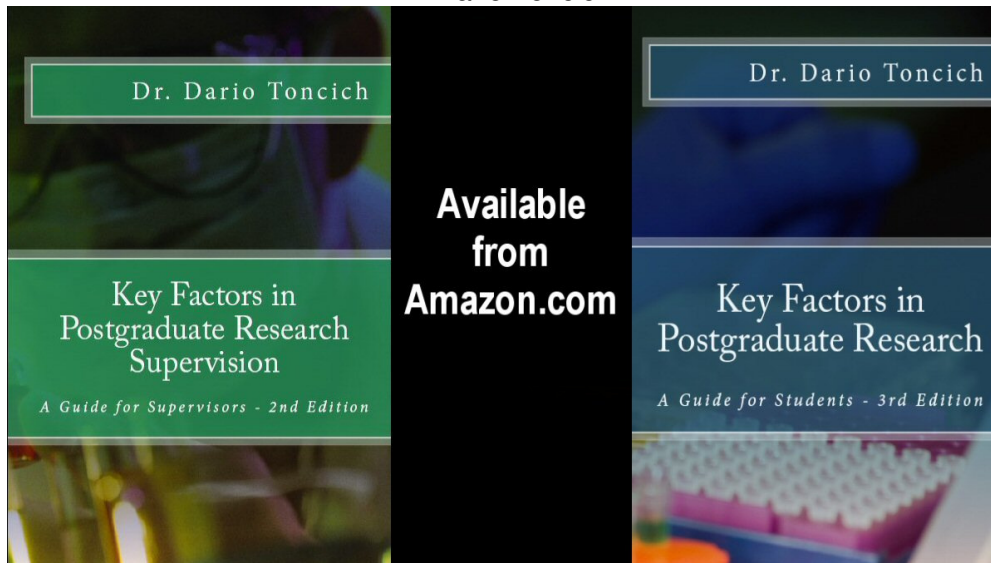


# 10 Tips for PhD Research

Dr. Dario Toncich



## Tip Number 6 – Learn Despite - Not Because of - Your Supervisor/s

One of the most common complaints from PhD candidates relates to the quality of the supervisors. The range of complaints generally varies from the lack of knowledge of the supervisors; tardiness/quality of feedback, and exploitation of students for the supervisor's own personal advancement. Notwithstanding any unacceptable behavior from a supervisor (discrimination, harassment, victimization, bullying, etc.) there is much to be learned from poor supervision.

Research students need to understand that those who learn because of their supervisors are rote learning – those who learn despite their supervisors are potentially getting a far better insight into their research and the management of human beings.

From the research student's perspective, the warning is to be careful what you wish for. A supervisor who is all-knowing about the field; has unlimited time to advise and provide feedback and has a great input into the decision-making associated with the PhD may generate a good short-term outcome – that is, the PhD – but there are longer term issues to be considered.

A person who has completed a PhD needs to be independent and not led by the hand. A person who has completed a PhD and wants a professional career in research or elsewhere needs to learn to deal with difficult people. Having an eminent supervisor may prove to be a useful short-term objective – but students need to consider whether their PhD will be assessed on the basis of their own work – or as mere supporting work for a highly regarded academic.

A research student who can defy the odds by achieving a PhD under the supervision of someone who is not particularly knowledgeable about the field, or who puts little effort into the supervisory process, may end up looking back with a greater sense of achievement than one who just did what they were told by an eminent person.

Difficult supervisors are also a particularly good vehicle for learning about people management – how to negotiate; how to sidestep or manage difficult human traits; how to work independently; how to resolve problems without being spoon-fed all the answers.