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Coaching Applications for Academic Advisors in Higher Education

Jaime R. Kelly
University of Pennsylvania, jaimerobinkelly@gmail.com

Submitted to the Program of Organizational Dynamics, College of Liberal and Professional Studies, in the School of Arts and Sciences in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for the Degree of Master of Science in Organizational Dynamics at the University of Pennsylvania.
Advisor: Charline S. Russo

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Abstract
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COACHING APPLICATIONS

FOR ACADEMIC ADVISORS IN HIGHER EDUCATION

by

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Approved by:

Charline S. Russo, Ph.D., Advisor

Linda Pennington, MSOD, MA, Reader

ABSTRACT

The field of higher education academic advising is expanding and the needs of students are ever-growing. Many academic advisors lack the training and tools they need to meet their students' constantly evolving needs. This paper is designed to illustrate the benefit of incorporating coaching techniques into academic advising sessions. The field of coaching can help improve the advisor / advisee relationship enabling a collaboration that is both successful and rewarding. Through research in coaching and academic advising as well as interviews with higher education academic advisors across the United States, this study demonstrates a simple to use model advisors can use to enhance their interactions with advisees.

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INTRODUCTION

A Personal Introduction

For the past three years, I have had the good fortune of serving as the program coordinator and academic advisor for two programs at the University of Pennsylvania. In this role, part of my work is to advise approximately 600 students. The students that I work with are non-traditional. They each possess at least a bachelor's degree and are primarily preparing for graduate and professional studies. My two programs provide students access to undergraduate courses at the University of Pennsylvania. These courses can help students in two ways. Some students in the program are making a career change. For example, if a student has an undergraduate degree in philosophy but is looking to apply to doctoral programs in economics, the programs will allow them to complete the necessary pre-requisite courses in order to apply. Alternatively, other students have already taken the necessary courses to apply to graduate programs but may not have the strongest GPA. These programs, will allow them to take additional coursework to show how they are more prepared for graduate study.

Due to our competitive admissions requirements, the majority of students accepted into these programs are gifted academics. I have worked with graduates of Fine Arts programs who are interested in pursuing a PhD in Psychology. I have advised students needing a single, additional course in an effort to strengthen their application to medical school. I have also advised students who use the program to explore academic options when they have not yet determined what field on which to focus, but know they want to go on to graduate study in the future.

Although I came to this position with no previous training in higher education or academic advising, I had private sector experience which gave me valuable skills in interpersonal communication necessary for an academic advisor. To fulfill my responsibilities, I learned as much as I could about the field of advising as well as the University of Pennsylvania. I observed and interviewed academic advisors across the campus to absorb their knowledge and study their methods. What could you, or even should you say to students? What resources would be valuable to different people? How should a student structure their schedule? What were the different departments like? I wanted to learn everything. I began attending quarterly meetings for S.A.L.T., Penn's Student Affairs Leadership Team. The more aware I was of the University and its structure, the more comfortable I felt in the advisor role. However, something was still missing.

Towards the end of my Master’s program in Organizational Dynamics, I decided to enroll in Dr. Charline Russo's course, Leader-Manager as Coach (DYNM 602). Going into the class, I did not have a great deal of interest in coaching. In fact, I had a somewhat negative opinion of the field believing coaches were hired motivators who racked up bills for their clients by always telling them how special they were. I believed coaching was something only wealthy professionals could afford. Nonetheless, I knew that coaching was a popular field of practice in the Organizational Dynamics program but I had not yet taken any courses on the topic.

By the end of my first coaching class, my understanding of the role of an academic advisor had changed. The practice of coaching represented everything I was struggling with as an academic advisor. As much data as I could collect about the structure of my university, as much as I could share about Penn’s classes, resources and clubs, I was still apprehensive about answering questions that held more weight.

Before I joined the coaching class, advising was going well. I had been working with students for about a year and felt relatively comfortable with my knowledge. Over time, my relationships with my advisees began to grow, especially those who would come in more than once. As these relationships grew, so did their questions. They would ask me what my opinion was on what they should do for work. They would ask me if they were ready to apply to graduate school. When these questions arose, I felt uncomfortable with the responsibility and in turn, uncertain. Who was I to answer these questions for them? Did they really expect for me to tell them what to do with their lives and did they intend to follow what I had to say? This was more responsibility than I wanted to deal with. I decided to become less familiar in my relationships to the students. The skills I gained studying coaching made me realize that I should welcome these deeper conversations and that I could be capable of helping them in these important decisions. In the past, these advising sessions made me uncomfortable, but once I began to use coaching skills it opened my relationships with my students to new levels of trust and possibility. Throughout the course and its assignments, I began tracking the ways the field of coaching is of value to the professional practice of academic advisors.

The Purpose of the Capstone

This capstone explores how the field of coaching can help higher education academic advisors improve the relationship between advisor and advisee as well as the outcome of those relationships. The goal of this study is to develop a coaching model that can be used as a tool by advisors to enhance their work. The handful of advisors that I connected with before writing this paper were similar to me and had come into the field without prior experience, academically or professionally. They had not personally studied higher education, counseling or psychology as an undergraduate or graduate student and would often describe themselves as having "fallen into the field". Many of the advisors that I spoke with described learning about advising on the job rather than through courses or trainings. I relate to these experiences and I believe the field of coaching will be valuable to higher education academic advisors for the same reasons it has been valuable to me. My goal is to share with other advisors the practices of coaching that I have found valuable in my role as an academic advisor.

The overall student experience is one of growth and change and advising college students is about positive and sometimes difficult transitions. Some advisors are working with students who are making adult decisions for the first time in their lives. Some advisors are working with older students who not only need to discuss their coursework, but also the balance of work and family. As an advisor, these can be overwhelming topics to discuss and coaching can give advisors the tools they need to help their students bridge gaps, without telling them what to do. Advisors may know which classes students need to obtain a degree, but we don't know our student's core values and needs as well as the students know them for themselves. And there are even times when the students don't have a firm understanding of what they want or how to communicate. Coaching allows advisors to help their students identify what they want, need and plan to do. Ideally, coaching will give our students the tools they need to become more self-aware and independent.

Capstone Outline

The remaining chapters of this capstone are organized in the following manner: chapter two provides an overview of the literature that was reviewed regarding the fields of academic advising, coaching and grounded theory. I share the key learnings from this literature as well as relevant theories. I also share some early assumptions that I was able to derive from the literature. In chapter three I present the methodology used in my research for this project. My research includes twelve interviews with academic advisors from a variety of institutions. The purpose of these interviews was to gain a broader understanding of the experiences of academic advisors and the skills needed in order to be successful in the field. The chapter also includes quotations from these interviewees. Chapter four is a summary of the findings from these interviews. In chapter five, I continue to expand upon these findings and identify key takeaways on how the field of coaching may help advisors, and areas where coaching is not helpful or of value. Chapter six will be a layout of the coaching model I have designed for academic advisors. Chapter seven will be my conclusion as well as possibilities for future studies.

CHAPTER 2

LITERATURE REVIEW

This chapter serves to detail the specific literature that was reviewed for this paper in the fields of academic advising, coaching and grounded theory. The purpose of this review is to form a foundation for the research that is described in chapters three through five.

A Background on Academic Advising

Before attempting to explore theories about enhancing the work of academic advisors, it is imperative to learn the history and practices that surround the field. To gain some background knowledge about advising, I began by consulting the handbook of the National Academic Advising Association. Academic advising is a relatively new field. Before 1870, colleges were small and intimate and all student pursuits - from living arrangements, to coursework, to student clubs and organizations were led by the faculty. It was not until the late 1800s that higher education institutions employed non-faculty academic administrators. As colleges grew in both size and student body, faculty were no longer able to handle all student needs. These administrators were brought in to assist students in understanding and navigating through the various courses, programs and organizations available to them. For many decades, this early version of advising continued, but more as a perfunctory position. It would be another hundred years until the role of the academic advisor resembled its current form.

In 1977, 300 academic advisors met in Burlington, Vermont to share their experiences and discuss best practices. Within two years, that group would become the National Academic Advising Association (NACADA). The group now has more than 10,000 members.

NACADA defines professional academic advisors as “individuals who have been hired to focus primarily on academic advising activities that promote the academic success of students, with additional attention to general student development at the institution” (Gordon, Habley, & Grites, 2011, p. 267-268). Having a visible academic advising resource has proven to be valuable for students. A 2005 study by the National Survey of Student Engagement found that

> The vast majority of students (88 percent) say they take advantage of academic advising at some point during the first year of college… Students who met with their advisors more frequently were more satisfied with advising and also were generally more satisfied with their institution… More frequent contact with the advisor also was related to greater self-reported gains in personal and social development, practical competence, and general education, and more frequent use of deep approaches to learning… The quality of academic advising is the single most powerful predictor of satisfaction with the campus environment for students at four-year schools. (Gordon, Habley, & Grites, 2011, p. 70-73)

Since it has been proven that advising is useful for students, it is important that advisors are well-trained in their field. In addition, advising skills need to develop and expand along with the needs of students. Since the 1970s, student bodies have changed dramatically. For example, students have increased access to modern technology such as computers, cell phones and the internet, often preferring to communicate through those means. Students are also experiencing dramatic tuition increases. The NACADA Handbook notes that from 1995 to 2004 tuition had increased by 98.1 percent at four-year public institutions, 65.8 percent at two-year public institutions, and 71.3 percent at four-year private institutions (Gordon, Habley, & Grites, 2011, p. 135). There has also been a rise in the number of international and minority students in the make-up of student populations, and these students often have specific needs unique to them of which advisors need to be aware. Lastly, advisors need to be cognizant of the constantly shifting definition of what constitutes a viable career path in a time where a volatile job market awaits their students after they graduate. There are many academic advisors working today who began their work at a time where there were a small number of homogeneous student advisees, keeping their notes in paper files but who now have had to evolve to completely new systems and ways of thinking.

