

# Activity Engagement for Novice Wellbeing Through Mentoring

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While traditional models of mentoring emphasize knowledge transmission and career advancement, alternative models underscore the importance of holistic approaches for nurturing both the professional trajectory and psychological wellbeing of novices, including beginning school principals. Our discussion presents a framework for mentoring that integrates principles from positive psychology with established theories of developmental mentoring that specify psychosocial and career development functions. By aligning these functions with the elements of human flourishing, the authors propose a framework that presents a view of novice identity growth and purposeful unfolding as rooted in wellbeing at work and in life. Novice growth necessitates the involvement of skilled mentors who understand professional or academic mentorship and how to effectively enact mentoring structures and processes. Theory and practice are bridged with activities for novice engagement in productive mentoring, as supported by Positive Emotion, Engagement, Relationships, Meaning, and Accomplishment (PERMA), a branch of positive psychology. The focus is primarily on wellbeing activities that can be adapted for assisting with novice development, reflection, and learning in support of mentoring relationships within schools, universities, and corporations.

*Keywords:* Activity, mentoring, PERMA, novice wellbeing

## Introduction

While traditional models of mentoring emphasize knowledge transmission and career advancement, alternative models underscore the importance of holistic approaches for nurturing both the professional trajectory and psychological wellbeing of novices, including beginning school principals. Our discussion presents a framework for mentoring that integrates principles from positive psychology with established theories of developmental mentoring, most notably Kram's (1983) psychosocial and career functions. By aligning Kram's functions with the elements of human flourishing, we propose a mentoring for wellbeing framework that presents a view of novice personal and professional development (PPD). Here we bridge theory with practice by suggesting activities for engaging in productive mentoring, as supported by Positive Emotion, Engagement, Relationships, Meaning, and Accomplishment (PERMA), a branch of positive psychology (Seligman, 2018). We focus on wellbeing activities that can be used for novice development and in mentoring contexts within schools, universities, and elsewhere.

## Literature Review

### Positive Psychology and Mentoring for Wellbeing

Mentoring is a cornerstone of PPD across

educational, organizational, and leadership contexts. Mentoring is a deeply collaborative endeavor focused on the mutually designed goals established by the mentor and novice. The relationship is dynamic with both mentor and novice sharing responsibilities for learning and communicating openly and honestly. Positive psychology, which emphasizes wellbeing, strengths, and flourishing, offers a lens for reimagining mentoring contexts and relationships (Seligman, 2018). Using Seligman's PERMA domains, one can assess or perhaps measure flourishing and wellbeing while enacting mentoring practices in the psychosocial (personal) development and the career (professional) development. Mentors can do this by providing structures and processes that are aligned with PERMA domains and PPD of novices. When applied to mentoring relationships, these principles create opportunities for growth that extend beyond skills acquisition or the attainment of professional goals, thus fostering resilience, purpose, and sustained motivation (Author 1, 2025).

### Mentoring for Wellbeing, the Outer Rim

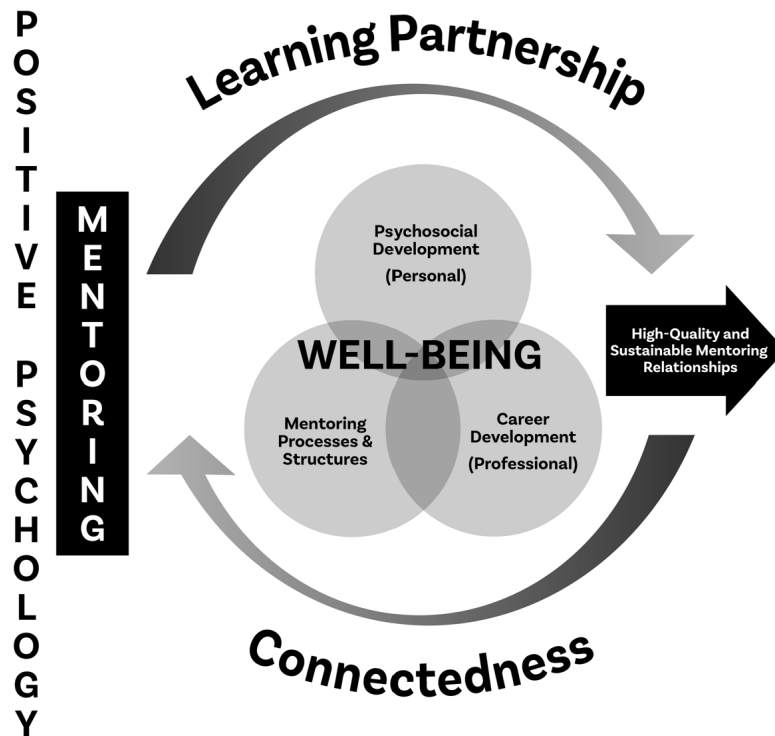
Mentoring approached holistically is a learning partnership where mentor and novice establish values and goals. Learning partnerships and social connectedness serve as the outer rim of the mentoring model. Classic scholarship (e.g., Author 2, 2012; Crow & Matthews, 1998) conceptualizes mentoring as a collaborative learning partnership,

