Special Feature: On Mentoring – *peer-reviewed*
Edited by David Stark
https://doi.org/10.6092/issn.1971-8853/21145

Sociologica. V.18 N.3 (2024)
ISSN 1971-8853
https://sociologica.unibo.it/

Passing It On

Walter W. Powell*

Graduate School of Education, Stanford University (United States)

Submitted: January 20, 2025 – Accepted: January 21, 2025 – Published: January 22, 2025

Abstract

This essay reflects on experiences with extraordinary mentors and decades of experience as a mentor. Mentorship is not about imparting knowledge top-down, but about creating an environment where people feel comfortable to ask hard questions and learning flows in multiple directions.

Keywords: On mentoring; On being mentored; trust.

* woodyp@stanford.edu

I use this essay to reflect on my experiences, both as a mentee and a mentor, and to share ideas about the reciprocal nature of mentorship — the way it can foster mutual growth and respect. I was fortunate to have a variety of mentors early in my career and equally fortunate to have guided dozens of doctoral students in strong, shared experiences. I claim these students as mine; whether they claim me is a question you would have to ask them. Over time, I have come to see mentorship as a two-way relationship in which both parties learn and grow.

These reflections are organized chronologically, in a truncated fashion, for narrative convenience. I am sure a more intricate rumination would highlight something I learned from a mentor and how those insights shaped my interactions with graduate students. I often find myself reminded of my professors when I am meeting with my students — as if Charles Perrow is sitting on my shoulder. Suffice to say, chronology is a convenience, and memories are selective. Ultimately, mentorship is a process of illuminating and embodying the personal and intellectual values that you hope a receptive person will embrace. And that is a continual process.

I began graduate school in the fall of 1972 at Stony Brook, New York. Having grown up in North Carolina and Florida, and lived in California before arriving in New York, my wife Marianne and I mistakenly thought we were moving to an urban setting. Instead, we found ourselves in suburban Long Island. I was taking a course in sociological theory from Lewis Coser when a letter arrived, forwarded multiple times, from a UC school I had very much wanted to attend, asking why I had not responded to their acceptance. Somehow, in our travels, I had missed the letter. As a result of the cross-country move, my wife and I were broke, and could not change our decision. This letter brought great sadness.

Coser, an intellectual giant with an urbane European presence, intimidated most students. He was a handsome man, always impeccably dressed, a chain smoker who spoke quickly, still retaining the German accent of his birth. Despite his imposing demeanor, somehow, he noticed my gloomy mood that day and spoke to me after class. I had written one paper for him, which he liked, so I confided in him and told him about this distressing news. He reassured me, saying "Don't worry, we will make Stony Brook a place you will come to enjoy. And, who knows, maybe you'll have a job in California one day." Then, to my surprise, he shared his own story — how he perilously escaped Vichy France, made his way to the U.S. on a ship from Portugal in 1943, and ended up at Columbia University, pursuing a second PhD, this time in sociology because it offered modest funding available. An accidental career trajectory, to be sure.[1] His story distracted me from my small troubles and laid the foundation for a lifelong relationship.

That first year was a period of getting to know one another. He shared his books and journals with me, marking articles in the *American Journal of Sociology* with plus signs if he liked them and negative signs if he didn't. If he really liked an article, he would write what he called a "little love letter" to the author, whether he knew them or not. He did the same for the book reviews. He wrote numerous book reviews himself, always banging them out on his old Olivetti typewriter within a day of the book arriving at his office. There were two sides to him, the intense academic and the engaged intellectual. He also edited and wrote for *Dissent* magazine, which he co-founded with Irving Howe in the early 1950s. He shared submissions and issues with me, knowing that in college I had been part of a collective that created an underground newspaper that had some modest national attention. Despite our old left/new left differences, we bonded over writing and editing. I admired his work habits — his strong sense of responsibility, his multiple commitments, and passion for having a well-formed opinion.

