

Rodney Duvra was afraid of failure. And who can blame him? The idea of not achieving your goals, especially when you haven't thought of alternatives, can be incredibly daunting. That's where Amy McMillan came in.

"Our mentoring relationship didn't start out with the intention of being a mentoring relationship," Rodney recalls. "I was her research student. But then it became one, when I needed the encouragement." Rodney initially considered himself one of McMillan's "bad" students. Then one day, she invited him to work in her lab. Confused, he asked her why.

"She told me I was doing very well, and even gave me examples of how," says Rodney. It was the encouragement that Rodney needed, after feeling like he wasn't succeeding in the ways he had hoped. But more than just encouraging Rodney to succeed, McMillan allowed him to fail. According to Rodney, the key to overcoming the fear of failure is "accepting that it's a possibility, but not letting it be so daunting that it gets in the way of actually doing it."

And it's not only McMillan's tolerance of failure that impacts her mentees in such a positive way. Despite his first impression that McMillan was strict, Rodney has only positive things to say about her. "I think she's an active listener," says Rodney. "She's very genuine and sincere, and she's patient. She's really approachable." He highlights the importance of communication, especially during times of self-doubt. "Her listening and giving positive input and feedback helped out a lot, and it meant a lot to me," Rodney remembers. "I think that was the crux of making her feel like a mentor to me."

When asked about McMillan's mentoring process, Rodney has trouble pinpointing specific tools that she may have used. "The flow was very organic," he says. "The guidelines weren't set out from the beginning, but it was almost implied what they were."

Because of McMillan's mentoring, Rodney has become more confident, daring, and to the point. "She's direct in an effective way that I can't put words to," he states. With her as an example, Rodney has found the courage and drive to challenge professors with whom he might disagree, and no longer finds it intimidating to talk with previously "unapproachable" professors. Thanks to McMillan, says Rodney, "I can be an active participant in my academic endeavors instead of just taking grades."

Having had such a positive experience with McMillan, Rodney wishes nothing but good things for other students. "I wish that mentoring in general would be more widely available in every field," he says. "That people be less afraid to ask for a mentor, to genuinely see that, hey, I could use a mentor in this situation."