

Chapter 23

Ed Fink: High Research Standards and a Participant-Centric Approach—Don't Settle for Less

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Ed was a force within the Department of Communication at the University of Maryland, and his role in my graduate career was instrumental. Admittedly, when I first met Ed, he was incredibly intimidating. As I participated in Ed's courses and eventually had the privilege of him advising my dissertation, I came to know Ed as a kind, good-humored, and intellectually passionate character driven by the desire for accuracy and precision. Of the many experiences that demonstrate my perspective, two stand out. First, as part of my dissertation, I had just finished a pilot study where I was testing my future survey instrument. I was in Ed's office complaining that my participants "just didn't understand some of my questions and answered them all wrong" with the implication that my participants had failed my pilot test. Ed looked at me and calmly stated "no, you just didn't ask the questions the right way," and then explained that my pilot was still successful because I learned what did not work. I went on to conduct two more pilots to ensure a reliable and valid instrument for my dissertation. The second example also is related to my dissertation experience. At some point during my third pilot study, Ed was questioning why I had selected a particular data collection procedure for my survey administration. Without thinking I said, "because it's easier" (mind you, I was exhausted and had already done two pilot studies). He again looked at me and told me it was not a good research choice and then said "remember, it takes just as much time to conduct bad research as it does to conduct good research." Together, these two examples taught me important life lessons that I have applied across my personal and professional life. With respect to research, Ed's sage advice highlighted that the burden of

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ensuring accuracy is, and always should be, on the researcher and not the participant. As well, he reiterated the importance of high standards and values when conducting research and how critical it is to have the desire and willingness to put in the effort to get it right. I have shared Ed's lessons many, many times as a parent, an employer, and an instructor and always will be grateful to have had the opportunity to work with and learn from Ed.