Theories on Academic Advising

New models and practices are needed to respond to these changes in the field of academic advising. In the past, the advisor's role was to tell students what they should do. Students would meet with their advisor, go over their checklist for graduation and be given a list of tasks that needed to be accomplished in order to attain their diploma. Those practices have evolved over time. This began when Burns B. Crookston

> Introduced the term *developmental advising* by contrasting it with *prescriptive advising* with the following medical analogy. Patients (advisees) seek the advice of doctors (advisors) when they realize they have medical (academic) problems, and doctors are the authorities who prescribe treatments to cure patients' problems… A prescriptive advisor assumes that once advice is given, his responsibility is largely fulfilled; now it is up to the student to fulfil his responsibility to do what is prescribed… The prescriptive style fails to engage the students actively in their education and does not help them develop a sense of responsibility for their academic choices… Developmental advisors gradually shift the responsibility of the relationship to their advisees by helping them develop problem-solving and decision-making skills, challenging them to develop high-order through processes, and enabling them to gain clearer insights into their own goals as well as the goals of higher education. (Gordon, Habley, & Grites, 2011, p. 85-86)

This practice is also called Advising as Teaching, and is the predominant model used by advisors today; Advising as Teaching is also the official model recommended by NACADA. Advisors feel their students are better prepared once they graduate and seek employment in their field of study if they have greater control of their academic experiences. Many advisors correlate Advising as Teaching to the philosophy, "If you give a man a fish, he will eat for a day but if you teach a man to fish, he can feed himself for a lifetime". They believe that students will not be able to make decisions for themselves if they are not given the opportunity. An increasing number of traditional students are growing up with helicopter parents, and working with a developmental advisor may be the student's first opportunity to explore what they want for themselves.

Nonetheless, there will always be some components of advising that require going over basic rules and regulations. Thomas Brown and Margaret King manage to break down the different elements of advising in their work. They explain that advising has three components: informational, relational and conceptual:

> The informational component includes detailed information on institutional and programmatic policies and procedures that advisors need to be aware of when working with students. The relational component includes the interpersonal skills an advisor needs in order to engage students in the advising process. The conceptual component includes what advisors need to know about the institutional mission, student learning, and the developmental theories that guide and support students in the academic careers. (Robbins, 2012, p. 4)

Examples of informational advising include going over the student handbook, the academic calendar and an advising syllabus (if one exists). Relational components of advising include open-mindedness and warmth. Conceptual components an advisor needs to master are the structure of the university or college, the university or college's mission statement and resources available to students.

Throughout my exploration of published articles on academic advising, I also attempted to find instances where coaching was cited as being used to benefit academic advisors. There were only a handful of articles that used the word coaching and these articles were more focused on the similarities of athletic coaching and advising than professional coaching. Although this was disappointing to discover, it made me feel that the purpose of my research was that much more valuable.

What is Coaching?

The word "coaching" can mean different things to different people. When I discuss the subject of my capstone with friends and coworkers, they often tilt their heads when I mention coaching. This is generally followed by several questions such as "Like with athletes?" or "What do you *mean* by coaching?"

In fact, there are many definitions of coaching, as well as many impressions people have of it (both objective and subjective). At its core, a coaching relationship involves a coach and a coachee (the client). Very often, the coachee choses to work with the coach, either through the recommendation of someone else or out of their own desire. Together they will reach an agreement on how they will work together and the coach's job will be to support the goals and needs of their clients. Jenny Rogers, in her book *Coaching Skills: A Handbook* defines coaching as "a partnership of equals whose aim is to achieve speedy, increased and sustainable effectiveness through focused learning in every aspect of the client's life. Coaching raises self-awareness and identifies choices. Working to the client's agenda, the coach and client have the sole aim of closing the gaps between potential and performance." (Rogers, 2012, p. 12-17)

What makes coaching unique is that the work is centered around the client's agenda. The coach does not dictate to their client what to do. This dynamic is different from many other professional relationships. Later in her book, Rogers highlights the differences between the field of coaching to other fields. One comparison she gives is a psychiatrist - patient relationship. In this relationship, the psychiatrist determines and then treats the patient's specific ailment in effort to resolve the issue (Rogers, 2012, p. 7). Another relationship often confused with coaching is a mentor-mentee relationship. Yet in this relationship, the mentor provides assistance to the mentee from their direct experiences within their specific field of focus. Coaching is different from both of these relationships because the coach is not viewed as superior to the coachee nor is the coachee viewed as subordinate. In this relationship, coach and coachee are partners. In their book *Co-Active Coaching: Changing Business, Transforming Lives* (2011), Henry and Karen Kimsey-House help us visualize what this relationship looks like:

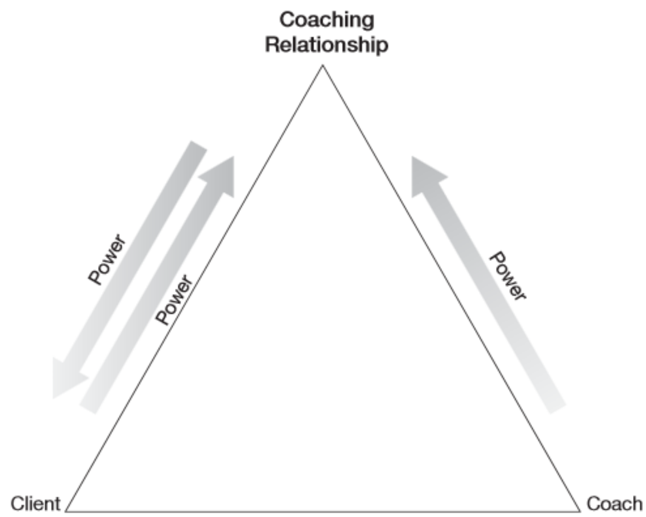


Figure 1: Kimsey-House, H., Kimsey-House, K., & Sandahl, P. (2011)

Unlike the professions previously mentioned, the coach does not have the power, but instead, the power lies *in the relationship* between the coach and coachee. Most importantly, this dynamic is designed to empower the client to make the changes they need to make.

Why is coaching based in a partnership? Coaches feel that in order to help their clients obtain their goals, offering advice is not a best practice. “When you give advice you imply that you know best and that client is a lesser person… Advice giving also leads to dependency - the opposite of what you are trying to accomplish as a coach.” (Rogers, 2012, p. 7) Coaching hopes to get clients to a point where the coach is no longer necessary - where the client has identified the resources they need inside him or herself and can succeed on their own.

The Coaching Appointment

Let us delve a bit deeper into the process of coaching and look at how a coaching session is structured. A key element of the session is that the coach asks the coachee open-ended and curious questions. As someone new to the field of coaching, this should be one of the first skills to practice. By asking questions, the coach can learn more about the coachee's state of mind, thought processes and goals. Oftentimes, asking these questions is beneficial to the coachee as well. Their answers may uncover aspects of the issue of which they were unaware. Questions need to be open-ended so that the coachee has the opportunity to reflect and delve deeper than a simple "yes" or "no" answer. The coach needs to ask curious questions because unless they reflect genuine interest in the discussion, the coachee will not feel comfortable and safe to share their thoughts. These open-ended questions then lead to discussions and eventually, goals for the next meeting.

It is also important to understand that coaching is not just about big milestones and goals. Coaching is just as much about the process. Jenny Rogers explains that

> One of the common misunderstandings about coaching is that it is simply about getting things done - performing at a higher level. Because of this misunderstanding, coaching has been compared to hiring a nagging parent who will make sure your bed is made and your homework is done… But coaching is not just about getting things done; it is just as importantly about continuing to learn, especially to learn how the action is not contributing to the core principles. (Rogers, 2012, p. 13)

Therefore, a successful coaching moment could be one where a client's goals shift or change. To discover that something does not work for a client can be productive. In her book, Rogers highlights that the real coaching work is what happens between coaching sessions. The client may come to their next meeting with revised plans and goals, and the coach will help the client reflect on the changes they have undergone and the new goals they have set. Oftentimes, these changes are celebrated by the coach as an accomplishment in itself (Rogers, 2012).

Because the process of coaching is designed to be one of discovery and support, coaches will rarely hold their coachees accountable for their goals. Instead, the accountability lies with the client. Henry and Karen Kimsey-House explain how important this dynamic is - this process is similar to not telling the client what to do but allowing them to discover it for themselves. The client must be accountable for his or her own choices. In his book *The Mindful Coach: Seven Roles for Facilitating Leader Development*, Douglas Silsbee expresses that it is the coach's job to "simultaneously support change and accept the client as he is." (Silsbee, 2010, p. 197) This includes accepting their clients when they make choices the coach may not have preferred.

Coaching Theories

Accepting clients is an integral part of Transactional Analysis, a theory that was developed by the psychiatrist Eric Berne in the 1960s and 70s. In *The Handbook of Knowledge Based Coaching*, Transactional Analysis is described as being

> founded on these assumptions and principles: People are OK. You're OK and I'm OK. I might not always like what you do, but I accept what you are. We are equals, regardless of the normal human markers of difference and status… You are responsible for yourself, and you live with the consequences of what you have decided. You can decide to change. You cannot be made to feel anything or to behave in a particular way… The practitioner does not do things to the client, and the client does not expect to have things done for him or her. (Brennan & Wildflower, 2011, location 949)

It is imperative that the coach creates an environment where there can be open and clear communication. This type of space permits the client to speak truthfully, avoiding feelings of defensiveness and dishonesty. There are three life positions Berne does not recommend for the coach. The first is "I'm OK – You're not OK". In this position, the coach pushes back on their client out of their own insecurity and fear. In the second, "I'm not OK - You're not OK," the coach expresses pessimism and fear. This position is generally associated with someone who is playing a victim role. Finally, in the position “You’re OK – I’m not OK,” the coach may be struggling with low self-esteem, believing others know what is best to do and they themselves are wrong.

Transactional Analysis recognizes three possible ego states that exist within the client. It is important for the coach to help the client identify their ego state and the perspectives that accompany that state. In the Parent State, the client is focused on what they should be doing but are not. These are the processes we are taught to do. In the Adult State, the client is rationally reacting to the here and now. These are the processes we think. In the Child State, the client reacts to experiences based on what they experienced in the past. These are the processes we feel. In our social interactions, we act and respond with these three ego states. Brennan and Wildflower explain that

> A transactional stimulus from one person results in a transactional response from another. In complementary transactions, needs are expressed and met, such as in problem solving (Adult-Adult), in mutual play (Child-Child or Parent-Child), or when two people gossip (Parent-Parent). Problems arise when a crossed transaction occurs. (Brennan & Wildflower, 2011, location 978)

Throughout the advising relationship, dynamics and situations can change constantly. Either through choice or by chance, coaching is based around client transitions. There are many theories about change, three of which I have selected to summarize in this paper: The G.R.O.W. model, Six Stages of Change and Bridges’ three stages.

