

# Last Call with Gabe Santner and Kevin Campbell on the importance of mentorship

By Sarah Connell

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Quinsigamond Community College is seeking mentors for the fall. For volunteer opportunities, email Director of Mentoring Gabe Santner at: [gsantner@qcc.mass.edu](mailto:gsantner@qcc.mass.edu).

We spoke with Santner and mentor Kevin Campbell to find out more about the experience.

## How did you form a connection to Quinsigamond Community College?

**GS:** I've been working at QCC for about two and a half years. I was brought in to develop and expand the mentoring programs that already existed. We had a few mentoring programs that were taking place for smaller groups of students, and they mainly involved faculty and staff members who would mentor students in academic and social development. I was brought in to attract community members as mentors and bring all the mentoring programs under one roof. I've also worked to add in an element of professional connection and networking to the mentoring programs. In the current program, QCC Mentoring, students are matched with an individual mentor for a full academic year. Mentors support students with academic encouragement, professional exploration, and social connections. We've had about 135 matches this year and almost 300 total participants. Over two years, we have worked with 25 different companies. We have four companies serving as our core partners that we collaborate with all the time as mentors. I get to meet people like Kevin and his mentee as they developed their own skills and built a positive relationship together. It's been a great ride over at QCC, and I'm really looking forward to continuing in the fall of 2020.

**KC:** I went through QCC back in 1968 through 1970 as a transfer student. I was commissioned in the army in 1973 through the ROTC program. I went through Worcester State and Worcester Tech, then went on to a long career in the

military, followed by a career in industry. When I got back to Worcester, there was an article in the newspaper written by the President of QCC, talking about the importance of mentorship. He wanted to expand his mentorship program. I have a relative who's on the board and I approached her and asked her if I could be introduced to the President. I went over and offered to be a mentor.

**What are some of the direct benefits that you've seen students receive from the program?**

**KC:** I don't see the entirety of the program, but I find that mentorship delivers a different perspective. You bring industry people in that have gone through similar programs. It's also a learning experience for the mentor to work closely with someone who might be from a different culture or background. There's often a generational gap. Learning is happening on both sides. And, it's a lot of fun. Our students learn a little bit about commitment by just showing up at the monthly meetings, or more frequently if they so desire.

**GS:** I'm still working to bring in alumni and mentors right now who would be interested in working with us this fall. It's been really inspiring to see the different journeys that our alumni have gone through. And also, the journeys some of our mentees have gone through. Everybody struggles when they're trying to complete a degree, whether it's a residential four year school or a two year community college degree. I think that many people benefit from having someone that is not just a professor or a boss or a family member, but somebody that's really dedicated to your own personal development. Having an extra person on the side who can help you professionally, socially, and academically, is just a benefit that I think a lot of college students could really leverage to improve their academic careers and their future professions. I've been interviewing students that had successful matches in the past. So many of them talk about the actual bond that was created. It's not just, "Oh, I was able to practice my interview skills." They actually built really powerful bonds with their mentors. I think having a mentor is helpful for any human being and especially somebody that's struggling with balancing work on top of college and family.

**How have you had to pivot during coronavirus in order to keep the program afloat? And what are you looking at in terms of making adjustments for the fall?**

**GS:** QCC is predominantly working on remote learning for the fall semester. We obviously shifted over to a remote learning environment in March. Prior to that, mentoring really required an in-person meeting once a month between mentors and mentees. We adjusted to allow for that monthly meeting to take place on video or over the phone. At first I was a little bit worried about that, just because I think we can all agree that there's great benefits to sitting down with someone in-person. But, I think that it's actually helped our program to allow more flexibility for the mentors and mentees to meet and feel comfortable emailing each other and setting up meetings on their own schedule without having to worry about the transportation issues. We're really excited about building a strong remote mentoring program in the fall, and then hopefully giving people more flexibility when we can all get back together. We've actually had mentors sign up who couldn't participate before because they don't live in Worcester. For people who live in Boston and want to help out with the mentoring program, they finally have the opportunity to do that. People understand that this time of COVID can be very isolating. Recruitment of mentors and mentees is a great way to feel connected. It's not much of a time commitment beyond an hour per month. You get to build a connection with somebody who could really also use a break from the isolation and their crushing work or school schedule.

**Kevin, can you share a success story from your experience as a mentor?**

**KC:** The mentee that I'm connected with, has been with me this entire academic year. He faces some challenges financially, which is not unusual for any student. Some other challenges are that he is an immigrant to the U S and he's trying to work through a maze of a system to gain permanent residency. Despite all those distractors, It was very rewarding to see him focus on a plan and adjust his plan when necessary to actually execute it. This past entire academic year, he met all his goals. He's going on to a four year institution beginning this fall. He may finish his bachelor's by the following summer in 2021. His success, his desire and drive, and his ability to persistently plan ahead, despite having hurdles thrown at him, made for a wonderful success story. When you invest something in a student, let's say a scholarship, even if it's a thousand dollars for an entire academic year, you tend to see statistically that those students end up staying with it and going on to graduate. I think the same can be said for mentoring.

**GS:** I will add that we have higher graduation and retention rates of students who participate in the mentor program.