

TEN BEHAVIOURS THAT DISTRESS SUPERVISORS

From *Vlog 9: How to upset your supervisor*, Tara Brabazon

Transcript summary:

Supervisors have a duty of care to their HDR students; they worry about their students, and they can become fearful for them. They can also feel disappointed when students do not act in their own best interests to become the best scholar they can be. Tara Brabazon identifies ten student behaviours that disappoint and worry supervisors:

1. A student does little or no reading.

Tara says, 'Reading is the oxygen for your PhD'; 'If you don't like reading, you shouldn't be at university.' Big ideas emerge from reading, and supervisors want to talk about the big ideas with their students; they don't want to talk about under-developed 'opinions'.

2. A student does no writing.

'We learn to write by writing'...Supervisors cannot work with you if there's no writing...they can't assess your current level of expertise.'

Writing of interest includes annotated bibliographies, or a discussion of ethical considerations in your research project.

3. A student does not reference their writing.

If students do not offer writing that references the creditable refereed work of others, supervisors 'start to panic.'

4. A student does not embed corrections from a previous draft before they present the next draft to the supervisor.

Tara asks "How would you feel if someone repeatedly ignored all the work you had done commenting on and editing your drafts?" She says this is a common oversight of students, one that infuriates supervisors. She recommends that all students take the time to go through supervisor comments on their work, and to send back comments that show they have 'understood the supervisor's suggestions, and are happy to accept or wish to offer alternative suggestions. A two-way relationship is important. Supervisors make changes to your work for a reason.

5. A student does not address issues about commentary or approach despite repeated requests from the supervisor.

Supervisors make useful and pointed suggestions. For example, they suggest that students: read more widely or deeply; analyse research findings or ideas in greater depth; delete thesis references to discredited scholarship; build up their bibliography. When students ignore their advice, it pains them. Tara says, 'Please listen. Please believe us.'

6. A student misses pre-arranged meetings.

Tara notes that supervisors, like all university employees, have 90% of their time organised by others; the remaining 10% they can devote to their many students. It is very difficult to reschedule missed meetings – she implores students to do the best they can to get to meetings, and to get there on time. This is a professional arrangement that invites professional meeting behaviour.

7. A student has stopped writing, is procrastinating, has developed other interests.

It is important to remember that a student has only three years in which to develop the necessary skills to be acknowledged as a researcher. All of that time is needed, so it is important for students to think of their PhD projects as occupying the most important place in their lives for those three years.

8. A student complains about everything.

Tara calls these students 'The Whingers' – valuable time is taken up with complaints that could better be used for scholarship. Remember, 'Time with your supervisor is precious'.

9. A student is emotionally volatile and unpredictable in behaviour.

Unpredictable things can happen in the course of three years; it's important that students present as committed, robust and focused. Motivation is essential to successful completion. Tara notes that students need to be 'centred' and not emotionally volatile. "Your behaviour has an impact on supervisors...How are you helping your supervisor to help you if you're slamming doors in their face?....If you're aggressive, supervisors get nervous."

10. A student is silent or moody.

One of the most difficult behaviours for a supervisor to manage is silence: the student who doesn't speak makes it impossible for a relationship to develop. Tara urges students to communicate with their supervisors: "They need to know what you are thinking".

Finally, Tara asks you to reflect: "Have you ever done any of these behaviours?" If you have, this might be why you've seen your supervisor emotionally withdraw from the process. She reminds us that the university is the supervisor's workplace, and that it is important to value "integrity, respect and kindness". It is also important to "act in your own best interests: to read and write and create and become the best scholar you can be"; "keep lines of communication open so that together we can come up with a solution." Her final piece of advice is one of the most important: "**LISTEN to what your supervisor is saying; listening is the bedrock of scholarship**".

Brabazon, T. (2016, May 26). *Vlog 9: How to upset your supervisor* [Video file]. Retrieved from <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=LfdWREVFSPY>