G.R.O.W. stands for Goal, Reality, Options and Wrap-up. In *The Tao of Coaching*, Max Landsberg takes the reader through the GROW model step by step:

> During the first step of a session [Goal], coach and coachee agree on a specific topic and objective for the discussion. During the second step [Reality], both coach and coachee invite self-assessment and offer specific examples to illustrate their points. They then move into the third step [Options], where suggestions are offered and choices made. And finally [Wrap-up], the coach and coachee commit to action, define a timeframe for

> their objectives and identify how to overcome possible obstacles. (Landsberg, 2003, location: 485)

The process of setting a goal or topic for each meeting is important. Even if the goal may change, the process of creating a tangible objective will set an expectation between both parties that the conversation be focused and goal oriented. If the coach finds that the goals a client sets are unrealistic, it is important for the coach to help ground the client by going over the possible roadblocks that may get in the way of that goal being accomplished. When this information is exchanged, the goal may be modified or changed. These modifications come from the client, as he or she will be the one responsible to follow through. A coach who encourages unrealistic goals creates a situation where the client will return to the next session feeling remorseful, frustrated and possibly no longer wanting to work with them. When the coach and coachee set a goal that is realistic, they can close the meeting with clear plans on how the goal will be reached and opportunities for success.

In her book *Coaching Skills,* Jenny Rogers offers advice on how to distinguish the type of goals a client has set. Rogers describes two types of goals. The first is transactional, or performance goals, which are “specific tasks that a client wants to achieve. These are often externally imposed and have an emphasis on short-term performances.” (Rogers, 2012, p. 134) Examples of transactional goals would be succeeding at a job interview or losing weight to fit into a dress for a wedding. The second type of goal is transformational, or learning goals. These are more long term, and serve to give the client “intrinsic satisfaction” (Rogers, 2012, p. 134). Transformational or learning goals “are about increasing capacity to deal with similar situations and dilemmas whenever they arise, rather than with achieving a short-term task.” (Rogers, 2012, p. 134). An example of this would be do live a healthier lifestyle overall, as compared to short-term weight loss.

But what does this change process feel like to the coachee? Three researches attempted to define the process of how client's experience changes. James Prochaska, Carlo DiClemente, and John Norcross conducted a study over several years to examine the process of change in human behavior (1992). They arrived at six stages involved in the change process:

> 1. Precontemplation. This is the stage at which the individual is not aware that change needs to happen or that he desires change.
> 2. Contemplation. The individual is aware that a problem exists and is seriously thinking about overcoming it, but has not yet made a commitment to take action.
> 3. Preparation. This stage combines intention with contemplation of a change in behavior.
> 4. Action. In order to overcome his problem, the individual modifies his behavior, his environment, or how he experiences the situation.
> 5. Maintenance. This is the stage at which the individual works to prevent relapse and consolidate the gains made during the action stage.
> 6. Recycling. The individual learns how to handle the experience of relapse and begin again. (Brennan & Wildflower, 2011, location: 2159)

In our discussion of the G.R.O.W. model, steps two through three generally take place before and during the coaching session. The client discusses the possibility of change, sets goals and modifies them so that they are both realistic and beneficial. Once the client leaves the meeting, they then must act on these goals. Even if the change that takes place is successful, it must be maintained and reflected upon in order to gain from it. This is where the coach can again be useful. At their next meeting, the coach can help the client review what has happened since they last met, how it went and if anything needs to be modified.

The coach is also beneficial during a related process, which was developed by William Bridges. Bridges defined the three phases of transition: ending, losing, or letting go; the neutral zone; and the new beginning. *The Handbook of Knowledge Based Coaching* explains that these three stages flow into each other, and it is often difficult for the client to identify which stage he or she is in. While a client experiences the feeling of an ending (for example, the loss of a job), they may also be in the planning stages of a new beginning (in this instance, obtaining a new position elsewhere). In addition, clients can flow back and forth between these stages, which is why it is so important for them to be aware of where they are in the moment. Brennan & Wildflower describe the stages as follows:

> Ending. This stage is typically characterized by confusion about what is really over, who has the power, and what has not ended. This resembles the early stages of the Kübler-Ross cycle. Clients may find it hard to imagine life without the old role. If, for instance, they are having to compete for what they regard as their "own" jobs in a reorganization, they may feel sadness and anxiety about what the future holds… The neutral zone. Bridges describes this as feeling like being "in continuous whitewater." The old has not quite ended, but the new has not quite begun. As well as noting the feelings of being buffeted and directionless, Bridges emphasizes that the neutral zone can also be a time of creative renewal. The new beginning. The new life is starting, but just as it was unclear psychologically what had really ended, so it might be equally unclear what has really begun. (Brennan & Wildflower, 2011, location: 3123)

The process of change can be scary and overwhelming. Many clients focus so much on the first part (ending, losing, letting go) and the last part (new beginnings) that they don't pay attention to the need to take stock and analyze what they've experienced and why (the neutral zone). Clients are encouraged to embrace this stage between endings and beginnings, and it is an important stage for the coach to help the coachee recognize and develop. Jenny Rogers, in her book *Coaching Skills: A Handbook* helps shed light on how coaches can support clients through each of these stages. In the first stage, the coach should discuss with the client what will be changing for them as well as what will remain the same after the change. Clients should be encouraged to feel that they have a role in the change process, and that the change does not control them. The coach should encourage the client to mourn any loss, yet at the same time begin to prepare for what is to come. Coaches can also help their clients identify the often-ignored neutral zone. They should help their clients understand the value of not jumping straight from the ending to a beginning, but instead, accepting a dip in confidence that may occur during the first few weeks of a change. It is important to encourage the client to plan and learn during this period. (Rogers, 2012, p. 169) Generally, the neutral zone can be accompanied with depression, and the coach should let the client know that as well. Even when experiencing new beginnings, clients can still have a dip in confidence. In their book *Immunity to Change: How to Overcome It and Unlock the Potential in Yourself and Your Organization,* Robert Kegan and Lisa Laskow Lahey offer additional insight on how change affects us. They explain that, "when we experience the world as 'too complex' we are not just experiencing the complexity of the world. We are experiencing a mismatch between the world's complexity and our own at this moment. There are only two logical ways to mend this mismatch—reduce the world's complexity or increase our own." (Kegan & Lahey, 2009, location 367) Coaches should be well-equipped to help their clients understand and deal with this complexity. By helping to build their understanding, the coach can reduce the anxiety around the unknown and make positive change possible.

Helping

After sharing a draft of my writing on Transactional Analysis, change and transitions, Dr. Russo was kind enough to share a book with me that she felt would be useful for my research. The book, *Helping: How to Offer, Give, and Receive Help* by Edgar Schein offers insight on how to support clients through the transitions described above. The book begins by unfolding the dynamics between the helper (in this case the coach) and the one requesting help (the client). At its core, the relationship between the person who asks for help and the person that helps creates status. The person asking for help is projecting a lower status by asking someone for assistance. By being asked, the helper is given higher status. This relationship and the dynamics that come with it are continually assessed and modified throughout the relationship. (Schein, 2009) The coach, as a helper of their coachee can take on one of three roles:

1. An expert resource who provides information or services
2. A doctor who diagnosis and prescribes
3. A process consultant who focuses on building and equitable relationship and clarifies what kind of help is needed (Schein, 2009, p. 54)

Schein explains that the first two roles (that of the expert resource and a doctor) are what we often associate with being a helper, and these two roles overlap in some ways. In general, people are most comfortable in the expert or doctor roles. When asked a question, people prefer to give an immediate answer. Yet in the third role, the process consultant, the coach is more focused on the process of supporting someone through change than telling him or her what to do. In this book, Schein advises coaches to primarily work from the role of the process consultant.

Schein explains that the process consultant should “not to assume too much, but rather… create a situation where not only will the client reveal more, but in that process will begin to gain status and develop trust. What this means behaviorally is to adopt a role of humble inquiry in order to avoid the traps of being seduced by one’s initial power position.” (Schein, 2009, p.82) Creating this dynamic in coaching could take a matter of minutes or several meetings. It is important to recognize that the client is in a position of vulnerability when asking for help and the coach must also help build the client’s confidence back to a place where they can be supported in making decisions for themselves.

Schein describes this method of communicating as “humble inquiry”. The coach is encouraged to ask open-ended, curious questions of their client in a way that not only helps them gain knowledge about their client’s needs but also encourages their clients to take charge of their situation.

While asking open-ended questions, it is possible that the coach will realize that they have heard or experienced something similar before. These feelings can lead to the coach having a bias about the conversation. The coach must strive to push aside pre-conceptions about what the client is sharing in order to serve them. Schein describes this as pure inquiry:

> Pure inquiry is difficult because it requires you to suspend as much as possible your prejudices, preconceptions, a priori assumptions, and expectations based on past experience. The third person in a row who asks you for directions to Massachusetts Ave. does not necessarily have the same goals as the previous two askers… The key to pure inquiry is the odd concept of “accessing your ignorance.” If you ask questions just to test your preconceptions or hypothesis, the client will sense it and be steered into your domain instead of revealing more of his or her own concerns. To access your ignorance and thereby minimize the bias in the questions, you must ask yourself what it is that you do not know. (Schein, 2009, p.154)

The process of pure inquiry opens up the conversation to greater possibilities, and often reveals to the coach that the client’s situation is more complex than it initially seemed. Another thought that is important for the coach to keep in mind is that even if a situation seems similar, everyone processes things in different ways. Never tell a client that you have experienced something similar and know what they should do. The client is the only one who knows their situation and can decide what is best.

Another reason coaches should not offer advice to clients is that not every client wants to be told what to do. As an example, Schein describes a situation where his daughter was working on a watercolor painting and asked her teacher for advice on how to paint a particular tree. Her teacher picked up the paint brush and began to outline the tree for her on the canvas. His daughter was very upset, as she wanted to paint the painting on her own. Schein describes this as “overhelping”. Although it seems like a smart choice to jump in and take action immediately, the client can end up feeling as if you are an “unwanted meddler”. (Schein, 2009)

Grounded Theory

I used grounded theory as my research methodology for my capstone. After discussing different research options with my advisor, she recommended that I look into grounded theory. I read several articles on the process and felt it would be an ideal method for my paper. The topic that I chose to write about did not already have published articles that I could identify. Therefore, I would be conducting the study without an established theory to test. I wanted to build my theory from the data collected through interviews and readings and grounded theory allowed me to do that.

