

Benchmark Leadership Interview Assignment

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Interviewer: Hope Victoria Charles, Doctoral Student, Liberty University

Interviewee: Dr. Linwood Vereen, Associate Clinical Professor, Oregon State University

Interview Conducted: 2/25/25

Interview Location: Zoom

On the topic of leadership, I interviewed Dr. Linwood Vereen, who serves as an Associate Clinical Professor at Oregon State University. Dr. Vereen was introduced to Dr. Bohecker's Dissemination of Research and Scholarship in Counseling course this Spring. He served as a guest lecturer. After his time with our class, I reached out to him and asked for his mentorship moving forward. Dr. Vereen has served as a Counselor Educator for several years. He has also served as an Editor for the Journal of Humanistic Counseling. He now prides himself on his work in advocacy, mentorship, and leadership within the Counseling Profession.

There were several things that stood out to me in our time together, but the things that resonated most were on the topics of monetizing our knowledge, leading in truthfulness, and referencing his mentees.

Monetizing Our Knowledge

Dr. Vereen spoke of the amount of knowledge we give away for free. He mentioned how we prepare for conferences, pay for attendance, and share knowledge with colleagues for free. He shared how if we leveraged that same knowledge by getting published, or writing in a manuscript or textbook, we can get paid for our contribution to the profession. By doing speaking engagements and sharing insights with other helping professions, we can monetize our skillset while establishing our professional identity. This insight was extremely eye opening. I realized I have spoken at several conferences and essentially paid the give knowledge for free. The perspective was both insightful and enlightening.

Leading in Truthfulness

Dr. Vereen spoke of how imperative it is to always lead in integrity and truth. He gave the example of offering writing opportunities. He stated if I were offered an opportunity to write on a

manuscript and I was swamped with work, to feel free to be honest about where I am. I should ask if the opportunity would be available later, when I can devote more time and attention to it. He stated that many times younger professionals take every opportunity that avails itself from fear of missing out. He ensured that staying honest about my time and ability to manage that time will be important as I progress in my career, therefore lead in honesty.

Referencing His Mentees

Much like when we are citing an article with the name of the author, Dr. Vereen will often cite his mentees to other students and colleagues. He stated that this is a practice he started doing to give his mentees kudos for knowledge they instilled upon him. This also shed light on them, thereby building up their professional identities, while they are still students. This type of exposure duplicates their efforts and helps get their name out into the counseling community. I think this practice was extremely thoughtful and absolutely something that I would care to replicate with my own mentees, supervisees, and students.

How the Interview Supported My Definition & Understanding of the Skills of a Good Leader

This interview was a game changer for me. I had in my mind what a mentor and a counseling professional looked like. This interview challenged those images for me. A mentor should be able to help their mentee navigate the new arena they are embarking upon. At the same time, am I helping them by speaking into the areas they are already proficient in? Am I telling them how I am learning from them, or just dictating to them? Am I speaking well of them when they are not in the room? Am I citing them and their accomplishments to my colleagues? These are things that can easily be done and can take their confidence to new heights. I never would be thought about using my power and authority in this way.

Likewise, a good leader knows their worth and does not sell themselves short. I had a good idea of the requirements for building up my professional identity, getting published, and speaking at conferences. However, the mind shift that happened when it was pointed out that I'm sharing knowledge for free, helped me to see that there are additional revenue streams that I may need to investigate for myself and for those who come up after me. It is imperative that I do not remain stagnant on what I know but expand my way of thinking about my contributions to the profession.

What I Learn from This Interview That Will Make Me a Better Leader

One of the first things I learned in doing this interview is that a mentee can come out of an unexpected exchange. I reached out to Dr Vereen, after he came and spoke to our class. He offered his services and support to the entire class, but I do not know that any of the other students took him up on his offer. I learned from our encounter that as I grow and develop, I will need to be prepared for the opportunities for mentorship, both as a mentee and a mentor. The learning and gleaming don't stop after being hooded.

Another thing that this interview taught me is that a good leader will invest time, energy, and knowledge into the professional community, not just at their university. Making a difference and having influence at home, in your university is important for your growth and the growth of your students, but it shouldn't stop there. True influence is going outside the four walls of your university and pouring into young professionals everywhere. This is how true change takes place.

Lastly, I learned that networking is paramount, not only for my own personal growth, but for the growth of those coming after me. If my professor had never forged the relationship with Dr. Vereen; if they never kept the relationship going all these years; if they never introduce him to the class, I would have never had the opportunity to meet a new mentor. The relationships that we are forming right now, while Doctoral students will begin to shape our professional lives, and the lives of those we influence. I didn't see the weight of that until this assignment.

I am eternally grateful for Dr. Vereen for sharing so many gems of wisdom in this interview, but I am also thankful for the assignment. It forced me out of my comfort zone to reach out to someone unknown to me and that has made all the difference. Leadership, I now see, is like an oversized coat that you are constantly readjusting to size. It can feel heavy, overwhelming and like it's not a good fit for you, but with time, you grow into the leader you will become. It is a process that is ever changing, while we are ever growing.