At the end of that first school year, he told me he was heading to Wellfleet on Cape Cod

1. See his "A Sociologist's Atypical Life" (1993, *Annual Review of Sociology*, 19, 1–16), for his story.

where they spent their summers. He said if I was in the area to come visit. I wasn't sure what that meant, or even had a clue about Wellfleet or Cape Cod. One weekend in midsummer, Marianne and I, on a trip to Cambridge to rummage through used bookstores, gathered the courage to go to a pay phone and call the Cosers. Expecting we might be invited to have a drink and leave, we instead stayed for a dinner party where they had invited other guests and then spent the night. That night stretched into a week. Their home was a modest cabin on a pond, and Lew spent his time reading in the sun and swimming. Rose Laub Coser split her time between work, gardening, and cooking. They balanced work and relaxation beautifully, and somehow, Marianne and I weren't in their way. Fortunately, we had stocked up on books in Cambridge. This was before computers, the internet, or even a television in the cabin — conversation was all we had. And it flowed. We were treated to good food (which we helped cook), wine, and my first whiskey. We stayed up late, rose early, and talked. That summer was the first of fourteen consecutive ones we spent with them.

Our relationship evolved in unexpected ways. In the summer of 1974, a tiny television set was acquired, so we could watch the Nixon impeachment hearings. I still recall listening to Lew reflect on "regicide", and what the wider implications of taking down a president might be. Two summers later, we sat in our car, at the Wellfleet drive-in, and watched *All the President's Men* (Pakula, 1976). We talked about politics constantly, but our conversations were always mingled with both Rose and Lew's reflections on Europe between the wars. Coser was also an avid reader of novels and, over the years, he would read new works of fiction and pass them to me, and then we would talk about them over a bottle of wine. When I see books like *Mr. Sammler's Planet* (1970) and *Humboldt's Gift* (1975) by Saul Bellow, *The Book of Laughter and Forgetting* (1981[1978]), by Milan Kundera, Marilyn French's *The Women's Room* (suggested, no demanded we read by Rose Coser), *A Bend in the River* (1979) by V.S. Naipaul, and Garcia Marquez's *Autumn of the Patriarch* (1976[1975]) on my shelves now, they make me smile with remembrance. Lew and I developed a ritual of driving into Manhattan to Sokolin wine store where he would buy a case of wine and I would buy a single bottle from the case, thus beginning my education about wine. We house sat for them, and when Lew found himself alone while Rose was traveling, he would call and ask if we would "professor sit". To say he became a father figure to me would be an understatement.

In my second year, I began an enduring relationship with another faculty member, Charles (Chick) Perrow. He had been on leave in England during my first year, and while he and Coser admired each other, they weren't particularly close — perhaps allowing me to have two mentors simultaneously. Perrow came from a hardscrabble existence in Tacoma, Washington, a youngster who somehow found his way to Black Mountain College in North Carolina, then Reed College and eventually Berkeley where he did his senior year and stayed on through graduate school.[2] He had different passions — trout fishing, woodworking, and above all tennis. I probably learned more from him on the tennis court than the classroom.

Working with the two of them shaped my intellectual trajectory. I began working on a big research project with Coser on the transformation of American book publishing. I spent most my time in Manhattan, interviewing editors and publishers about the changes underway in book publishing as it transformed from a gentleman's profession to a corporate enterprise. Together, we poured through *Publisher's Weekly* to keep track of the industry and read *The Times Book Review* and *New York Review of Books* to try to discern which houses were most adept at landing reviews of their books. Coser's ideas were very much steeped in the sociology

2. See his autobiography published on the Berkeley Sociology Alumni In Memorium website: https://sociology.berkeley.edu/charles-perrow-1953

of knowledge and cultural sociology, wherein people's biographies would condition how they would experience these corporate changes. But Perrow emphasized the organizational aspects, suggesting that the way these houses had previously been organized and what they were altered into would profoundly influence decision-making processes. And it turned out he was right.

Perrow helped me get an academic job after Stony Brook at the newly formed Yale School of Management, where I was partly in the school and in sociology. (Unable to find academic work, I briefly flirted with becoming a book editor at Basic Books, so Perrow saved my scholarly career.) Then, a few years after I arrived, Yale had a senior opening in sociology, and the junior faculty organized to make the case for Perrow and he was hired. Our relationship grew even closer. We would often spend weekends with him and his wife Edith at their home, nestled in the woods in Hillsdale, New York, where we spent our time fishing, playing tennis and going to hear chamber music at the Norfolk music festival. Their home was simple and sturdy, designed to survive extremely cold winters. Chick had pretty much built the place by himself.

