

00:01 Hello, I'm Deborah Davidson,
00:03 director of the Suffolk University Gallery.
00:05 And I'm so pleased to be here today
00:07 with graphic design professor Keith Kitz.
00:10 Hi Keith.
00:11 Hi Deborah. Nice to be here.
00:13 We are talking today about the importance
00:15 of mentoring and being mentored,
00:17 in conjunction with the current exhibition in the gallery;
00:20 Mentor, Teacher, Role Model.
00:22 The theme of mentorship encompasses the breadth of the work
00:26 produced by the full-time
00:27 and adjunct art and design faculty.
00:30 The relationship to the respective practices
00:32 is essential to their interest in,
00:35 and ability to nurture and guides students.
00:38 Their own work ties to and stimulates their passion
00:41 that guides their teaching, as well as demonstrating
00:44 their relationship to each other as colleagues.
00:46 They in turn were mentored by teachers
00:49 when they were students, and in this way,
00:51 they all make an important contribution
00:53 to Suffolk University as a whole.
00:56 And Keith, I'm gonna quote you in a statement
00:58 that you wrote for the exhibition.
00:59 You say that, "Mentorship is at the heart
01:01 of art and design education,
01:03 and our collective fields have a rich history
01:06 of apprenticeship as a path to sharing, learning,
01:09 and advancing the techniques and tools of our professions."
01:12 So if you could expand on that...
01:14 Sure. That would be great.
01:15 So, to me, what is more valuable,
01:18 when you're starting something new,
01:20 or you're starting something,
01:21 a journey, to talk to somebody,
01:23 or to work with somebody who's been there before.
01:26 So that's, to me the great role of mentorship,
01:29 someone who knows the ropes and can train you
01:33 and teach you and share with you in an honest way.
01:36 I just wanna say,
01:37 I'm not in the exhibition 'cause I'm the curator of it,
01:41 but this idea of mentorship is very important to me.
01:44 And I just wanna sort of say that, I've had many mentors,
01:50 as probably many of us has. Yes.
01:52 Starting from my grandmother to, you know,
01:54 my teacher in college and so on.
01:56 Sure. So...
01:57 And I know you talk about your family.
02:00 Could you share that with us?
02:02 Yeah. So I come from a family
02:04 that I feel is full of artisans.
02:06 So my father was a fine art painter,

02:08 my uncle is a florist and a sculptor,
02:11 and also a watercolorist,
02:13 my grandmother, a baker, a quilter, a crocheter.
02:16 So being around all of these people growing up,
02:19 and seeing what they were doing,
02:22 and being able to be curious
02:25 about all these different aspects of their lives,
02:27 and them sharing with me openly and honestly
02:30 about those crafts and those different practices
02:32 was really enlightening.
02:35 Yeah. That's great.
02:37 How do you see your own role as a mentor?
02:40 I think you've touched on this a little.
02:41 Sure.
02:43 So I see myself as really a coach and a cheerleader,
02:47 as well as a mentor.
02:48 So I'm helping students to understand
02:51 the practice of graphic design
02:52 from a professional standpoint.
02:53 I've been doing this for 30 years,
02:55 so I can talk to them about client interactions,
02:58 and things that maybe don't fit so neatly
03:01 inside of pedagogy or curriculum.
03:03 So I can talk to them also about real time
03:05 things that are going on in my practice.
03:07 So I think it's just the reality factor of professionalism,
03:12 is really comes into play. Right.
03:13 That makes me think that, in any profession,
03:17 you know, having technical skills
03:18 and knowing what you're doing is important,
03:19 but also those kind of relationship skills are equally
03:25 or more important. Yeah.
03:26 And that's something that you kind of,
03:28 just gain almost by osmosis from your relationship
03:31 to the students and they to you.
03:33 The human centered skills in any profession
03:36 are the skills that are really challenging
03:38 to teach inside of a classroom.
03:40 So really being able to point to practice,
03:43 really being able to point to the things
03:46 that I'm actually doing and my colleagues
03:48 are actually doing what their clients,
03:49 really is the thing that is a difference maker.
03:52 Right. So that you...
03:53 By demonstration, you don't even have...
03:55 You're not explicitly teaching that,
03:57 but you're demonstrating that.
03:59 Yes.
04:00 And I would add to that, it's the rights and the wrongs.
04:02 So the successes and the failures,
04:04 like, I love to talk to students about things,
04:06 especially when I was their age,
04:08 where there were problems and maybe I did something wrong,
04:12 and talk about how I managed that situation,