advocating for a process whereby both parties earnestly undertake mutual PPD. This approach moves beyond hierarchical mentoring, thereby promoting dynamic leadership through shared experiences and reflective practice. Learning partnerships create a foundation of mutual respect, empowerment, and shared inquiry that enables knowledge to be co-constructed and belief systems to become known.

Social connectedness is considered a fundamental human need and critical component of psychological wellbeing that fosters psychological safety and belonging—critical conditions for

authentic mentoring (Author 2, 2025). Effective mentoring practices demonstrate that social connectedness is more than a social relationship. Such practices encompass quality and depth of connection as well as network belonging. Parties feel accepted as well as cared for, supported, and valued within a context that supports professional risk taking (Author 1, 2025). Mentoring and social connectedness surround and support three intersecting domains—psychosocial development, career development, and mentoring processes. Wellbeing—centered in the Mentoring for Well-Being model—is viewed from the perspective of

**Figure 1**  
*Mentoring for Well-Being (Reames 1)*



PERMA (Figure 1).

Psychosocial development encompasses aspects such as identity formation, emotional support, and interpersonal connection, while career development includes sponsorship, exposure, and coaching (Kram, 1983). Our theorizing presents a view of mentoring functions through the lens of wellbeing, and we are proposing an integrated approach that aligns mentoring with positive psychology to promote flourishing within learning relationships. Author 1’s Mentoring for Well-Being model offers a practical, theoretically grounded approach for anyone seeking to design mentoring

initiatives that empower individuals to thrive and organizations to adapt.

**Method**

Drawing on our expertise in mentoring for wellbeing in our capacity as two white female professors of educational leadership from different U.S. states, we identified mentoring activities and developed our own. To further enrich our collaborative process, we incorporated appreciative inquiry, a type of collaborative action research described as define, discover, dream, design, and destiny (Reason & Bradbury, 2001).

Using AI allowed us to align certain key activities for novices in school leadership, applicable to other professionals, with PERMA domains. Informing this work were our primary research data sources, analysis of mentoring and wellbeing literature, and reflection on conversation and practices in educational settings.

**Data Sources**

Research on mentoring and wellbeing through a positive psychology lens oriented our AI analysis. Along these lines, we identified factors crucial to effective mentoring and activities for supporting novice wellbeing and PPD. Specifically, we consulted books and articles on wellbeing, growth mindset, mindfulness, and PERMA. We also kept journals, met via Zoom to develop the activities chart, and took notes during an in-person meeting in April 2025 that we analyzed together with our email/text messages from 2024 and 2025. Additionally, we examined relevant documents, such as the Professional Standards of Educational Leadership from the National Policy Board for Educational Administration (2015) and state administrative code statements concerning leadership mentoring and wellbeing.

Moreover, survey and interview data gathering (2022 to 2025) occurred at an annual leadership conference in a southern U.S. state. An email list was garnered from the organization to make contacts. Participants voluntarily completed the anonymous online survey about their mentoring experiences and wellbeing. Interviews were conducted four times in total and yearly following administration of the survey, which contained Likert scale and open-ended questions.

Two questions from the survey were: (a) Which of the following do you think most influences your personal and professional wellbeing? (exercise/movement, sleep, nutrition, spirituality, support systems, work relationships, personal

relationships). (b) How do you enact these wellbeing choices? Provide examples in these areas. Interview questions included these two prompts: (a) How intentional was the guidance for PPD from your mentor? (b) What actions might your mentor have suggested for your wellbeing and PPD in these areas?

