Self-Efficacy Case Study 2: The Slob

A graduate student mentor was frustrated because her rotation student mentee was not running successful experiments. While the rotation student had great enthusiasm for the project, each experiment failed because of some sloppy error: forgetting to pH the gel buffer, forgetting to add a reagent to a reaction, or forgetting to turn down the voltage on a gel box.

After a month of discussions, and careful attempts to teach the rotation student habits that would compensate for forgetfulness, the graduate student mentor was ready to give up. She spoke with her faculty adviser (the PI in the lab) and asked for advice, hoping that she could fix the problem. The adviser offered to work with the rotation student mentee. When the rotation student walked into his office the next day, the faculty adviser said, “I hear you’re a slob in the lab. You gotta clean up your act if we’re going to get any data out of you.” Seeing the crushed and humiliated look on the student’s face, he quickly added, “I’m a slob too—that’s why I’m in here pushing papers around and not in the lab doing the hard stuff like you guys!”

Focus on what you, as the PI, would do to build and strengthen the mentee’s research self-efficacy using the four factors that build self-efficacy discussed in today’s session.