The two settings were different as could be, but both revealed the interplay of private and public selves. The Cosers loved entertaining; there was a stream of visitors and illustrious guests for dinners. Conversation was lively and not intimidating, but the guests surely found it a little odd that these graduate students were hanging out with the Cosers. Weekends with the Perrows was different; it was usually just the four of us and conversations often went deep. Chick's wife Edith was a psychiatrist, so that was partly responsible, but the solitude of the place added to the atmosphere. I learned different lessons from both families, especially how to hold an opinion without imposing it or being strident. The give-and-take of conversations in both settings was immensely stimulating. Both men listened and gave me confidence. They had different opinions about my work and career and expressed criticism in a way that didn't stifle or impose their prescriptions on me. It may seem trite, but both excelled in very different ways at helping me discover my own tune to dance to.

At Yale, I developed a different set of relationships with senior faculty, nearly all outside my discipline. In retrospect, I see now that it was easier to have external ties than within my own field of sociology. At that time, Yale was a place where junior faculty were meant to be seen, but not heard. I found the place incredibly curious and unfamiliar. Having only been to public schools, what Chick Perrow proudly called "crabgrass universities", encountering the traditions and wealth of Yale was unsettling. Several people helped me adjust and find my bearings.

Geoffrey Hazard, a stately presence in legal ethics, and an associate dean in both the Law School and the School of Management, was one of my guides. During my very first semester, he invited me to a dinner meeting with representatives of General Motors and the United Auto Workers Union. I had no idea what to expect, but as we walked over to the law school, Geoffrey turned to me and said, "Don't be nervous — these guys put their pants on one leg at a time this morning, just like you did". The dinner was a behind-the-scenes negotiating session over a new labor contract, an especially crucial discussion as this was still the era in which one firm set the lead labor contract for the entire auto industry. And the industry was about to go through wrenching changes. Watching Geoff orchestrate the conversation, so that both parties were heard despite their considerable differences, was revelatory.

That same semester, I was teaching my first undergraduate organizations course, using Jeffrey Pfeffer and Gerald Salancik's *External Control of Organizations* (1978) as a text. One chapter discusses the military industrial complex and the extent to which arms manufacturers exert influence over Congress, using Colt Industries as one example. In my next class, I noticed an elderly gentleman sitting in the back of my classroom. I assumed a student had brought their grandfather along, but I soon discovered he was a member of the Colt family. He came to argue.

Drawing on what I learned from Geof Hazard, I let him make his case and, rather than try to rebut him directly, invited my students to comment. Their range of responses was fascinating, and left Mr. Colt flabbergasted. I then wove the different perspectives into a broader discussion, creating a teachable moment I would have been incapable of without Geoffrey's example.

I had a pre-existing tie with Rosabeth Moss Kanter, whom I first met during graduate school when Lew Coser arranged an introduction. I was working on a master's thesis comparing 19th and 20th century American communes. I drove up to Cambridge, when Rosabeth taught at Brandeis, and she shared the data from her dissertation on 19th century communes. She subsequently moved to Yale, and I looked her up upon my arrival. We were linked in another way as our teaching was part of a trade. I taught the graduate sociological theory seminar in the sociology department, and she led a course on managing organizational change for master's students in the School of Management. I also taught an organization theory seminar that included PhD students from both departments. As I worked on early drafts of *The Culture and Commerce of Publishing*, a book I did with Lew Coser and Charles Kadushin (1982), I shared them with Rosabeth. Having recently published her *Men and Women of the Corporation*, a groundbreaking crossover scholarly book, she offered invaluable comments on how to broaden our book's audience, reading these drafts as she traveled between New Haven and her home in Cambridge.

The faculty member who initially hired me at Yale left at the end of my first year, leaving with me without an "official" advisor. I ended up with Richard Hackman, a social psychologist who studied groups and the design of work, as my advisor. We were intellectually different, and our personalities more so. In private, I found Richard reserved, even shy; in the classroom, he was electrifying. It was decided I would co-teach with him, as an introduction to the curriculum that proved anything but gentle. Richard stood 6' 5", and as he started teaching, he would loosen his tie, remove his sport coat, and — on occasion — his shoes. Sometimes he even leapt up on chairs. Running around the room like a whirling dervish, he cut quite a figure. He was a brilliant teacher and I quickly realized I was a poor second fiddle with much to learn. I watched and absorbed. He rarely responded directly to student comments, instead encouraging others to react. He usually waited until there were four or five comments before weighing in. He never provided a "right" answer. Whenever a student made an unpopular but thoughtful remark, he would quietly walk over and stand beside that student — a subtle move, but a strong display of solidarity.