Multiple data sources were used to develop the model (Figure 1) and the activities in all PERMA domains (Table 1). In essence, PERMA and mentoring for PPD, both positive psychology concepts, provided mutual reinforcement via activity design. Mentoring activity engagement through a wellbeing lens is a niche area that we are demonstrating for the first time, which contributes to research. Addressing this gap in mentoring literature, we aligned our mentoring for wellbeing activities with PERMA domains.

**Results**

Table 1 reflects our results. PERMA's five domains serve as organizers for psychosocial/ personal and career/professional reflective activities that any novice can complete. Our study also highlights how appreciative inquiry and its five phases can actively shape mentoring within the PERMA framework. In the Definition phase, we framed mentoring relationships through the lens of wellbeing, using PERMA as our guide. During the Discovery phase, participants told powerful stories around when mentoring felt most engaging and supportive. Immersed in the Dream phase, the authors and participants identified reflective journaling, strength-based activities, empathy and other practices as key to fostering strong mentoring relationships. For the Design phase, we created a list of practical activities for supporting PERMA-aligned mentoring practices. Finally, in the Destiny phase, we captured the transformation in mentorship research that recognizes mentoring as

learning partnership (Author 2, 2012; Author 1, 2024, 2025).

**Table 1**  
*PERMA-Informed Reflective Mentoring Activities*

1. PERMA	2. Psychosocial/Personal	3. Career/Professional
	Role modeling, confirmation, counseling, friendship.	Sponsorship, exposure, visibility, protection, challenging assignment.
Positive emotions	Gratitude journaling.	Penned gratitude notes.
	Activities that bring joy (nature walking, time spent with family).	Team-building activity—scavenger hunts, retreats, time with colleagues.
	Random acts of kindness (sit with someone who is alone, etc.).	Tour the office or building, connect with students, staff, and faculty.
	Mindfulness, meditation, relaxation (breathing/grounding work).	Ice breaker activity—name plates with name, hobby, family, work.

	Positive affirmations: I am brave, smart, and accomplished. Self-compassion exercises: Charge your emotional/physical “batteries.” Reflect on positive experiences: something joyful, inspiring, etc. Plan restorative time: reading, etc.	Positive affirmations: I have grown through obstacles; I make sound decisions and regulate my emotions; my wellbeing matters to others. Self-compassion exercises: Observe your feelings; boost your mood. Reflect on positive experiences: teachers feel happy at work, etc.
	Create and foster social connections—go for a meal or walk with a colleague or friend.	Record things you are grateful for at work; identify obstacles and sound strategies. Exchange your ideas.
	Physical activity and time outdoors is a mood booster.	Enjoy achievement celebrations when novices reach benchmarks.
	Listening to uplifting music.	Expand novices’ leadership roles.
<u>Engagement</u>	Strengths identification: learn your character strengths. Try the Gallop Strengths Finder (Chang, 2023).	Identify your strengths to build your role, foster the environment, and develop your relationships.
	Skill development: do something creative, play sports, do yoga, etc. Write a blog/do a podcast. Network and experience community events.	Take growth-expanding classes, take on leadership roles, present at conferences, listen to videos, write articles, join professional platforms.
	Book club or study group.	Delve into topics of great interest.
<u>Relationships</u>	Spend time with family and friends and make new acquaintances.	Empathy exercise—active listening and speaking heart to heart.
	Volunteer time in the community.	Engage in team-building exercises.
	Contemplative practice (journaling, mediation, prayer, yoga, etc.)	Networking opportunities include social media platforms and events.
<u>Meaning</u>	Assess personal values: For the Bulls Eye exercise write an action plan of your “work/education, leisure/recreation, relationships, personal growth/health” values (Harris, 2008, pp. 1-2).	Assess professional values: Randall’s (2023) video demonstrates the Bulls Eye exercise relative to Acceptance and Commitment Therapy, which potentially fosters wellbeing.
	Personal mission statement: Document your process of forming and acting on values and goals.	Professional mission statement: Share your process of forming and acting on values and goals.
	Journal about obstacles you have encountered and overcome.	Use reflective journaling to document opportunities for growth.
	Suspend judgment, criticism, and distraction in conversations.	Steer conversations using questions: “What inspires you in your work?”
	Life-mapping is a life compass and tool: identify patterns, passions, and areas for meaningful growth.	Life-mapping techniques for work: mind map, timeline, vision board, journal, wheel of life (Gupta, 2024).
	Goal setting and appraisal are advisable in personal daily living.	Formulate goals using SMART (specific, measurable, achievable, relevant, time-bound) (Eby, 2024).
<u>Accomplishment</u>	Write a reflection about personal accomplishments and share it.	Write a reflection about professional accomplishments and share it.
	Progress tracking and personal development plans: Create strategies for combating obstacles.	Lead an initiative, take on challenging projects, and mentor others. Record milestones reached.
	Watch educative lectures to inspire reflection and promote wellbeing.	View useful videos on wellbeing (Duckworth, 2013; Randall, 2023).

