

APR. 2021

# AN INTERVIEW WITH TRAVIS DOCKTER

Part 1

*Bolder Impact Story*


---



*Travis and his mentee  
on the Alumni trip to  
Montana, 2018*

Weekdays, Travis Dockter is a super statistician inside Mayo Clinic's Cancer Center. In addition to his day job and hobbies like running, hiking and playing card, board and video games with friends, Travis is a Rockstar youth mentor. He got an early start at it, as a high school volunteer informally tutoring middle school students, continuing as a work-study mentor through his college years at North Dakota State University – including summers. So perhaps it's no surprise that when he started up his career with Mayo Clinic 8 years ago he eventually sought out mentoring opportunities in Rochester, hoping to give back and make connections in his new community.

We wanted to dive deeper into Travis's motivations for continuing to be a youth mentor – and succeed so well at it – so we've asked him a few personal questions. Turns out he's as good in an interview as in his role as a mentor. But you decide for yourself...



---

Bolder Options: What inspired you – while most of high school is all about friends, homework, sports, cool footwear – to begin mentoring younger students with their homework help and college prep?


Travis: It was sort of an informal thing at first, helping middle school students with homework for a course credit in my senior year of high school. For about an hour during school, the students dropped into groups or in ones or twos, whoever showed up. I was able to work with a bunch of students, sometimes they just came in to study on their own because it was a supportive space. It was a rewarding experience getting to know them and cheer them on.

Bolder Options: As a freshman at NDSU, one of the first things you did was sign up for Upward Bound, a work-study job tutoring high school students to help them study and prepare for college. What about this experience launched your interest and commitment to mentoring after college?

Travis: Again, the Upward Bound tutoring wasn't one-to-one but we did work in small groups. Beyond tutoring during the school year, some of the tutors and I continued working with students through the summer, teaching courses in various topics, figuring out how to organize field trips, and ultimately helping some students with their college applications and resume-building. We even served as references for some of our students. It was rewarding to build relationships with them, many of whom were immigrants or refugees, some working on their English proficiency, with very different cultural backgrounds than the historical Fargo, North Dakota community. This work-study job forced me to get creative with my communication and planning skills and mentoring strategies.

Bolder Options: On-the-job is often the best way to learn new skills! What were the most important “creative” strategies you developed because of your college mentoring efforts?

Travis: I think the most important thing I learned was to appreciate – and value—cultural differences, and identify the similarities we all share. Eventually, my efforts and relationships with the high school students made me feel more confident beyond my own cultural frame of reference. It forced me to think outside my own box and I'll always be grateful for the college years I spent in Upward Bound.



APR. 2021

# AN INTERVIEW WITH TRAVIS DOCKTER

## Part 2

### *Bolder Impact Story*

---



*Travis and his mentee on the Alumni trip to the Fond Du Lac Reservation, 2018*

Bolder Options: Barely settled in your new job, in your new town, you sought out more mentoring opportunities. How and why did you connect with Bolder Options?

Travis: I found out about the United Way's website looking for volunteers, and some of the opportunities included mentoring. Bolder Options was among the Rochester area mentoring programs, and their wellness focus really appealed to me.

After settling in to my new job and community, I felt like I now had many of the same goals described as mentee goals – establishing healthy habits for diet, exercise and overall attention to my own self-care.

Bolder Options: What were your first reactions to Bolder Options as a mentoring organization, based on your previous mentoring experiences?

Travis: I'm totally on my own now, and I had to decide for myself how to participate in community, volunteer my time and share my passions. I chose to try out Bolder Options because it seemed like a good fit for me. I'm still a Bolder mentor today because of the dedicated and supportive – and really fun – Bolder staff. First, the volunteer coordinator was super welcoming, the vetting process was appropriately rigorous, and they took great care to identify good M & M – mentor-mentee – matches.

---

Bolder Options: You're "still" a Bolder Options mentor – how long have you been with Bolder Options?

Travis: I've mentored five youth over the past 8 years. I recently graduated from Bolder's one-year program with one mentee, as well meeting with another informally about once a month. Two other former mentees and I occasionally find ways to get together or stay in contact as we can, with this pandemic making all connections more difficult. My first mentee and I made it together through our M & M year, but we didn't "click" as well as I'd hoped, so we're not really in touch anymore.

Bolder Options: So, what more can you say about not "clicking" like you'd hoped, and what other bits of experience and advice would you want future mentors to know about engaging their mentees?

