.

NJIT: What is the most valuable benefit or insight you've gained from being a mentee?

RK: It's hard to choose one, because there are a lot of valuable insights that I have gained here: to be proactive, communicate effectively, learn to think out of the box, be observant, and to ask questions when you need help. Every day she made sure she pointed out where I was going wrong and

how to improve on that. She encouraged me a lot throughout the internship, and during the final review she made me know my strengths and weaknesses and told me how to improve on that. She always said she believes in excellence and asked me never to be mediocre; for me, I think this is the most valuable insight that I have received.

NJIT: What advice do you have for others who seek to become a mentee?

RK: I would suggest to always look for opportunities around you. Read about entrepreneurs in your field, because they are the ones who teach us a lot. For students, it's not just learning the technological side, but also getting great mentorship with great values from leaders that makes an internship successful.

NJIT: Has being mentored helped you in your career?

RK: Of course, yes, civil industry is a field in which you understand things when you see how the real-time projects work. For me, it's been just one year since I came to the U.S. and getting exposed to the procedures on how the projects work, attending project meetings, preparing reports for site visits, communicating effectively, and understanding different construction documents have given a great start to my professional career. I will always be grateful to Marjorie Perry for taking her time to mentor me; she has given me the best from her side.

SUSANA HOLGUIN-VERAS '06

Director of Marketing

Howard L. Zimmerman Architects, P.C.

ASHLEY GRIFFITH '19

NJIT: How did you meet your mentee?

SHV: Ashley participated last year in the Student Ambassadors initiative of the New York Metro Alumni Committee, of which I am a member, and made a positive impression on the committee. She was

enthusiastic, dedicated, and showed a great work ethic through her involvement in multiple extra-curricular activities.

NJIT: How did you decide to become a mentor?

SHV: When the time came for our firm to seek summer interns, NJIT seemed like a natural starting point for the search, as I'm well aware of the strength of the architecture program.

NJIT: What is the most valuable benefit or insight you've gained from being a mentor?

SHV: There is great value in working with students who are eager to learn and who share similar educational experiences. I am also immensely grateful to those who have provided guidance in my own career, and it is a privilege to be able to do the same for others.

NJIT: What advice do you have for others who seek to become a mentor?

SHV: Design a mentorship opportunity that offers long-term value to the student, that provides a foundation for future success, and that allows the student to learn multiple aspects of their profession. In particular, focus on students who will truly benefit from the exposure and who show both talent and disposition.

NJIT: How did you meet your mentor?

AG: I decided to become a mentee when I met Susana through the Alumni Association. I was lucky enough that Susana was willing to take the time out of her day to teach me about her position at HLZA and train me to help her with projects. It worked out that she was on the Board for the Alumni Association and I was a student ambassador and we both had the same major. Becoming a mentee was a very important decision because it has opened so many doors and connections for me!

NJIT: How did you decide to become a mentee?

AG: I met my mentor through the NJIT

Alumni Association. I am a student ambassador for the NJIT Alumni Association and met Susana at one of the New York Metro Alumni meetings. I was then looking for an internship for summer 2018 and Danielle Siemons, the assistant director of Alumni Relations, connected me with Susana since she was working at an architecture firm in New York City, Howard L. Zimmerman Architects, P.C. I went in for an interview and officially got to know Susana better and I have worked alongside her all summer as her intern.

NJIT: What is the most valuable benefit or insight you've gained from being a mentee?

AG: I have definitely gained a lot of knowledge and connections. Throughout the course of the summer, Susana has taught me how to use many new programs. These programs have allowed me to acquire skills that I will be able to use throughout the rest of my time at NJIT, as well as throughout the rest of my career. In addition, I have also gained many connections. Susana is a well-connected member of HLZA and with this I have been given the opportunity to meet just about everyone in our office. Feeling connected and getting to know everyone was truly a memorable experience.

NJIT: What advice do you have for others who seek to become a mentee?

AG: Being a mentee is a very valuable experience. Having someone to guide you and help you makes adjusting to an office job much easier. Before Susana, I never really had anyone at any job before that really guided me through the whole process and was willing to hands-on teach me more about the architecture field. Susana also went to NJIT for architecture, so it was nice to have someone who I had so much in common with and I could go to anytime I needed help.

NJIT: Has being mentored helped you in your career?

AG: My mentor has opened my eyes to all

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- Nicholas M. DeNichilo '73, '78

the possible options I can look into for being an architect. There are so many subfields under architecture and she has definitely helped me to see all of those. She has also helped me to conduct myself well in an office setting and in meetings. She is great at explaining tasks and allows me to help with a lot of different projects. ■

Author: Christina Crovetto is editor of NJIT Magazine. Introduction by Michael Smullen.



Right: Ashley Griffith '19 and Susana Holguin-Veras '06