## Discussion

Tapping into the literature and our mentoring expertise revealed diverse and creative mentoring activities. We aligned these with the PERMA wellbeing framework. Specifically, the novices and mentors we interviewed reported using gratitude journaling, mindfulness practices, and self-compassion to foster positive emotions. This learning approach illustrates Fredrickson's (2001) broaden-and-build theorizing around how positive emotions enhance resilience.

For the engagement domain, participants engaged in character strength assessments (such as the Gallup StrengthsFinder) and skill development activities like yoga, music, or book clubs. This aligns with Seligman's (2011) assertion that identifying and using one's strengths can deepen engagement and promote flourishing. Surrounding oneself with positive people in the workplace, joining social media platforms, and networking all provide connection to others.

Relationships were strengthened through deliberate social interactions—volunteering, contemplative practices, and spending time with family and friends—which are well-supported in the literature as essential for professional wellbeing and leadership efficacy (Kram, 1985; Mullen, 2005). These activities underscore the importance of social connectedness and mutual support in mentoring relationships. Showing empathy in the workplace, team building and networking all provide opportunities to grow the novices constellation for a fulfilling career.

For meaning, life-mapping, personal mission statements, reflective journaling, among other activities, help novices articulate personal goals and values: "Values are ongoing actions" (Randall, 2023). Values-based action and meaningful goal-setting are drivers of wellbeing and leadership (Harris, 2008; Randall, 2023). Values and goals support a lifelong growth mindset.

In the accomplishment domain, participants reported reflecting on personal milestones, tracking progress, and engaging in PPD, which mirrors findings in mentoring literature that highlight how mentors can help mentees recognize and celebrate their growth (e.g., Crow & Matthews, 1998). Taking on new challenges as a novice stretches aspirations and deepens their reflections, strengthening resilience as they move through their career and experience life.

These findings validate mentoring's dynamic and reciprocal nature—emphasized by Kram's (1985) psychosocial functions. They also highlight how PERMA can operationalize mentoring for wellbeing and leadership development. Broadly, they reinforce a conceptual shift in mentoring from a career to learning partnership focus (Author 2, 2012) where mutual growth, reflection, and wellbeing are central. Personal and professional flourishing are at stake.

## Limitations

While our study provides insights into mentoring practices and wellbeing for leaders, limitations should be acknowledged. First, the reliance on self-reported data introduces biases, such as selective recall. Second, the PERMA framework does not account for all possible dimensions of wellbeing or tap into our participants' fuller or richer learning contexts.

## Future Research

We recommend studying mentoring relationships over an extended period to ascertain the sustained impact of mentoring for wellbeing and any influence over leadership development, career trajectories, and personal flourishing. Author 1's Mentoring for Well-being framework is conducive to diverse and marginalized populations—learning how best to support the mentoring of these groups with PERMA could prove fruitful. Interventions that educate leaders on wellbeing centered mentoring and mentors on enacting practices with novices are needed.

## Conclusion

Herein, we addressed mentoring activity engagement through a wellbeing lens, which enhances knowledge of mentorship. Our results reinforce the shift in mentoring literature from a narrow career-focused orientation to a holistic learning partnership approach (Author 1, 2024, 2025; Author 2, 2025; Crow & Matthews, 1998). The view we presented prioritizes wellbeing as central to effective leadership development and integral to mentoring theory and practice. Mentoring for wellbeing promotes human flourishing in leadership worlds.

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