The following year, I taught my own course, New Directions in Human Resource Management, which was, in essence, a course about building organizational culture. It was a new elective, yet it attracted about 45 students, the majority of whom were women. By week five, I was called to the dean's office and informed there had been multiple complaints — male students were objecting that they weren't being heard and felt ignored. Stunned, I went to see Richard. As we talked, we both came to the realization this was likely the first time these male students had ever been in the minority. The shoe was on the other foot. Richard encouraged me to use this as a learning opportunity. With some trepidation, I started the next class with the complaints, and we explored what it meant to be consistently outnumbered. The discussion was transformative, and the class went on to be a success.

My most unexpected mentor was Martin Shubik, a prodigious mathematical economist, who intimidated almost everyone. We were worlds apart intellectually and politically, yet he and his wife were the only senior faculty in the School of Management who invited us their home for dinner. We were nervous the first time, wondering if we were on the menu. We were the only faculty guests, the others were Martin's friends from Wall Street, where he had a thriving

investment practice. After they departed early for their Fairfield County estates, we too moved to leave, but were asked to stay. Over the course of many dinners, we learned that Martin was something of an émigré too and knew Rose Laub Coser from various meetings. Born in New York, he raised in London, he was evacuated to Canada with his mother and sister during World War II when the bombing began. A leading game theorist, Martin studied and wrote with some of the greatest minds of the 20th century. For reasons I never fully understood, he decided to teach me game theory — using our fractious faculty meetings as cases. After particularly confounding school of management faculty meetings, Martin would invite me to his office for a drink and debrief. He analyzed our meetings through the lens of game theory, revealing the strategic calculations behind each move for new hires or initiatives. Over time, I realized that Martin was often the most effective player in the room. While others were playing checkers, he was playing three level chess. From Martin, I saw university politics and administration in a very different light.

These relationships — some cultivated, some unexpectedly discovered — shaped my understanding of mentorship. They taught me that mentorship is not about hierarchy or discipline, but about the exchange of ideas, the ability to listen, and the willingness to learn from those who approach problems differently. At Yale, where I might have quickly floundered, these mentors helped me find my footing and, in the process, shaped the mentor I would become.

My next academic job was at the University of Arizona, where my wife and I moved as faculty after a year and a half at Stanford. She completed a postdoc at Stanford Medical School before joining the faculty at the Arizona Cancer Center, while I spent a fulfilling year and a half at the Center for Advanced Study in the Behavioral Sciences. During this time, I shifted my empirical focus from publishing and cultural organizations to the emergence of a new science-based industry, biotechnology. Now tenured, I had my own students for the first time, and persuaded several to join me in studying how this burgeoning field was recasting university science and university-industry relations. Drawing from my wife's experiences in different biology labs in her career, I adapted practices from her work environments to create a novel lab structure in the Sociology department.

I knew that studying this transformation required a collaborative effort. Universities were attempting to commercialize their ideas, federal science policy was evolving, and female university-trained scientists were making inroads into private biotechnology. My primary interest lay in the organizational networks forming between startup companies and universities, as well as the novel financing mechanisms that scientists and young companies were attracting from the nascent capital industry. To tackle these issues, I recruited Peter Brantley in sociology and Ken Koput, an assistant professor in organizational behavior, to analyze the dynamics of these networks. Meanwhile, Laurel Smith-Doerr was interested in these new career paths, and Jason Owen Smith focused on technology transfer and university finance. Our work overlapped significantly, and our discussions during frequent hikes in the mountains and over meals, helped us refine or ideas. Our work was organic; I certainly didn't have all the answers, and we thrived by learning from one another.

In fact, Jason's master thesis proved to be a big inspiration. He studied a neuroscience lab at Arizona led by the esteemed John Hildebrand, a polymath who combined anatomical, behavioral, chemical, and neurophysiological methods to understand insect nervous systems. His "H lab" study, later featured in Jason's 2001 *American Sociological Review* article, exemplified how a large, interdisciplinary lab could foster both skepticism and support among scientists at different career stages. With funding from my first NSF grant, we tried something similar on a smaller scale, where our different projects would inform one another, and we would all profit

from the diverse ideas we were pursuing. We also committed to building a shared database tracking the evolution of collaborative relationships in biotechnology, a resource we could all share.