Glaser and Strauss developed grounded theory in 1967. Unlike other forms of qualitative research, grounded theory is not designed to test a hypothesis or an assumption, but instead to develop one through research. In order to successfully use grounded theory, the researcher must reflect upon their work as they conduct it in order to build interpretations. Unfortunately, grounded theory is often misused and / or overused. In his article, "From the Editors: What Grounded Theory is Not" Roy Suddaby attempts to describe grounded theory and explain how it can be misinterpreted.

A researcher using grounded theory must use observation, ongoing interpretation and self-reflection throughout their study. This is different from many positivist models because the researcher is not separated from their research. Their reactions and feelings are an active element of their work. Suddaby describes this method as being, "built upon two key components: constant comparison, in which data are collected and analyzed simultaneously, and theoretical sampling, in which decisions about which data should be collected next are determined by the theory that is being conducted." (Suddaby, 2006, p. 634)

Accomplishing this requires a great deal of awareness in the researcher. Sarah Crowley and Helen Heath help confirm this in their article, "Developing a Grounded Theory Approach: A Comparison of Glaser and Strauss". They state that, "Analysis will always be filtered through one's tradition and cultural position. Furthermore, symbolic interactionism and thus grounded theory sees researchers as social beings whose experiences, ideas and assumptions can contribute to their understanding of social processes observed" (Crowley & Heath, 2004, p. 143) This process can sometimes seem difficult. It is not always natural to be aware and take note of your reactions, even while you are experiencing them. Suddaby advises researchers that, "A simple way to seize this middle group is to pay attention to extant theory but constantly remind yourself that you are only human and that what you observe is a function of both who you are and what you hope to see." (Suddaby, 2006, p. 634)

Once enough data is collected to reach a saturation point, it is then ready to be presented. Category saturation is an essential element of grounded theory. It requires that the researcher continue to collect and reflect upon their data until no new evidence appears. Despite some opinions to the contrary, coding is welcome in grounded theory research. It is not acceptable for papers to present raw data without analysis.

In the next chapter, I will review the methodology used in my research. In chapter four, I will summarize the data that was collected in the interviews. Chapter five will be an interpretation of the data, which will revisit some of the data from this chapter. In chapter six I will share the coaching model that came from the interpretation. In chapter seven I will conclude the paper.

CHAPTER 3

METHODOLOGY

Research through Literature

For my capstone, I collected data through two sources: literature about the fields of coaching and academic advising as well as interviews with academic advising administrators throughout the United States. The use of grounded theory as my research model helped in this process. By reviewing articles and books while preparing and conducting interviews, I was able to mold my research and questions I progressed. Each bit of data benefited other pieces of my research.

For my literature review, I began by visiting the National Academic Advising Association website and read articles related to the history of academic advising, new developments in the field and information on how to make advising relationships successful. These readings led me to the NACADA handbook on academic advising. In addition, I looked for any papers that had been published that connected the field of advising to coaching through databases like JSTOR, Google Scholar and EBSCO.

I then began to review literature related to the field of coaching. Some of the literature used for my capstone was part of the coursework in Dr. Russo's coaching course. In addition, Dr. Russo offered recommendations on additional books and articles that would enhance my knowledge of the field.

Retaining all of the knowledge from these readings often proved challenging during my research. Because my goal was to continue to add to my knowledge as I moved through the process, I needed to find a way to retain as much information as possible. During my readings, I highlighted sections that were meaningful to me and kept notes on the sides of books and articles of things that stood out. After completing a reading, I added some notes to a central document that I kept on the topic so that I could easily access that information at a moment's notice. This practice proved fruitful while conducting interviews. Often, when I reviewed an interview, I could quickly find a reference to the topic being discussed. This method allowed me to have a broad awareness of the concepts I was researching without losing important information.

In addition to conducting readings on coaching and academic advising, I also reviewed articles on grounded theory and best practices conducting interviews. This was based on the advice of my academic advisor as well as Dr. Barstow and Dr. Kamenstein. Dr. Russo said if I planned to conduct grounded theory research, I would need to be knowledgeable about its methods and pitfalls.

Interview Methodology

Towards the end of my readings, I began the process of creating interview questions. I asked myself what I wanted to learn and then wrote down every possible question I could think of that would be of value to me. I was then able to identify questions that had similarities and reduced my interview questions to no more than fifteen.   Dr. Russo and Dr. Barstow reviewed my interview questions and shared their thoughts and recommendations. After several revised drafts, I was able to finalize the questions that would be used. In addition, I piloted the interview with two colleagues to see what types of responses I received and to become more comfortable with the process.

I used a semi-structured format for the interviews. I worked from the series of eleven questions I had established through multiple drafts and the pilot. The questions were designed to obtain this information: the role and structure of academic advising at multiple institutions, the tools and techniques advisors use, how advisors view their work and the field of advising overall, and what they feel successful advising looks like.

The interview questions were:

Questions	What it is intended to reveal
Question 1: Can you tell me about academic advising at ---? For example, how many advisors you work with, how many students you see, what other administrators you and your students work with?	Before learning about the advisor's individual experiences, I want to gain an understanding about the universities' structures related to the advising process. This will give me context about the environment in which they work.
Question 2: I'm interested in learning about your students. What is the age range of your advisees and their demographics?	I plan to interview advisors from a variety of institutions – universities, colleges as well as community colleges. This question is designed to give me an understanding of the types of students they work with.
Question 3: <First name>, how did you become an academic advisor? Prompt: Was this a planned career path? Prompt: Have you had related training?	After reading the National Academic Advising handbook, it became clear to me that advisors come from a variety of backgrounds. Some advisors have no formal training, while others have obtained certificates or degrees in the field. I am interested in learning how the advisors learned to advise – whether on the job or through education and how that affects their work.
Question 4: In your opinion based on your experiences, what are the top three important skills for an academic advisor? Prompt: Why do you believe that these are important?	I am interested to see how coaching skills overlap with academic advising skills.

Question 5: How do you define “advising”? / What is your definition of “advising”?	Based on my advising readings so far, there is clearly still a great deal of research needed in this field. I am interested to see how advisors would define their field and see the overlaps with coaching.
Question 6: What is your role as an advisor and what are your key responsibilities? When you describe your job and key responsibilities to a potential advisee, how do you describe it?	This question will help me fill in additional background data from question 1. I’d like to understand the structure of advising services at their university as well as how they manage to complete their work.
Question 7: Do you use this process with all your students? Prompt: Can you give me an example of this?	Coaching focuses a great deal on customizing your work with your coachee based on where they are. I want to see if this overlaps with how advisors work with advisees.
Question 8: What is your role in supporting your student’s transitions and changes? Prompt: Can you give me an example of this?	Academic advising and coaching both often deal with clients undergoing some kind of change / progression. This question will help me see how advisors work with their students through these processes.
Question 9: What does a successful advising relationship look like to you? Prompt: How do you know you have been successful? Prompt: What is the role of the advisee in this success? Prompt: Can you give me an example of this?	I’m interested in finding out how advisors determine that they are advising successfully and how they track the progress of their students.
Question 10: As you think about your advising, what do you think would make you a more effective advisor? What are your goals to make you even better at your job?	A great deal of my interview is focused around what the advisor is doing well. I also want to touch upon room for improvement, so I can get a sense of the goals each advisor has. These goals will help me see the long-term aspirations of the advisor.

Question 11: If you were building an advising process at --- what would it look like?	This is my attempt at a blue-sky question. I would be interested to hear what advisors think is the ideal setting for academic advising.

Once the interview questions were solidified, I was ready to identify academic advisors to interview for my capstone. I wanted to conduct between eight and twelve interviews and speak exclusively with academic advising administrators (as compared to faculty who advised students on the side). My goal was to interview advisors from a wide variety of institutions across the United States. Ideally, these advisors would work for different types of schools: two-year colleges, community colleges, large research universities, online institutions, small liberal arts colleges and Ivy League schools. I wanted to gain a broad understanding of academic advising, and therefore did not want to limit myself to schools that were geographically or academically similar. I began by conducting three on-campus interviews at Penn. After my second Penn interview, I felt prepared to reach out to advisors at other schools.

I began researching advisors through the NACADA database. I looked for contacts whose job title stated that they were an academic advisor. I tried to identify people spread out over the US. I sent some e-mails, and followed up several days later with a call.

Initial response was disappointing. After I contacted ten advisors, only a few responded to my request. I was sympathetic to their concerns - these people did not know me, and may have been hesitant to share information about their work with a complete stranger. I discussed the issue with Dr. Russo as well as my manager, Eli Lesser. They both immediately offered to connect me with their personal contacts at other universities to see if they could connect me with advisors. The results were far more successful than my initial attempts. Within two weeks, I had twelve interviews scheduled.

I conducted the interviews either in person or via phone. I obtained permission to record our conversation from the interviewee in advance. In order to record the phone calls, I had to setup a Google Voice phone number. At our meeting time, the interviewee would call the number and it would be forwarded to my phone. I was then able to record our conversation with the press of a button. The interviews lasted between 35 and 90 minutes. The speed at which the interviewee spoke, as well as the level of detail they were willing to share in our conversation, affected the length of the interview.

During the interview, I used a copy of the interview questions and wrote notes on what was said. After the interview, I completed a brief journal entry notating my thoughts on the conversation and initial reaction. I downloaded the recording to my computer and sent it out for transcription through a trusted service, Amazon Mechanical Turk, which prohibits the collection of personal identifiable information. Once the transcript was received I would listen to the interview again, making any necessary edits for accuracy as well as highlighting items that stood out to me. Each interview was then assigned to a folder containing the audio of our conversation, my notes from the interview, my journal entry after the interview was complete, the transcription and a copy of the transcription with my notes. Although my work was very detailed, it helped me stay aware and engaged in the research process and helped me build on theory over time. This level of detail is beneficial when conducting grounded theory research. As a researcher, I needed to have access to information and be able to identify it. The process of transcribing, reviewing and coding interviews helped me maintain broad awareness of what was being discussed in my interviews and allowed me to develop theories through my work. Themes began to emerge. While reading my third interview, words popped out of the page that other advisors had used. I noticed that most of the advisors I spoke to shared that they came into the field of advising with no previous experience. Grounded theory helped me discover these findings early on instead of waiting until all of the data was collected to reflect upon it.

CHAPTER 4

DATA COLLECTED

Once all of my interview data was collected, I began to organize it. I notated key bits of information to identify the variety of people interviewed. Here is a layout of data collected about each interviewee. For the privacy of the people interviewed, I have changed the name of each advisor and will use these alternate names throughout the rest of the paper.

