

EXPLORATION and LAUNCH SUMMER

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Working with your Summer Coach: Tips and Tricks

You invited a Coach to join you as you continue on the path toward Summer 2025. But if you've picked someone with whom you don't have an existing relationship, how do you develop a system that will work for you and your Coach? Or, how do you adapt an existing relationship so there's room for this new kind of conversation? We say that connection is essential for leadership, but how do you actually do it?

The following material comes from Scholars' and Coaches' stories of working together during Summer 2023. I've also drawn on my years of directing undergraduate honors theses and my teaching about coaching and mentoring.

Vicki

1. Take responsibility for your relationship. Ask for what you need. You might wish or assume that your Coach will direct your work. Actually, though, your Coach is probably expecting you to get things started. One of the greatest leadership lessons from Robertson Summers is learning how to identify what you need from your Coach and to ask for that. Your Coach might come to you with ideas and information, but do not expect that.

2. Set a schedule for conversations, starting now. You're busy, and your Summer Coach is busy, and what's the rush? However, I strongly encourage you to develop a meeting schedule with your Coach now so you can get in the habit of talking. This is one of the most powerful tools I used with my own students' projects. We use this in our office team, too. We have regular times set aside together that we can use or not, but at least the time is set aside. If you're creating a new relationship, or you're adding a new layer to an existing relationship, there are so many barriers to getting started on Summer 2025! So ask for a regular meeting, at a frequency that works for both of you. Danica did this with her Coach, and that turned out to be really important.

- **Danica Bajaj:** As usual, my brilliant summer coach, Sheryl Welte, came to the rescue. **Our biweekly phone calls** always leave me laughing, energized, and inspired with a renewed sense of confidence. It feels like nothing can go wrong when Sheryl is on the other side of the line.

3. Ask your Coach for examples from their own experiences. You can learn from the information your Coach shares. In addition, this approach helps create or strengthen your connection.

- **Felipe Yanaga:** When it comes to the role that (Alumna) Margo (Werner) played in my summer, I have no words to describe how incredible she was. Even though I had disliked working at Big Tech previously, Margo assured me that Google was a different place. **She explained to me, in detail, the culture that Google had** and how I could make the most out of it. As part of the Google application process, you have to be matched to a team. **Margo helped me tremendously** with this by telling me what each team did and what was their role within the company and if, based on my interests, I would be a good fit for the team. Because of this, I got matched to quite literally, the perfect fit for me.
- **Lydia Rowen:** My official Robertson mentor, (Alumnus) Travis Crayton, really opened my eyes to this career back in fall 2022. Since then, **he has been an invaluable source of knowledge and advice.** During the super fun spring applications period, he was willing to reach out to his contacts far and wide. This is a privilege and act of service that I do not take lightly. In fact, it was from his positive character review that I reached out to Tab Combs asking her to be a faculty mentor for my course I will be teaching this year. The transportation webs of personal connections is just beginning.

- Patrick Li: My coach, (Alumnus) Andy Pickens, played a massive role in helping me develop my plans. **He was with me every step of the way**, helping me decide on consulting as my path to pursue, to connecting me to The Alexander Group in a role that would help me develop my analytical skills, to suggesting EDM production as my passion project. During the summer, Andy checked in with me to ensure I was enjoying my work and musical journey as well. He has helped me be more introspective and thoughtful about what makes me happy and encourages me to pursue my passions. **We have already had multiple conversations about what I will be doing for Launch Summer, and Andy has been incredibly supportive in helping me decide how to continue my professional path.**

4. While you're collecting factual information from your Coach, also pay attention to the leadership your Coach is modeling. Allow yourself to be inspired.

- Jenna Smith: I briefly attempted to integrate this component into a larger portion of my reflection, but in all honesty, the amount of gratitude I have for (Alumnus) Jake Sheridan deserves an essay all to itself. . . . **There are countless anecdotes that I can't point to but to demonstrate the depth of Jake's kindness and mentorship**, but the specific instance I will point to today was July 4. When Jake was brand new to the Tribune's newsroom, he led the coverage of a fourth of July mass shooting that went on to receive significant national coverage. This most recent fourth of July, I accompanied him to work on a follow up piece. Watching how he moved through the streets – approaching survivors and community members with such significant empathy and compassion, crafting a story with seamless technical expertise and taking me along for the ride is some of the best mentorship one could ever ask for. If you're reading this, thank you for everything Jake! I couldn't have dreamed of a better mentor.
- Avery Smedley: My Summer Coach, Irma McClaurin, has been such an inspiration to me. Every time we had a conversation, I genuinely learned something new. I am so in awe of her –her breadth of knowledge and adaptability in so many fields. She is another person this summer who pushed me to go where my creativity takes me and not be my own limit. Our relationship complements each other very well. **We recognize an equal passion and vision in each other** –and she has the experience to direct me and how I might carry these things out. For example, when I explained to her the problems I was seeing in the community and the lack of data, she was the one to inform me on how I could conduct consensus modeling research. I was so grateful to her to have a formalized method to take an idea I was passionate about and feel like I was contributing to the project at Chocolate Mountain.

5. Be honest with yourself and your Coach. Be vulnerable. This is so hard to do! But your Summer Coach will walk alongside you if you're willing to share.

- Julia Davis: I had a phenomenal coach, (Alumna) Jocelyn Streid! Jocelyn coached me from the beginning and supported my exploration when I told her I was considering other paths outside of medicine. She encouraged my double discernment this summer: to explore both the clinical psychology PhD, as well as medical school, with two meaningful experiences. Moreover, she shared with me why she chose a career in medicine, helping me reflect on my own experiences and what I was committed to.
- Johnathan Brown: (Alumna) Rebecca Doherty has been great as a formal and informal alum-turned-mentor since she served as my boss during 2021's Community Summer; in the two years since, **she has been deft at helping me translate my wildest creative aspirations into concrete plans.** She has been incredibly helpful in helping me to identify spaces that may be receptive to my unique skill set, and has (thankfully) reintroduced the concept of pacing to me as I head into senior year – helping me to focus on thoroughly executing what's right in front of me, rather than getting caught up in the big picture details.

Open yourself to the possibilities of a deep and satisfying connection that goes beyond Coach/Coachee. It's easy to forget that Summer Coaches are actually people, especially when we hold them in high esteem. But they agree to be Coaches to meet relational goals– they want connection, too.

- Emilio Abelmann: One of the most **significant and cherished aspects of my time in Geneva was the connection I furthered with (Alumnus) Andy (Cunningham), my exploration summer coach.** Of course, Andy has been the chief catalyst for my work with AKF all summer long. Because of his guidance and selflessness, I had the privilege of engaging with AKF initiatives that hold a genuine impact on the lives of people in need. This hands-on experience not only expanded my skill set but also instilled a sense of purpose that extended beyond traditional educational boundaries. . . . Andy's wisdom is unparalleled. He poses great questions, challenges perspectives, and our talks about college, friendships, values, and future opportunities gave me invaluable insights into navigating the complexities of life's transitions. . . .Really, the impact of my time in Geneva, both professionally and personally, was undoubtedly amplified (and made possible) by the connection I formed with Andy. His mentorship transcended the role of a 'summer coach', transforming into what I believe is a genuine friendship based on mutual respect and shared values.



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