04:14 how I was mentored through the management
04:16 of those situations, it's very helpful.
04:18 Yeah. That issue of failure which is part of the process.
04:22 Absolutely. It's okay.
04:23 You don't have to be getting an A every time.
04:25 It's the things that lead to success,
04:27 and success is the thing that leads to confidence.
04:30 So these are the things that are gonna help.
04:31 Right, all tied together, yeah.
04:35 Well, this is, I guess, more sort of a general question,
04:37 but, what makes a good mentor?
04:39 I think a good mentor is not only someone
04:41 who is a practice professional,
04:43 but someone who's willing to listen
04:45 and be open and honest with whoever the mentee is.
04:49 And then, someone who has the time that's available.
04:51 'Cause this is something that...
04:53 The great thing about mentorship is,
04:54 it can exist outside of a curriculum.
04:57 It can exist outside
04:58 of all these kind of trappings of education.
05:00 It can just be a one to one,
05:02 and it can be something where it's kind of,
05:04 an ask me anything situation.
05:06 And I think that, that...
05:07 Taking away grades and class structures, it really helps.
05:14 Well, you mentioned your family were your early mentors.
05:20 I was wondering if there's one person
05:22 along the line who stood out.
05:24 There's a whole slew of people.</v
05:25 I am blessed with a lot
05:27 of really great educators in my path.
05:30 My first inspiration to become an educator
05:32 was my fourth grade instructor, Jay Williams,
05:34 who I talk about every time I'm interviewed,
05:37 because this was someone who was really,
05:39 very patient with me and my fellow classmates,
05:43 and just taught with a certain level of care
05:46 that I had not experienced prior to that.
05:48 And then, I had a whole list of people.
05:50 'Cause I went to an arts high school after that,
05:53 who were really professionals in practicing...
05:57 You know, practicing artists,
05:59 who were really helpful in talking
06:02 about how to make what I wanted to make my career happen.
06:07 And then beyond that,
06:08 I would say that when I reached my master's degree,
06:11 working side by side with my then teacher,
06:15 who then became came a colleague when we co-taught together,
06:19 John Crane was really helpful to me.
06:21 He'd worked with Paul Rand back at IBM,
06:24 he's the person who developed the Polaroid logo.
06:28 So he has all of this great experience
06:31 and could talk to me about,

06:32 like that "Madman Era" of advertising.
06:34 Like, he was a part of that.
06:36 So really just a brilliant maker and a very interesting man.
06:41 Yeah. Well that sounds invaluable and fantastic.
06:43 Yeah. And...
06:45 You know, I really like that idea.
06:46 In fact, we have a couple of people
06:49 like that in our exhibition who were students,
06:54 and of course their mentors are now their colleagues,
06:57 or they are colleagues with their mentors.
06:59 And to me, that's like a really great kind of leap
07:03 to then like, "Oh, we're on par with each other."
07:06 Yeah, absolutely.Yeah.
07:07 I think it's an unusual at first situation,
07:10 'cause I've been in that situation,
07:12 as I mentioned with John. Yeah.
07:13 And also with some other colleagues
07:15 where you then become peers.
07:17 And I think that, it takes some finessing at the beginning,
07:20 but it is really one of those things, especially for me,
07:23 because I aspired to be a teacher when I was in that program
07:26 and then being able to have that person as a peer
07:30 was really quite great. Right.
07:34 So maybe our last question is this, which is,
07:38 how does your own experience affect how you teach?
07:42 So I really do very strongly teach
07:44 from a mentorship perspective.
07:46 So all of my classes really are structured as a studio.
07:52 I look at it as like, I'm the art director
07:54 and my students are the designers of a firm.
07:57 So we're really setting things up
07:58 in very practical and very pragmatic way.
08:01 And, you know, I talk to them about,
08:03 "Hey, when we have this process meeting...
08:05 This is like a Monday morning meeting inside of a studio."
08:09 And when we have presentations, I talk to them about like,
08:13 "Make this a client facing conversation
08:16 and not just like, it's all of us and we know each other."
08:18 So that kind of modeling and practice really helps.
08:22 Yeah. I love that.
08:24 That you're modeling sort of the real world...
08:27 Yeah. I think modeling behavior
08:28 is really key to being a good teacher.
08:32 Right. And I guess in the same way, or in addition,
08:35 the critiques that you hold with your students
08:38 would be like the art director saying to the artist like,
08:43 "Our client really likes
08:45 this better than this," or whatever.
08:46 Yeah. Critiques never end.
08:48 So I tell them, it's like, you know,
08:49 "The things that you're doing inside of a classroom
08:51 as far as a critique, these are the types of critiques
08:53 that you're gonna have with your team,
08:55 with your ADs and CDs inside of your firm,

08:58 and also with the clients.
09:00 'Cause the clients are gonna come in at some point and say,
09:02 "Love this, I don't love this,
09:04 make this bigger, make this smaller."
09:06 And you need to be able to justify the design choices
09:09 and talk about the rationale. Right.
09:12 I think that's a really good place to end.
09:14 I wanna thank you so much for this conversation.
09:16 Absolutely, my pleasure.
09:17 And just to mention,
09:19 that the exhibition is up through March 11th,
09:22 of many other faculty artists and their ideas
09:27 about mentorship are there. Great.
09:29 So thank you. Thanks Deborah.