



Starting Strong (A Mentoring Fable): Strategies for Success in the First 90 Days

Zachary, Lois, J.; and Fischler, Lory A.
Wiley, 2014

Book Review

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Lois J. Zachary and Lory A. Fischler's *Starting Strong* is an accessible book that has varying use depending on one's institution. The book is composed in two sections. The first is a fable situated within a large corporation that has multiple divisions and an official mentoring program. The main characters are Cynthia, a VP of Marketing and Communications, and Rafa, a newly hired financial analyst. The fable follows them through six mentoring conversations and maps their mutual development. The second section is a summary and strategy for having those same conversations in your own mentoring relationships. Zachary and Fischler's writing is easily absorbed and their ideas about mentoring presented in the form of a dialogue allow readers to imagine themselves in similar conversations whether they are a mentor or mentee. Scholars who are in institutions with formalized mentorship programs may find this to be a helpful book because it can assist with structuring early mentorship meetings, setting boundaries and goals, and setting the stage for both mentors and mentees to benefit from a mentoring relationship from the beginning.

Starting Strong's weakness for those teaching and learning in Religious Studies and Theology is that the book's corporate setting results in some mentoring relationships that are hard - if not impossible - to copy to the relationships in which most professional academics will engage. For example, Cynthia has no power over Rafa. She is only a mentor, there for his development. This model excludes the teacher-student relationship in which mentoring takes place -- where assessment is a significant obstacle to overcome toward building rapport with students. So long as teachers hold the power to evaluate students, then the mentorship relationship Zachary and Fischler imagine does not happen in academia. By the same token, unless your institution has a formalized mentorship program that explicitly takes people out of their

colleges and departments and into relationships with people in other faculties, the risks to tenure and promotion from a mentor who works closely with one's supervisors does not allow for the kinds of open exchanges and risks Cynthia and Rafa take in developing Rafa's leadership skills. Zachary and Fischler did not write this book for academics, but if academics are going to think about mentorship and the development of students and faculty then the question of how that might be done within higher education's hierarchies needs to be asked.

It is worth the time to think about how to formalize mentorship programs into specific institutions - both for students and faculty - and this book can help once those programs are implemented. For those who are looking for a book that can help start the process of mentoring someone, including graduate students, then this is a useful book to mine for ideas, especially the second section in which the authors summarize the conversations one needs to have to achieve mentoring success in the first ninety days. I recommend *Starting Strong* as a resource for graduate student supervisors, but its assumptions do not translate as well into undergraduate mentorship.

https://wabash.center/resources/book_reviews/starting-strong-a-mentoring-fable-strategies-for-success-in-the-first-90-days/