This was a halcyon time at the University of Arizona. After his wife Edith passed away, Chick Perrow spent winter with us to enjoy the desert sun. He returned in subsequent years and became like a grandfather to our young son. Doug McAdam, who had also studied with Perrow at Stony Brook, had a strong intellectual bond with Mayer Zald at the University of Michigan. He persuaded Mayer to visit Arizona, where Zald and Perrow built a close relationship. Both men occasionally joined our lab meetings, adding their wisdom. Meanwhile the department was hiring terrific junior faculty — Elisabeth Clemens, Sarah Soule, Marc Schneiberg, to name just a few. I soon realized my role extended beyond mentoring students; it was my responsibility to be an advisor to these young faculty as well.

In Fall 1998, I received a phone call from James March at Stanford with an unexpected question: Would I consider coming to Stanford and taking his job? Getting a call from Jim March was like getting a call from Johnny Cash, and I was gob smacked. Arizona's declining public funding had already led us to consider other options, but a chance to return to Stanford was particularly enticing, as it offered a prime setting to study the commercialization of science. Once I arrived, I eagerly set about doing just that. I had also hoped to learn directly from Jim March. To my surprise, he essentially handed me the keys to the Scandinavian Consortium for Organizational Research and wished me luck, staying away almost entirely that first year. In hindsight, I realize he was giving me space to create the environment that I wanted. In the ensuing years, I would get many opportunities to learn from Jim.

In my second year, Jim organized a Monday lunch group, the Monday munch, which drew some notable economic historians, including Nathan Rosenberg, and Gavin Wright, and during his winter visits, Douglas North, as well as Scandinavian scholars, and unconventional graduate students from around the university. Jim was the gravitational force; his relentless curiosity and openness set the tone for the seminar. He had an uncanny ability to find something interesting in everyone's work, no matter if the quality was exceptional or the ideas muddled. He elevated the work of others, a quality I aspired to emulate.

Now with ample resources, I was able to establish a sociology of science lab. Jason Owen Smith joined me after completing his PhD at Arizona, and soon sociology students including Kjersten Bunker Whittington, James Evans, and Kaisa Snellman joined the lab. Andrew Nelson, from Management Science, was studying how the music department at Stanford had unexpectedly become a hub for commercial innovations like the Yamaha player piano. Kelly Packalen and Stine Grodal, also from Management Science, joined, as did Caroline Simard from Communication, who wanted to study how San Diego evolved from a tourist town into a high-tech cluster. Jeannette Colyvas, in Education, studied faculty members who became entrepreneurs and those who resisted the lure. We met Friday afternoons for several hours to brainstorm ideas and share preliminary draft papers. Over time, those drafts turned into journal articles, and people started practicing their job talks. We became a cohesive community where ideas could grow, challenges were met with support, and curiosity flourished.

A few years in, some new students wondered why we didn't turn the lab into a credit-bearing endeavor. Initially, I resisted, wary of transforming something voluntary into something instrumental. Eventually, I relented as students convinced me it would help them to have this formalization. We obtained a course number and rebranded the Friday afternoon lab as the Networks and Organizations Workshop. Several faculty — Steve Barley for a time and now Arvind Karunakaran have joined me in guiding the workshop. For a spell of years,

when he visited at Stanford, Chick Perrow was also a regular. Now, two decades later, the workshop continues to thrive, with an extraordinary array of students participating, many remaining throughout their entire graduate careers.

The norms of the workshop have stayed constant. I do not care who is the smartest person in the room. What matters to me is progress — seeing individuals grow over time. We discourage criticism for the sake of criticism. The strongest rule remains: if you break it, you must fix it. The workshop is rigorous, with high expectations. Everyone reads the materials beforehand and is expected to engage. Criticism must be constructive, aimed at strengthening ideas rather than tearing them apart.

Few things give me greater satisfaction than seeing papers that originated in the workshop go on to be published in leading journals. In recent years, Christof Brandtner, James Chu, Aaron Horvath, Kata Mueller-Gastell, Krystal Laryea, Madeleine Rauch, Hatim Rahman, and Dan Wang have all published work in top journals that began as discussions in our workshop. In many ways, the ethos of the workshop is an indissoluble mix of lessons I learned from Perrow, Hackman, and March. My approach to mentoring students is deeply influenced by Coser and Perrow, as well as, in different ways, Geoffrey Hazard and Martin Shubik.