Name	Title	Region	School Type
April	Associate Director, Undergraduate Degree Programs	Mid-Atlantic	Private, Ivy
Mary	Associate Director, Undergraduate Division	Mid-Atlantic	Private, Ivy
Jennifer	Graduate Programs Coordinator	Mid-Atlantic	Private, Ivy
Michelle	Assistant Dean	Mid-Atlantic	Private
Carol	Academic Adviser	Mid-Atlantic	State, online
Thomas	Pre-Law Advisor	Mid-Atlantic	Private
Elizabeth	Director, Academic Advising	Mid-Atlantic	Private
Sue	Assistant Dean/Director of Advising	Mid-Atlantic	State
Eric	Academic Advisor	West Coast	State
Betty	Academic Advisor	Mid-West	Private
Amelia	Assistant Director	South East	Private
Emma	Academic Advisor	Mid-Atlantic	Community College

Name	Students	Type	Traditional / non	# advisees
April	Undergraduate	Liberal Arts	Non	250
Mary	Undergraduate	Business	Traditional	440
Jennifer	Graduate / Undergraduate	Engineering	Traditional	480
Michelle	Undergraduate	Pre-Med	Traditional	250
Carol	Undergraduate	Business	Non	300
Thomas	Undergraduate	Pre-Law	Traditional	320
Elizabeth	Undergraduate	Liberal Arts	Traditional	60
Sue	Undergraduate	Liberal Arts	Traditional	-
Eric	Undergraduate	Liberal Arts	Traditional	-
Betty	Undergraduate	Engineering	Traditional	200
Amelia	Undergraduate	General Studies	Non	150
Emma	Undergraduate	-	Non	-

Background of Advisors

Of the twelve advisors interviewed, ten were from the Mid-Atlantic region, one was from the Mid-West and one was from the South East. Although I was hoping for a broader range of regions, I believe more people from the Mid-Atlantic agreed to participate because of the connections that were made available through my capstone advisor and manager. Although I consciously reached out to advisors from a broad range of areas, the group of twelve that I spoke with were the first that agreed to be interviewed. Eight of the people I interviewed worked at private institutions, three worked for state institutions and one worked for a community college. In addition, three of the interviewees worked for an Ivy League institution and one of the interviewees worked for an online degree program.

The advisors that I interviewed worked for a variety of programs within their institutions. Four of the advisors served students studying the liberal arts, two worked in schools of engineering, one advisor specialized exclusively in pre-law students while another specialized in pre-med students. In addition, there were two business school advisors and two general advisors. All of the advisors I spoke with advised undergraduate students, although one of them additionally advised graduate students. There was a healthy mix of student types. Eight of the advisors worked with traditional students (students who went on to four-year colleges straight from high school) and Four of the advisors worked with non-traditional students. The number of advisees each interviewee served varied greatly. Three of the advisors I spoke with worked for institutions where students were not assigned advisors, and therefore could meet with anyone they wanted to work with. Other advisors were assigned between 60 and 480 students, the average being 272.

The background of the academic advisors themselves is diverse: nine out of twelve of people I interviewed had a secondary degree, although the fields in which they obtained their degree varied broadly. One advisor had a Master's in Liberal Arts, another had a Master's in Environmental Studies, one was a lawyer, three had Master's degrees in Social Work, one had a Master's in Philosophy and two people had a Master's in Higher Education. The people I interviewed who had a bachelor's degree had studied economics, accounting and art history. When I asked advisors how they got into academic advising eleven out of the twelve described themselves as having "fallen into the field" instead of planning it. Three stories specifically speak to this:

Carol had an associate's degree, and later in life decided to get her bachelor's. When her husband's work required that they leave the area, Carol signed up for a distance education course at her university. The experience was better than she had imagined:

> I was so amazed at the feedback, the personalized feedback, I was getting on my work, because I was used to the forum classes, the bigger classes, you know what I mean? And it was very personalized. So, when I went to get back into the working field, and I had had a cost accounting background for ten years, I saw an opening in distance education, and it was for a staff assistant in advising. And I had such a good experience it's the only application I put in... Because I just felt a connection to that group, and their mission. And I started as a staff assistant, and worked my way up.

Unlike Carol, Sue graduated from her bachelor's program in business at a traditional age. After graduating, she went to New York City to work for an insurance company for about five years. Sue discovered that there were parts of her work she enjoyed, and parts she did not care for. She learned that she most enjoyed working with the people within the organization, making sure they were placed in the jobs where they could be successful and thrive, more than she cared about the organization itself. After five years, Sue left the business world to raise a family and slowly found herself working in education.

Betty’s path to higher education may not have been as long as Carol’s, but it was also complex. Halfway through her master’s program in communications she discovered the value of strong academic advising from her mentors. Betty quickly realized that she too wanted to advise students: “I sort of realized, ‘Oh, these people are also professionals to help you figure out, like, what kind of work do you enjoy, and how do you get experiences that will help you test that, and support that, and then pursue that?’ And so, I wanted to become an advisor so that I could be that for students... And so, that's what introduced me to the field.”

Personal Advising Experiences

Betty’s previous experience as a student working with academic advisors was a discussion point that came up in most, if not all of my interviews. Many advisors I spoke with had a very negative or positive experience with an academic advisor as an undergraduate or graduate student. Some advisors reflected on the experiences of their children working with academic advisors at other institutions. When Betty was an undergraduate, she had a poor advising experience:

> I saw academic advising as somebody who helped you walk through the course catalog and make sure you were taking the classes that you needed to earn a degree. That was a limited perspective, but that's what I thought advisors did. I actually had an interaction, at the start of my sophomore year, with an advisor who told me-- She really didn't think I should be taking these two classes together. One was a math statistics class, and the other was a statistical testing in psychology class, both of which I had to take for my degree. And she thought that that was just really too much for me to be working on. I was like, “I'm kind of acing them both,” and it was actually really helpful. They supported each other, the content really works together. I think I understood it better because I took them together, and I was really frustrated that she hadn't tried to understand before judging my plan, and that was the last time I saw an advisor in college. From that point forward, I just thought, “You know what? I can do this myself.”

Amelia described the experiences of her daughter who was an undergraduate at another school. She often found herself checking in on her daughter to see how things were going and if she was having any issues navigating the resources of the university. Her daughter would tell her that she was unaware of the support systems that existed for her. She described her advising meetings as a time when she checked off a worksheet showing what she needed to graduate and then left the office.

On the other hand, several advisors had positive experiences with academic advisors which inspired them to work in the field. Michelle was working in a lab and had a close relationship with one of her academic advisors. When the advisor was leaving her position she recommended Michelle “go for the job” herself. Michelle’s co-workers in the lab tried to dissuade her from applying for the position. They told her as soon as she went to work in academic administration, she would never return to the lab. They were right. Fifteen years later, Michelle is still happily working as an advisor.

Without a doubt, the most sentimental advising experience I heard about was from Thomas. Like Carol, Thomas was a non-traditional undergrad. When his son went off to college, Thomas decided that he wanted to finish college before his son did. He had about three years of college cobbled together, and began to look for schools that might accept his transfer credits and allow him to go to school during the evenings and weekends. Thomas read about a school in the mid-atlantic that might meet his needs:

> And so, I drove up one day, it was only an hour from my house, and I asked where admissions was. I walk into the office, and there was one secretary, and it turned out it was admissions, it was financial aid, it was the registrar-- It was kind of the whole office. The whole nerve center... And so, I told the secretary what I wanted. She said, “Oh, you want to talk to Greg.”… And so, we sat down, and I had a transcript with me from (my last school), which is where I did most of my schooling at that point, and I showed it to him, and he said, “So, tell me what you've been doing for the last 25 years or so.” So, we're talking, and he's making notes, and after about half an hour he handed me a piece of paper. He said, “Here, sign this.” I said, “OK, what am I signing?” And he stamped it, “Accepted.”

Thomas went on to complete his undergraduate degree in a year. He described Greg as the person who (aside from Thomas' family) has had the biggest effect on his life. After college, Thomas went on to law school, and made sure to call Greg to let him know when he received his law degree.

Only half of the people I interviewed felt that they received or still receive some form of on the job training while working as an academic advisor. Amelia stated that "I was very surprised that there wasn't an established, almost, department (in my school). Because large public school systems do have them. It's an actual department, where all the counselors go and meet once a year, or every six months. And I was very surprised that there wasn't that." Five of the advisors I interviewed obtained training in the field outside of work, through either conferences or organizations. One of the most popular sources for external training was NACADA. One advisor was surprised to discover that NACADA allowed her to not only understand other institutions better, but even her own. While attending her first NACADA conference, she met people within her own university she did not know about: "I went to a regional conference, not a lot of the advisors at the time who were in distance ed were attending, so I went by myself to a regional conference. Found it to be very worthwhile, and left with a lot of information. Even about my own school because we were separated at the time. You know (we were) more separated from the university."

Analyzing the Data

After conducting the interviews, my next step was to take the transcriptions and input each of them into a coding tool called Saturate. Saturate is a simple, web-based coding application designed for research in qualitative analysis. Each interview was kept on a separate page within a notebook that held all of my data. I was able to manually go through each interview and highlight paragraphs or sentences that reflected themes within the interviews. I began the coding process by using the notes that I took from listening to the transcriptions. Anything that I identified as meaningful was coded. As the process went on, the need to categorize my codes became necessary. For instance, many codes were related to important skills an advisor should have - therefore I moved all of those codes under the "advising skills" category. Once the process was complete, 23 codes had been identified in 259 locations.

