

June 2024

# Mentoring Expert Offers Wisdom and Hope

Insights from Buffy Smith, PhD,  
think2perform Research Institute Board Member



***“Any organization, any person, that speaks to my values, I become a follower,”***

says Dr. Buffy Smith, Dean of Dougherty Family College and  
Professor of Sociology at the University of St. Thomas.

think2perform Research Institute’s mission inspired Buffy to join the organization’s board of directors. Much more than a follower, Buffy’s board leadership contributions include her three-cycle mentorship model. Comprised of advising, advocacy and apprenticeship,

the model is a foundational component of t2pRI's Future Leaders Academy. Buffy explains the importance of the three-cycles:

*When you're entering this beautiful mentoring relationship it is easy to give advice and share wisdom, and that is helpful and useful. But if the ultimate goal is to develop moral and emotionally intelligent, transformational leaders, it has to go beyond just giving advice. Advocacy, or using your social capital to help the young leader get what they need, has its place and is important, too. But the last cycle, where the young leader is empowered to develop the skills, the knowledge, and the confidence needed for their own social capital — now you have a young leader who will be able to thrive in any setting.*

Buffy believes in the power of mentoring. "It's just the power of human connections," she attests. For her, mentoring is an important way to provide people with access to economic, social, and human capital. Especially those who, on a structural level, were not afforded the same opportunities as other members of the population. "Mentoring is valuable for everyone, including for young leaders who are coming from under-resourced communities," says Buffy.

In a society facing a myriad of inequities and injustices, Buffy sees mentorship as a formula for strengthening relationships across communities:

*If we can bring together individuals from different socioeconomic backgrounds, races, ethnicities, genders, sexual orientations, religions, physical and emotional capabilities — if we're able to say that those socially constructed identities are not*

*a barrier, or should not be a barrier, to forming meaningful, authentic relationships with one another, then that to me is a sign of hope.*

With intentionality, a shared focus, and a desire to achieve an agreed upon goal, people with seemingly little in common can forge powerful bonds. “When you take individuals who are strangers, and put them in the right social conditions, you can have flourishing, meaningful, wonderful, dynamic, engaging relationships,” says Buffy. “So, I think mentoring offers a hope, or at least a glimpse, of what relationships can look like.”

When considering her hopes for the future of think2perform Research Institute, Buffy shares an exciting trajectory for the current future leaders in the Future Leaders Academy. “I would like to see some future leaders who are in high school, go to college,” says Buffy. “I would like to see our future leaders co-leading the Future Leaders Academy program. I would like to see them be part of our overall board, and it would be great if some would go on to become research fellows.”

Buffy admits she is always thinking about relationships, “because that’s all we’ve got.” And she offers valuable advice for navigating the dynamic, messy, and sometimes challenging realities of being in relationship. “We all have different lived experiences, and sometimes when those lived experiences come together, there is tension and conflict,” says Buffy. “But it doesn't have to end there. We just need to be aware of it, offer each other grace, and trust the process and one another.”

*Interested in mentoring a future leader? Applications will open again in July for the 2025-2026 Future Leaders Academy. Learn more about the Mentorship [here](#).*

Dr. Buffy Smith's book on mentoring: [\*Mentoring At-Risk Students through the Hidden Curriculum of Higher Education\*](#). (Plymouth, U.K.: Lexington Books, 2013).

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