In the spring of 2015, Bob Gibbons (MIT Sloan School and Economics) and I met for lunch at the Center for Advanced Study in the Behavioral Sciences (CASBS). Having shared many friendly exchanges over the years, this time we met with a more intentional purpose. Our conversation unearthed both excitement and frustration about the study of organizations: we saw how different social sciences were developing their own theories and techniques at increasing depth, but rarely conversing with each other. Likewise, scholars in professional schools were studying their respective types of organizations in new ways, but seldom integrating insights from other schools and social sciences.

The lunch also reminded us of our deep affection for CASBS, where both of us had been fellows twice and previously run summer institutes. CASBS had played a formative role in the early study of organizations, hosting luminaries like Kenneth Arrow, Robert Dahl, Robert Merton, Philip Selznick, Herbert Simon, Oliver Williamson, and Harrison White as fellows. For both of us, the legacy of Jim March loomed large. Our lunch prompted the question: Could we use CASBS to create a new generation of organization scholars — deep in their own discipline or method yet knowledgeable about other disciplines and domains and attuned to ways that improving organizational effectiveness could benefit the world? Or, as I later put it, "Could we build the department we will never have?"

Since then, we have hosted six summer institutes (2016–2019, 2023 and 2024), with planning for 2025 underway. We have also organized multiple convocations to create cross-cohort integration and virtual programs during the pandemic. To date, we have approximately 90 alumni. From the outset, our goal has been to advance the academic study of organizations (and organized activities more generally), fueled by cross-disciplinary conversations, collegial support, and possible research and writing collaborations.

We developed several guiding principles for the selection of participants: We sought highly promising young faculty from the core social science disciplines — economics, political science, and sociology — along with comparable candidates from professional schools of management, law, policy, and education. When we had terrific applicants from cultural studies, public health, and social psychology, we expanded our reach. We prioritized scholars who wanted to learn from outside their current area of expertise. To prevent disciplinary cliques, we never took many people from any particular discipline. And we took people from around the world. In constructing a class, we mixed disciplines, methodologies, organizational domains, institu-

tional affiliations, and personal experiences. (A striking moment occurred on the first day of the first year, when not one but two scholars said in their introductions "And that's when they took my father to jail" as a political prisoner).

Selection and anticipation are only the first steps in building a vibrant community. We also developed practices for our two weeks of intense work with each summer cohort. For example, aside from opening introductions, we did not allow people to present their own work, precluding retreat into what they already knew and avoiding disciplinary defensiveness. Instead, participants were asked to *steal* — that is, to borrow ideas from other fields and apply them to their own research settings.

In terms of teaching, each in-person two-week summer institute began with both of us moving from foundational to frontier material in our own disciplines for the first week. Beyond teaching, we also had dinner speakers with significant experience both in the academy and in other kinds of organizations, ranging from being a state Supreme Court justice to creating organizing principles for a start-up that is now one of the world's best-known companies. Finally, the first week also included significant time blending the scholars, in smaller groups and, encouraging them to represent their own disciplines and to reflect on others'. As one scholar later characterized this first week, "Bob and Woody built a home for us".

The second week follows a different rhythm. We invite "guest chefs" — scholars from fields beyond our own — to spend about 24 hours with us — often from lunch through lunch, giving lectures in a relatively traditional format the first afternoon, assigning a "hack" for the evening that applies the afternoon's material, and having a wider-ranging discussion the next morning, including a discussion of the evening's assignment. These wonderful guest chefs served several purposes. Scholars such as Jenna Bednar, Dan Carpenter, and Hahrie Han covered topics in political science. Kate Kellogg, Adam Reich, and Julia DiBenigno introduced ethnographic methods to our troops. A favorite moment was when a young economic theorist said he wanted to do an ethnography. Other visitors such as political philosopher Josh Ober talking about democracy in Ancient Greece, development economist Nava Ashraf discussing her field experiments in central Africa and London firms, or economic theorist Jean Tirole reflecting on how he might model organizational culture added to the "dream department" we aspired to have. For both the guest chefs and the dinner speakers, there was, of course, a discussion while the guest was there, but very importantly, there was a free-wheeling discussion after the guest left. These discussions often surprised us, and we enjoyed that. Sometimes the young scholars were too much in awe, and we disabused them of that, too.