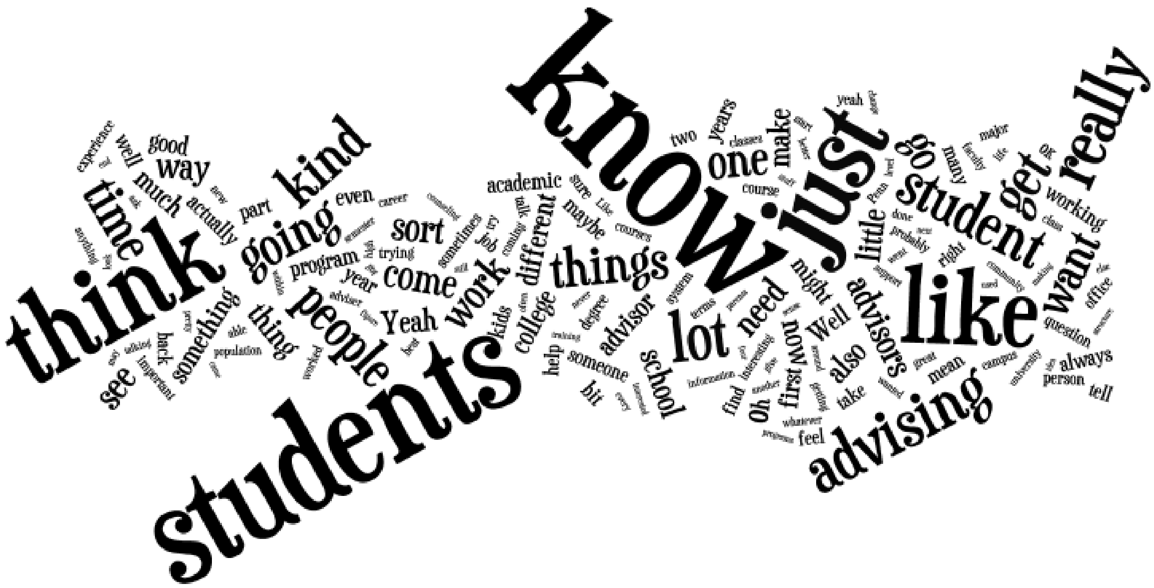
Once this process was complete, I downloaded quotations from the interviews that related to each code. I then cleaned up the data by removing any quotes that were overly repetitious or would not add to the paper.

In the next chapter, I will share some of these quotations along with my analysis. Certain themes became apparent during the process of conducting and coding the interviews. With the help of Saturate, I was able to make connections between the role of a coach and that of an advisor and where the two practices differ.

CHAPTER 5

DATA INTERPRETATION

Figure 2: A word frequency diagram from the twelve interviews
(Generated from Wordle™ online tool)



The image above is a word cloud. It was generated from the online tool, Wordle™. This word cloud represents the responses from the study interviews. The more frequently a word appeared in interviews, the larger it is in the diagram. In this word cloud, “students”, “know”, “like” and “think” were most prominent.

Advising – Coaching Differences

The advisor / advisee relationship and coach / coachee relationship are based on different foundational principles. In the advisor / advisee relationships described in this study, most advisees are assigned an advisor. Advisors are expected to work with students through their sophomore to senior years of college. At the minimum, the advisor is responsible for sharing degree requirements with advisees, helping them select a major, giving them resources on navigating their school and oftentimes signing off on their coursework. Coachees often select the coach they want to work with through a series of informational interviews. Sometimes, specific coaches are recommended to a coachee by their employer; however, the coachee usually makes the final selection of the coach. Coaches often have "ground rules" surrounding their appointments. They do not control their coachees' choices or decisions.

The advising relationship has a different power structure than the coaching relationship. In an advising relationship, the advisor has greater control over the student. The advisor often approves many of the student's decisions. As discussed in chapter three, the power in the coaching relationship lies in the partnership of the coach and coachee. Amelia begins the advising process of reviewing the degree requirements before students even apply to her program:

> So, even before they apply, whether it's a readmission or they're completely new to the university but they will be completing their degree with us, we give them a very visual plan of what they still need to do, so that it's not just a credit value, but more a visual of, "OK, these are the areas of study that I still need in general education," and hopefully it's just, maybe, 12 credits, or maybe even 16 credits in general ed, and then the 45 credits of their actual major, or area of concentration.

When it came to degree requirements, Emma prints out a worksheet of degree requirements her students complete in her presence. Many advisors complete the form on behalf of the student in Emma's office. Emma has found that students are more aware of what needs to be completed when they manually identify their complete courses.

Coaches and advisors also differ because advisors are expected to be knowledgeable about the resources that students need within the school. Coaches do not need to be experts in their coachee's fields. Many advisors consider awareness about school policies and resources the starting point of their work. Eric, the newest advisor in the study, went to great lengths to identify resources for his students. When Eric was unable to find a resource through his own university, he would visit websites of other schools to find resources. Emma spoke about the importance of connections in the career center as well as major advisors to help her students in a variety of situations. It was important to Emma, as it was for many advisors, to know that when she referred a student to another office, she was connecting them with someone who could help them.

“You’re OK and I’m OK”

An advisor has many ways to use coaching skills. The most commonly occurring theme in my interviews is the importance of making students feel welcome, accepted and respected by their advisor. Advisors used terms like “wanting to be there”, “having a warm and welcoming environment”, “caring about students”, “believing in them” and “meeting students where they are”. This advising philosophy connects directly with the theory of Transactional Analysis highlighted in chapter two.

Many advisors emphasized that a safe, encouraging environment for students is imperative from the start. They explained that if students felt a lack of connection, or even worse, judgement from their advisor, students are highly unlikely to return to the advisor unless absolutely necessary. Advisors who are judgmental are even more detrimental to the student – advisor relationship. Mary encouraged advisors to

> Find something in (their) life or personal experience that connects with a student, no matter who they are or what they bring into the room… finding some sort of point of similarity. Because I think I've also seen people put up walls really quickly, especially when an advisor says… “Oh, I don't know anything about that.” Or, “I can't connect with that.” It's not good.

Carol shared an interesting example of the importance of maintaining a positive environment for her students. She described something many advisors experience, receiving the same requests from many students in a day. In a social situation outside of work, this could be considered frustrating and repetitive, but Carol does what she can to see the situation from her student's perspective. She explained that while she may have received the same e-mail from different students forty-five times that day, each individual email was actually the first time a student was reaching out. Carol's father is currently suffering from dementia, and she has found the experience of caring for him helpful in her advising. She recognizes each message as a brand-new opportunity to connect with her students.

Sue shared a particularly poignant story. She spoke about a student who was failing his classes. At first, the situation may seem black and white; if the student was failing, he needs to do better. Sue described what happened when she invited the student into her office, asking for more information and offering to help. The student had a parent who was suffering from cancer and needed a ride to chemotherapy on one of the class days. With this new knowledge, the advisor could help the student speak to his professor and see if an alternative schedule would work for the course. Sue went on to say:

> Advising comes down to some of those little traits. It's not memorizing all the requirements to the umpteenth degree. It's the initial contact, and what does the student feel when they leave your office. That's what your goal should be. Is, to establish an environment that they feel safe, they feel that you listened to them, you made eye contact with them, you observed them. Sometimes it's a simple as, they'll come in with an umbrella, and it's pouring rain, I go, "Oh, you poor thing. Is it raining that hard out there? Oh, where'd you come from? Oh, you were a commuter from XY? Oh, my goodness. You must have had a rough time getting to this building with that umbrella." Sometimes it's just a matter of being human about sharing what happens in the world today, or the weather, or whatever. You immediately are sending them the message that you're human, just like them… And so, it's always the best not to judge, because you don't have all the facts. And as soon as they start sharing with you, then a relationship's developing. And that is, by far, the goal of that opportunity. A goal is to establish a relationship. And, say goodbye by calling them by their name. "Alright, Sajahn. See you again. Don't forget to come back and see me soon. I'll be looking for you." And their eyes twinkle, because they don't expect anybody to say that to them.

Different Student Needs

The application of Transactional Analysis theory to academic advising includes recognizing that each student is different with different needs. The advisors in the study worked with a variety of students. Even in small communities of what appeared to be homogenous students. The needs of each student varied greatly.

Many of the advisors in the study described the experience of advising international students. Jennifer's engineering program had a large international student body and she took the time to gain a better understanding of their previous undergraduate education in order to serve them better. She described how undergraduate education was conducted in India and China. She works with students to help familiarize them with the U.S. system of education and help them transition into that system.

Elizabeth spoke about the increase of students with mental illness who are now able to go to college. She was happy that the advances in medication and therapy allowed more students to go to college. At the same time, she had to increase her own awareness about mental health and wellness so she could be a better advocate for her students. In Mary's program, they assign certain advisors as specialists in certain topics in order to address students' needs. For instance, she specialized in student athletes and underprepared and underrepresented student populations.

In some cases, it is simply not feasible for advising offices to offer specialties, such as in Emma's case. Emma works for a community college without assigned advisors. She advises a broad variety of students. Some students came straight from high school, some were older adults, some were students completing a certificate and some are preparing to apply for bachelor's degree programs. Emma described her first week advising students:

> In that first week, I had a 65-year-old woman who dreamed about becoming a lawyer but didn't even have an undergraduate degree, so there was a discussion about the process for

> that. And then, I had a young man who came in because he was in a halfway house.. and he wanted to know what he could do in terms of going back to college. And then, I had a young woman who came in with her new baby, and she was probably eighteen. And so, in that week alone, I had just something I would never have seen at (my previous four-year college) in five million years.

Emma was ready for a new discussion with each student, providing the best service in every situation.

The knowledge we collect about the different types of students, being aware of their cultural diversity, is not enough. April described a common occurrence she has experienced working with students who are experiencing difficulties for the first time:

> So, for instance, if you have a student that experiences something somewhat devastating in the middle of a semester, like a death of someone close or something like this, you don't know if the best thing for them is to get super-busy or to just completely clear the plate and go curl up in a ball because people have different needs with what they need to do in their coping mechanism. They look very different, and you don't know what it's going to be. But once you know a student for a while, and you've seen, you do start to understand what that often looks like for them, and sometimes they do, too, and that's the best situation, if they know themselves.

Finding Their Voice and Being Creative

April's responsibilities include helping her student advisees through difficult times. April, like many advisors, needs to tap into what works best for that individual student. Ideally, this can be done through the process of identifying and promoting the strengths of her student. Many of the advisors in the study discussed the importance of working with their strengths instead of their weaknesses.

In the honors program she advises for, Betty describes how she defines her work to new advisees. Betty has the good fortune of meeting with students before they apply to her program. They can determine if the program is a good match for them. She tells students to focus on what where their work in the program is going to take them as an individual. She encourages them to not focus on what other students are doing. Michelle, on the other hand, works exclusively with pre-med students. Many of the students she advises change career paths while working with her. Michelle's goal is to make the experience a positive one by encouraging her students to explore a broad variety of fields, either on campus or abroad, so that they can find the field of study that works best for them. In my interview with Mary, explains the two sides of her role as a student advisor:

> That's how I've been explaining to the freshmen. Like, "So, our university has rules and expectations. First, we have to get through those. That's your base level. We just have to make sure that you're fulfilling those requirements… And then the next level, the more fun level, is when we actually talk about why you're here, and what motivates you, and how do you learn best, and all these kind of questions, that the sum of which will get you to where you want to be, long term."

