TA Doesn’t Stand for Tomato Attack

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Mentoring grad students is an important form of teaching.

But it’s not the only form of teaching the grad student may be involved in...

And it’s critical that the grad student receives mentoring to be a TA as well.

The grad student will inevitably be compared with the instructor, and that comparison will drive any assumptions about the TA’s knowledge and ability.

...which they may take out on the TA, and, well...

...the last thing we want is a scene like this!

And the students in the class may resent decreased contact time with the instructor...
There are tons of benefits for graduate students when they TA: financial support, improved communication skills, having their understanding challenged and potentially broadened.

But those intellectual benefits will only come about if the grad student is engaged and invested in the class.

And the TA’s involvement is critical not only to ensuring the success of students in the course, and if they are a lab TA, their involvement can ensure critical safety standards are upheld, too!

Proper mentoring, training, and a firm limit to the TA’s time commitment is critical. Otherwise, the grad student may focus entirely on being a TA as a workload, and it’s a terrible experience for everyone.

So be clear and follow through!

1.) Define the role and expectations for the TA’s involvement in the course

2.) Define the intellectual skills necessary

3.) Define the interpersonal skills necessary

4.) Support and mentor to ensure they can achieve as you want/need them to

A critical component to the grad student TA’s success is the guidance you provide. And your mentoring will pay off with how they interact with your students.

Help your TA, help your students. And save the tomatoes.