To put stealing in a broader context, over time we developed a scale: from Pablo Picasso to Ezra Pound, to an oyster, to an ICU. This strange little spectrum asked whether an idea had value because it: (a) was so useful it could be stolen and repurposed, as in Picasso's line that "good artists imitate, great ones steal"; (b) provoked thought about something seemingly unrelated, as in Pound's aphorism that "sometimes the value of a poem is in the image evoked in the mind of the reader" (illustrating this aphorism, it was not Pound who said it and what was said was not this); (c) scratched a curiosity or need and might develop into a pearl; or (d) provoked so much anxiety that it threatened to send the listener to an intensive care unit. Treating ideas in this fashion greatly eased their accessibility and increased their portability across disciplines and types of organizations.

We designed the summer institute to be resilient — adaptable yet enduring, committed to discovery and exploration. What we did not anticipate was how profoundly the experience would transform us as well. These two weeks became the most intensive and exhilarating teaching experiences of our careers. While our participants frequently describe their fortnight as

career-altering and even life-changing, Bob and I found ourselves equally changed. The overwhelmingly strong applicant pool, high participation rates, and enthusiastic reviews affirm the program's impact. But more than anything, we discovered that the greatest joy of mentorship lies in guiding scholars as they uncover and refine their own intellectual identities. Encouraging them to embrace and continuously rediscover their values has been, for us, the most rewarding lesson of all.

The most unexpected outcome of this journey has been how much it has taught us. What began as an ambitious idea over lunch has evolved into a transformative experience — not just for our participants but for us as well. Teaching in this program has reaffirmed our belief that mentorship is not about imparting knowledge top-down, but about creating an environment where people feel comfortable to ask hard questions and learning flows in multiple directions. The scholars who have passed through the summer institute have left an indelible mark on us, and we are endlessly grateful for the opportunity to learn alongside them. If anything, this experience has shown us that the best mentorship is not about shaping others — it is about growing together. The legacy of this program will not be measured by the papers published or theories advanced, but by the relationships forged, the ideas exchanged, and the collective spirit of inquiry it has fostered. In the end, the greatest reward of mentorship is knowing that its impact extends far beyond the classroom or the seminar room — it lives on in the work of those we have had the privilege to guide.

References

Bellow, S. (1970). *Mr. Sammler's Planet*. London, UK: Weidenfeld & Nicholson; New York, NY: The Viking Press.

Bellow, S. (1975). *Humboldt's Gift*. London, UK: Secker & Warburg; New York, NY: The Viking Press

Coser, L.A. (1993). A Sociologist's Atypical Life. *Annual Review of Sociology*, 19, 1–16. https://doi.org/10.1146/annurev.so.19.080193.000245

Coser, L.A., Kadushin, C., & Powell, W.W. (1982). *The Culture and Commerce of Publishing*. New York, NY: Basic Books.

French, M. (1977). *The Women's Room*. New York, NY: Summit Books.

Garcia Marquez, G. (1976). *Autumn of the Patriarch*. New York: Harper & Row. [Original Version 1975].

Kanter, R.M. (1977). *Men and Women of the Corporation*. New York, NY: Basic Books.

Kundera, M. (1981). *The Book of Laughter and Forgetting*. New York, NY: Penguin Books [Original Version 1978].

Naipaul, V.S. (1979). *A Bend in the River*. New York, NY: Alfred A Knopf.

Pakula, A.J. (1976). *All the President's Men*. Ny, Los Angeles: Warner Bros.

Perrow, C. (2019). *In Memoriam: Charles Perrow Passed Away on November 12, 2019*. Berkeley Sociology Alumni In Memorium Website. https://sociology.berkeley.edu/charles-perrow-1953

Pfeffer, J., & Salancik, G.R. (1978). *The External Control of Organizations. A Resource Dependence Perspective*. New York, NY: Harper & Row.

Walter W. Powell – Graduate School of Education, Stanford University (United States)
https://orcid.org/0009-0007-2319-5815 | woodyp@stanford.edu
http://woodypowell.com
Woody Powell is Jacks Family Professor of Education, and Professor of Sociology, Organizational Behavior, Management Science and Engineering, and Communication at Stanford University. He is also an External Faculty member at the Santa Fe Institute. He was a founding co-director of the Stanford Center on Philanthropy and Civil Society (PACS) in 2006. At PACS, he heads the Civic Life of Cities Lab, which studies civil society organizations in the SF Bay Area, Seattle, Shenzhen, Sydney, Taipei, and Vienna. From 1999–2010, he was director of SCANCOR at Stanford, and he continues his involvement through supervising the postdoctoral fellows and running the annual PhD workshop in Europe. His research interests focus on the processes through which ideas and practices are transferred across organizations, and the role of networks in facilitating or hindering innovation.