The role of the advisor involves a bit of creativity while supporting a student's strengths. If, as an advisor, we are encouraging our students to stretch themselves, we sometimes also need to go a step further to help serve their needs. Many advisors described experiences that required them to go above and beyond for their students. April shared that she is constantly looking for opportunities on campus for her students. She begins to think about who might benefit from her discoveries. Amelia helps her students transfer to other programs if those programs meet the student's needs better. Emma shared a story of a first-generation college student who met with her after discovering that she had not tested into an introductory English class. The young woman was extremely upset and brought her mother to the appointment. The student could not believe she didn't get into the class. Emma reviewed the test with the student. She helped the student identify the ways that she might be able to enroll in the class. She suggested that the young woman write an essay to send to the department chair requesting an exception. Emma knew the likelihood that the student would be permitted into the course was low. Although helping the student write an essay would be more work for her, her priority was to help this young woman. When I spoke with Mary, she summarized this type of advising in the following way:

> The best advisors I know are also excellent problem solvers, and creative problem solvers. I think that even goes back to the whole flexibility idea. Like, if you want to help a student-- I mean, there are definitely things that are, “Absolutely no,” “Absolutely yes.” “You must do this, you cannot do this.” But coming into it and saying, “Well, maybe there's a way we can figure this out.” And even if the answer is still “no” at the end of the day, making someone feel like you've actually made some sort of effort to at least investigate what the possibilities are goes a long way.

<u>External Influences</u>

Discovering students’ needs is a significant part of the support process. Advisors need to identify triggers that the student experiences that affect his or her decision making. Throughout the interviews, advisors described the many influences that affect students’ decisions. Several advisors (even non-traditional advisors) spoke about helicopter parents who participate in academic advising appointments. Their children often struggle to separate their parents’ plans from their own. In my conversation with Mary, she brought up several external stimuli students deal with: their peers, the media and their parents. The pervasive desire for her students to be perfect is often overwhelming for them. Betty described this feeling as “an impostor syndrome”. Students are sometimes unable to see past a highly edited version of what life is like due to the popularity of social media outlets like Facebook and Instagram. In addition, many international students’ pressures are different from U.S. students. Mary feels it is important for her and her students to be aware of these facts.

April may have described this need best when she said “ I feel like I'm always sort of trying to help people stay focused on what's actually important to them and of value to them, instead of what they feel is imposed upon them by something external. I think that people who stay solid with what their own value system is and their own goals tend to do better.” By helping her students separate their own values from those of others, April is demonstrating an important coaching skill. Just like coaches, advisors need to help their students identify and prioritize their own goals and interests. By doing so, the students are more likely to be happy and successful in their choices.

Choice

In the beginning of this chapter, we discussed several ways in which academic advising and coaching differ. Although advisors are responsible for overseeing some level of rules and regulations with their students, there is still a vast element of choice that the student has in the relationship. From choosing a major, finding a major advisor, applying for internships or a study abroad program, students still have a tremendous amount of freedom in their education. The advisors that I spoke with pride themselves on encouraging this in their students.

This process is not always an easy one. Sometimes, students make decisions that are on in their best interest. April shared how difficult it is to let students make bad decisions:

> Sometimes you see a student making that choice, and you would love to force them not to if you could but you're not the boss of them. I used to lose sleep over that a lot, just be anxious for their situation in anticipation of what I was seeing was going to unfold. But I've learned to let go of that because you have to because there's a lot of it, and you're always going to have people that do that. So, I had to just kind of...and I have to say it out loud to myself sometimes, that you can lead a horse to water, but you can't shove their head under and hold it there to try to make them drink, and that the student has the right to fail.

On the more positive end, it can also be extremely satisfying to see a student take over and succeed. When I was interviewing Mary, I asked her what that experience was like for her and she began to laugh. In her mind, when the student succeeds it is the student who should be proud, not her. She did not feel responsible for their success. She joked that she wasn't the one going to class, or taking the exam - that the student's success was their own. This is similar to how coaches see their relationship with their coachees. Situations arise when a coach may not agree with a choice their client is making. Yet unless the client's choice is dangerous, a coach does often not jump in and tell their client what to do. Coachees often have to learn through their own choices and experiences.

Accessibility

Many advising offices are purposefully located in easily accessible locations to make it easy for students to meet with their advisors. Advisors agreed that it is important to be accessible to their students. Some offices encourage students to walk in at any time to speak with an advisor. Other offices offer students the ability to schedule an appointment with an advisor online.

Elizabeth explained that her office purposefully offers multiple services in one location. Internship and professional development opportunities are available in addition to advising services. This arrangement is more convenient for her students. They always know where they need to go if they have any pressing needs. Because Amelia and Carol work with students all over the U.S., they have learned to use of Skype in the advising appointment. Requiring students to come in to meet is often inconvenient. They were able to serve their students with these modifications.

Several years ago, Sue's university changed their advising structure. In the past, students were assigned an advisor at one of the many campuses. If a student was taking a class at one campus, they may need to travel back to another campus to receive advising. Now, students can meet with any advisor on any campus. Paula describes how this has simplified things for her students:

> When the student comes in, and let's say they have a question-- They're a first year student, and they have a question about their registration and issues related to first year. The philosophy is, "Do not send that student over to the other campus because that's where the specialization is. We don't want our students to be inconvenienced by jumping on buses to go over there. And if we don't have the answer, then we call over there, find the right answer, and then provide it to the student."

In addition, each office has a dean is always on site to meet with students. She calls the advising office an "academic emergency room". Students can walk in and whatever their issue may be, they will work to resolve it, even if the issue requires a dean's involvement. Accessibility is also an important element of coaching. Although coaches are not expected to be available at all hours of the day, they do their best to make it convenient for their clients to meet with them or reach them between appointments.

<u>Ending, Losing and Letting Go</u>

When I brought up the subject of change in my interviews, many advisors were very familiar with the topic. Whether it is a student transitioning into a college, selecting a major or applying for graduation, advisors are commonly in demand when a change is taking place.

Bridges' transitions model (ending, losing or letting go, the neutral zone and the new beginning) (Brennan & Wildflower, 2011) outlines the emotional side effects of change and how advisors can help support students through these stages. For this section, we will use Bridges' transitions model (ending, losing or letting go, the neutral zone and the new beginning). (Brennan & Wildflower, 2011).

To help students with the transition into college, Elizabeth's team created a credit course for students in their first semester led by their academic advisor. In this course, the advisor reviews the resources of the university as well as the expectations of the student. Elizabeth shared that the students at her school are generally gifted students who were able to succeed in high school without a great deal of work. The course is designed to help those students prepare for the additional pressures and expectations that come with a college education. The course (and the work of her advisors) appears to work as they has a 94% retention rate.

Carol shared that she is continuously assesses students' status in change process:

> I think coming in I spend more time, honestly, than going out. Coming in, it's really looking at their history. You know, what have they experienced before. Are they coming in with transfer credits? Were they successful before? You know, trying to get a feel for who they were. And when we have a conversation, it's finding out who they are now. You know, "What's changed, what do they want, why do they want it?" You know, just trying to understand them better.

Working with engineering students at an Ivy League university, Jennifer is constantly assessing her students' statuses. When things are stressful, she must think quickly:

> Like, they're like, "Oh, my God. I can't take this class. Life is over!" And I think, "Well, no, no, no. You know, there are options." And then teach them about flexibility. You know, "Don't think about this in black and white," as we learned, and point thinking. "Don't think about this in black and white. These are options. Let's think of this as a continuum rather than this is your only option, 'If you didn't complete it, that's it.'"

G.R.O.W.

Once the advisor identifies the change, the next step is to help that student work through implementing the change. For undergraduate students who are facing more school work than they are used to the question is "How do they want to manage their time?" If an advisor is working with an advisee who wants to change majors - what will the plan look like? All of these issues can be addressed in the advising appointment. The G.R.O.W. model can serve students well in this meeting. Helping the student pinpoint his or her goal is the beginning.

Carol helps students identify these goals with questions. She explains: "And when we have a conversation, it's finding out who they are now. You know, 'What's changed? What do they want? Why do they want it?' You know, just trying to understand them better." She then transitions the discussion to the reality of their situations and identifying options.

> You know, I'm just trying to help them have realistic expectations of how long it's going to take, making sure that they've done the assessments, making sure they know themselves what's a good style for them, and just monitoring them. Keeping in touch, seeing how things are going, trying to find out if there's some intervention, you know, maybe tutoring or something, that we need to help them with.

Sue had a similar style to helping her students make a decision, and that often included honesty:

> And I advise students, when they have 110 credits, and they hate economics, "Can I switch now?" I said, "You can, but is that a wise thing for you to do? Do you know how much money it's going to cost, and time, for you to get a different undergraduate major? Wouldn't it be best just to finish economics? As much as the fact you don't really like it, but you're too close not to finish it. And then, perhaps, think about adding something else later. Getting a job, start paying back some of your loans. Maybe going for a master's degree in a slightly different area. You have to think about all these options." And we have a career services office that we'll refer to, and-- You know, I think I'm trying to be, as an advisor, to be factual. When they ask my opinion, I give it. I probably give it more than they ask. But, I try to say, "In my experience, this is what I find." And many people-- I also use myself as an illustration. I said, "When I went to school, I thought business was the right place for me to be, and I never thought of ever doing anything other than working in a business environment." I said, "Well, time moved on and I realized it wasn't about the business. It was about people, that I was interested in. And that's why I phased into social work, and this career. And this is my third career, and the best career I ever had, because I wasn't able, at age 22, to decide what would be the best career for me. You don't have enough life experience to know that."

No Longer Needing the Advisor

The more experienced advisors spoke about how all of this work leads to one goal - to help students discover and achieve their objectives and no longer be dependent on their academic advisor. The advisors that I spoke with had a variety of ways to describe this. When asked about the ideal advising relationship Carol said, "for me, the ideal one is where they start out maybe not knowing a lot, and we build, and in a couple semesters they understand it and they start to take over. To me, that's a successful advising situation." When I asked how she prefers to advise, Emma responded, “I still do what I do best, and that is I want to empower the student to not need me, that's sort of how I approach that.” In terms of choice, Mary made her feelings clear - her students’ successes and failures were their own. She was there to support them.

