

Julian Resasco learned from the best. Throughout his college career, he had multiple mentors to help him with the different aspects of his life and field of study. But one mentor in particular made an impression on him, and because of that man, Resasco has been able to make the transition from being a mentee to becoming a mentor.

As a PhD student, Resasco was working with a freshman undergraduate student who knew that she wanted to be an entomologist. “She was so dedicated,” Resasco recalls. With his guidance, the student was able to follow her dream, and even received an NSF graduate research fellowship. “It says more about her than me as a mentor,” says Resasco. “She went far and followed her dreams, and I was able to help her.”

When pressed, Resasco cites the characteristics of his former mentor as his reasons for mentoring success. “I tried to emulate some of the things that I saw and that were effective in my mentor, which was having an open-door policy, being very giving of my time, helping with writing, and recognizing that drive and interest and helping that student run with it,” he says. “These aren’t necessarily things that come naturally, but they’re things that are effective. I don’t think there was anything inherent other than wanting to be good, and seeking out ways to do that.”

It’s also important, Resasco believes, to be introspective, and to communicate excitement about projects and accomplishments. “What makes thing successful is if you make the mentee want to work hard and achieve success on their own,” says Resasco. “It’s important to let them be challenged, but know when to step in and help out. At the edge of the mentee’s comfort zone is where the learning and the growing happens.”

But according to Resasco, he wouldn’t be half the mentor he is today without the influence of what he calls his “mentor for life.” When applying for an NSF graduate research fellowship, Resasco was seeking help in writing the essays. When they got down to the wire, his mentor reached out and invited him to his home, where they worked late into the night. “It really stood out to me,” recalls Resasco. “I feel like most mentors would clock out, but he went above and beyond.”

His mentor also encouraged him, as an underrepresented student, to work with underrepresented minorities. “It was one of the hardest things I did in graduate school, but it was very rewarding,” Resasco says. “Because of him, I’m a lot more thoughtful about being a good mentor, and about thinking about his good characteristics.”

Which is exactly what Resasco recommends to his fellow mentors. “Think about what it takes to be a good mentor,” he advises. “Do research. Then see where you can make improvements.”