Travis: If I had to offer my "advice" for anyone considering or just beginning a one-to-one mentoring program, I'd start by saying take yourself out of the center of the relationship. A few other things in no order are:

- Focus on what your mentee wants – to do, learn, accomplish – and don't push too hard for activities that don't interest them.
- Help them set reasonable goals, no matter what they might be. What might seem like an unimportant or small goal to you might feel like a scary stretch for them. Encourage them from where they are in their confidence journey; small steps can be huge.
- Talk about topics that interest them, and ask the questions that can draw them out and see if there's a way for you to connect – or not (which is ok) but you can still be interested.
- Be as present and available as possible, without pushing. Sometimes they just want someone to listen to them and to be heard.

More than anything I've found that the most important thing about being a mentor is to just be yourself. I feel like the mentees in my life have all mostly wanted someone they could trust, who listens and is genuinely interested in what they are into or struggling with.



# AN INTERVIEW WITH TRAVIS DOCKTER

## Part 3

### *Bolder Impact Story*

---



Travis and his mentee after completing the Color Dash 5k.

Bolder Options: No surprise you received the Diane and Alan Page mentoring award last year! [Hey I couldn't find anything about this award online – LUCY and/or TRAVIS, can you fill this in?] Can you also offer potential or incoming mentors some suggestions specifically about being a Bolder Options mentor and any other information that could help them have the best experience?

Travis: Yeah – who knew? – turns out there's more to successful mentoring than a good relationship with your mentee. Here's some of the things I've learned from you all.

First of all, it is OK to decide NOT to become a Bolder Options mentor. If, after you've explored the possibility, you don't feel like you can make such a commitment. A less intensive mentoring program or other volunteer opportunity might be a better fit for you, and there are other programs out there to explore. The Bolder Options program is not for everyone, they know that. FWIW, everyone I've met who's been through it will say it is the best thing they've ever done.

REGARDING TIME COMMITMENT: With the Bolder Options program, you need to be very aware of the time commitment (it's why it works). Though it's just a one-year commitment (unlike some other longer-term mentor programs), it's time-intensive. You need to be prepared to spend about two hours with your mentee every week for 52 weeks. Two hours each week is what it takes to really get to know and become a consistent, trusted person in your mentee's life. That said, the program is VERY supportive, you're not on your own to come up with something to do each week. Bolder Options offers lots of different things to do as a group with other mentors and mentees. The awesome staff are your support system and available to talk or text as needed if you're ever feeling out of your depth or need fresh ideas.

---

OR A MISMATCH: It is not beyond possibility to discover that no matter how long, how hard and how many ways you've tried, you and your mentee haven't been able to develop a working relationship. Or you might realize (too late!) that as much as you'd like to, you're not actually able to maintain the necessary time commitment. Bolder Options works really hard – based on years of experience – to make good successful pairs, but nobody's a wizard. If it is clear that there isn't a fruitful way forward, the Bolder Options team will be there to support you (and your mentee) and respectfully help you opt-out of the mentoring program.

REGARDING PARENTS/CAREGIVERS: Your mentee's parent, parents or caregiver(s) can be a great partner in your mentor-mentee relationship. (Or not.) Best to make respectful connection(s) with the parent figure(s) in your mentee's life as soon – yet not forcefully – as you can, ideally during the first few meetings. You're not necessarily going to be friends, as much as teachers aren't with their students' parents, and that's fine. To me it seems my responsibility is to be cordial and respectful (I'm the new guy), keep our lines of communication open, and share relevant information (without betraying a mentee's confidence). I haven't yet had a bad relationship with a parent or caregiver, though Bolder Options staff can probably describe things that could go wrong and what to do then.

Bolder Options: You've just written our next brochure, thanks. Except for one other thing – can you describe your experience with the Bolder Options Alumni Program?

Travis: Being a part of the Bolder Options Alumni program has been great! The Alumni Program provides support for mentors and mentees who want to continue their relationship beyond the one-year program, as well as help pair new mentors and mentees together who lost contact with their previous mentors/mentees. My mentees have been able to reach new goals like running 5k races and obtaining jobs, as well as travel places they had never been like Fon Du Lac and Yellowstone National Park, all thanks to the Alumni Program.

Bolder Options: Thank you, Travis. Seriously, we couldn't have said any of these things better, or more convincingly from the experiences you've had. And you're correct, nobody's a wizard here, but what parting words or non-wizard wisdom would you put out there?

Travis: But I want to be a wizard. Anyway, I'd say again that mentoring with Bolder Options is the very best thing I can do – especially for myself. Also: there's no such thing as a super-mentor, it's no good to strive to be a super-mentor. You just need to BE – to be yourself, to be reliable, to be honest as you can, and to be actively present. Youth are smarter than we are, and they can smell insincerity, so just be genuinely, sincerely YOU.