This correlates with the process of disengagement in coaching. Similar to advisees, coachees reach a point where they are ready to manage things themselves. Either they have reached the goal that they set for themselves or have identified how they will get there. In these moments, the coach and coachee can take a short break, or conclude their relationship. Jenny Rogers encourages coaches to celebrate these moments, while never closing the door completely with their coachees. There should always be an invitation for the coachee to return if need be. Rogers explains:

> I rarely regard a coaching relationship as truly over. Clients frequently return when they have new jobs or challenges, or e-mail me with their news sometimes years after the coaching has finished. However, I do like to mark the final session of any one stage with a review. In this review I will ask clients to think back to the issues they initially presented and to look at what has changed, including any feedback that they have solicited from colleagues. I will also ask for their feedback on the coaching process and on me. (Rogers, 2012, p. 279)

CHAPTER 6

COACHING MODEL FOR ACADEMIC ADVISING

After organizing the interview data in chapter five and identifying themes through coding in chapter six I developed a coaching model for academic advisors. This model includes a visual tool to share key coaching techniques with advisors to help them improve their work and relationships with their advisees. The model is formatted in the shape of a ladder. The Advising Ladder has four rungs, each rung serving to support the one above it. The model is as follows:

<u>Rung One: "You're OK and I'm OK"</u>

The first rung serves as a foundation for the academic advising relationship. It is centered around Berne's theory of Transactional Analysis. Without this foundation, the advisor and advisee will struggle to progress past a prescriptive dynamic. If an advisor hopes to help their students develop and grow, they will need to work on mastering these techniques.

There are several elements in the first rung. The first is to ensure a warm and welcoming environment. There are many ways to do this. One of the advisors I met with brought in a cushioned chair for her advisees to sit on. She also laid out rugs to make her office warmer and displayed pictures of her and her students in the room. Once the advisee has come to the office, advisors should silence their office and personal phones and their e-mail pop ups. It is important the advisor does not check their computer for any of these distractions can make an advisee feel unwelcome.

During the advisor's conversation with the advisee, it is imperative that he or she resist the urge to jump in with a yes or no answer. Advisors should make it a daily practice to use Schein's humble inquiry with their students. Open-ended, curious questions are important for a good dialogue. Advisees can sense disinterest or negativity from their advisors. These projections can inhibit the student's trust in the advisor and slow or deter with the process.

When an advisor makes it clear to the student that they have heard what the student said and know what the student should do early in the discussion, this limits the relationship. In our interview, Carol described a scenario where she heard the same thing from her advisees forty-five times a day and explained how she manages to still be curious with her advisees. She viewed the situation from the perspective of the advisees. Although she had heard the request many times, this was the first time that particular student had asked. Making this perspective shift multiplies the advisor's value to the student.

A final essential element of this rung is to be accessible to your students. Some advisors allow their students to walk in at any time. Other advisors pride themselves on being very responsive to phone calls or e-mails. No matter what tools advisors use, students need to feel that their advisors are welcoming and available.

Rung Two: Voice and Strengths

It is possible to begin serving the advisee when the setting is comfortable for him or her. Students need help identifying and growing their voice and strengths so they can make decisions.

The role of process consultant is helpful for this rung (Schein, 2009, p. 54). Instead of telling clients what they should do, the process consultant supports the client's own decision making. The process consultant listens and gains insight on the client's core beliefs and helps him or her build their knowledge. The practice of humble inquiry can help the advisor with this process.

Rogers' comparison of the coach-coachee relationship to that of a doctor-patient or mentor-mentee relationship is also useful (Rogers, 2012, p. 12-17). As a coach, an advisor views his or herself as a partner and colleague to the advisee instead of a superior and wiser person who tells them what to do and controls the process. By viewing the student in a similar way, the advisor helps empower their students to lead themselves.

Many people can affect the way a student makes decisions. Students are continuously told what they should and should not do by others. This can be unintentional. These influences include parents, family members, friends, the media and even social media, as mentioned in chapter five. Advisors have a responsibility to help their advisees dissect and examine these influences to gain a better understanding of their goals. This will help the student separate their goals from those of others. This process can take a great deal of time and effort. The results are critically important to the student. Without being able to identify their own desires in comparison to those others have for them, students are highly unlikely to find success.

Despite all of this support, it is possible that some advisees will make decisions that the advisor believes are not in his or her best interest. It is often best to allow the advisee to make less than ideal choices so that they can learn from them, unless the decision is dangerous. In his book, *The Mindful Coach* Silsbee describes this as “accept(ing) the client as he is.” (Silsbee, 2010, p.197)

Rung Three: Change

Many of the advisors I interviewed who participated in this study worked with students from two to four years. Traditional students often experience the transition from high school to college. Non-traditional students transition from the working world to returning to school. It is important for the advisor to realize the state of the advisee in order to help them make their transition. If an advisor has established a strong foundation with his or her advisee, the advisee feels safe and supported and can identify goals and needs. The student will be well equipped to tackle new things.

Two coaching theories focused on change and transition serve as excellent models in the advising world. The first is the G.R.O.W. model (Goal, Reality, Options, Wrap-Up). This model can help the advisor and advisee discuss goals, develop a plan to achieve them and establish a way forward. The G.R.O.W. model helps the advisee remain in the driver’s seat. It gives the advisor the ability to help the student hone in on their needs and plans for action. Using the G.R.O.W. model can help unpack any external influences or unrealistic expectations and increase the likelihood that the student succeeds.

Once a student has begun to experience change, Bridges Transition Process provides an excellent model for advisors. They can help support their students through change. The stages of change: the neutral zone and the new beginning are often ignored during the change process. The advisor should be knowledgeable enough about these transitions to help the advisee understand and welcome what comes with change. Although not all transitions are positive, advisees can learn from them when the advisor walks them through the change and helps them identify with the transition process.

Michelle often works with students experiencing transitions. Many of her pre-med advisees determine that they are going to have to pursue a field other than medicine while an undergrad. Even after a student decides on a new field, Michelle's work is far from over. The period after deciding on a new path often comes with it's own complexities and Michelle is there to support her students through that process.

Rung Four: No Longer Needing the Advisor

When I asked the most experienced academic advisors about their goals, I was surprised to hear their most important goal was to have their advisees no longer need them. The more I met with advisors and read about the process the more this made sense to me. An advisor or a coach should strive to support students to be the strongest and most competent they can be. In some cases, this independence will make the advisor less valuable to the student. This can be a good thing. Taking a break does not mean that the student will not return to the advisor when a new challenge or goal arises, but it does mean that the student, for a period of time, has the tools he or she needs to take charge of the academic work. Mary describes this final rung better than anyone. When I asked her how it felt to have her student succeed, she paused and looked confused saying, “I want to empower the student not to need me”.

Much like coaches, part of the advisor’s role is to help students navigate this disengagement. In the final advising session before a break, the advisor should discuss next steps with their students. It is important to confirm the plan the advisee has, including what they plan to accomplish on their own. The student may meet some challenges along the way; therefore, it is valuable to talk about how they will navigate these issues. The end of an advising relationship is a change in itself. Previous skills obtained in the Advising Ladder can again be useful in this rung. The process of independence involves many of Bridges’ steps. An open discussion of the process with the advisee is an important step in the process. This independence is a new beginning. Advisors may remind students that they will still be available to them. They might tell their students that they are encouraged to stop by, e-mail or call at any time. Just because their work may have concluded for this period, the advisor will always be available to the student, even, on occasion after they graduate. This final advising appointment is a good time to ask the student about their experience working with you. Moments of honest, open evaluation can be extremely valuable to the advisor’s practice. After concluding the advising relationship, either for a period of time or long term, it is a thoughtful gesture for the advisor to stay in touch with the student. E-mailing them a few months later to check in is a kind and compassionate thing to do. It also brings the advising cycle full circle for the advisor. Oftentimes advisors do not know the end of the story.

Moving Within the Rungs

It is important to recognize that although each rung builds upon the other one, the Advising Ladder is not a completely linear path. In fact, it will be rare that students move directly from rungs one through four. Most students will instead move backwards and forwards on these rungs during their time as a student. Some many never reach the final rung. Alternatively, there will be advisees who work with their advisors through the process and need to come back when a new challenge arises. This is why in the ladder design there is a net behind the ladder.

CHAPTER 7

CONCLUSION

The goal of this paper was to both broaden my knowledge of coaching and academic advising and to explore whether or not their connection had value to the advisor and/or advisee. To that purpose, I feel that this research was a success. Throughout the process of reading literature and conducting interviews, the value of coaching in academic advising became apparent. Advisors would often describe methods that mirrored coaching and these moments reinforced my theory that implementing coaching techniques proves to be a vital component in a successful and rewarding advisor/advisee relationship.

My hope is that this research and my model will be useful to academic advisors. I hope to present this model at academic advising and higher education administration conferences in the future. Through research, I developed an advisor / coaching model, the Advisement Ladder seen in chapter six, that can be implemented into already existing advising practices and prove highly beneficial. I believe this model will be helpful to others.

Nonetheless, there is room for further research. The next step would be to put the Advisement Ladder into practice. A study could be implemented in academic advising offices from diverse programs like those included in this study. In each office, select academic advisors could incorporate this model into their day-to-day work. A researcher could track the success of the model through interviews and surveys. Many schools already send surveys to students after academic advising sessions. One could easily design and distribute custom surveys for students after their initial meeting with their advisor, as well as follow-ups throughout the months that follow. The surveys would help the researcher determine if the techniques in the model improve the advisor / advisee relationship and most importantly, whether or not the advisee is more enlightened and capable when making decisions for themselves. The researcher would also be expected to interview the academic advisors throughout this process.

Based on the results of this study, it would then be possible to improve upon the Advising Ladder model. I believe that these findings could be valuable to not only for academic advisors, but other professionals in education. The first group that may find this research useful are faculty advisors. Many faculty advisors lack training in advising, and this model could offer some techniques to get them started. The practice of peer-to-peer advising is gaining popularity at many U.S. institutions and although I did not interview any peer advisors for this paper, it is my belief that these techniques could also be helpful to them. Lastly, the Advisement Ladder could be shared with high-school advisors, who I feel engage in some of the same topics undergraduate advisors do. Conversely, within the administrative functions of higher education, two groups stand out as not being well served by this model. The first group is psychological counselors. As stated in chapter two, psychologists and psychiatrists roles differ from that of a coach. Because their goal is to treat a patient, and often to identify an ailment, the ladder model will not serve them well. The second group is student financial services officers. These staff members have an important job of getting across important data, and they would be limited in how much creativity they could encourage in their students.

Overall, the experience of conducting this research was a process of learning and growth. I look forward to sharing this paper with others and receiving their feedback.

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