How to Get the Most From Your Mentor

Jeanne M. Clark, MD, MPH
Professor of Medicine and Epidemiology
The Johns Hopkins University

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Origin of the Mentor

• **Mentor** or Mentes
  – From Greek mythology
  – In his old age, a friend of Odysseus
  – Left in charge of Odysseus’ son, Telemachus

• **Mentor**: a trusted friend, counselor or teacher.
Modern Definition of Mentoring

• A relationship in which a person of greater rank or expertise teaches, guides and develops a novice in an organization or profession.

The experience has “an unusually beneficial effect on the protégé’s personal and professional development”.


Example of Mentors

Yoda (top) and Obi Wan Kenobi from Star Wars

Giles from Buffy the Vampire Slayer

Dr. David Levine from JHU DOM
The Essence of Mentoring

The Mentor has the professional expertise and the political know-how and shares these with the Mentee.

“Mentors teach what textbooks cannot.”

The Mentor accepts responsibility for the Mentee.


Role Model vs. Mentor

- Can function from a distance
- Excellent example but not personalized
- Passive role
- Unknowing effect
- Functions better up close
- Personalized input and attention
- Active role
- Conscious effort
Both Role Models and Mentors can have a strong impact on individuals.

A Good Mentor should also be a Good Role Model, but a Good Role Model is not necessarily a Good Mentor.

#1 Rule

To get the most from a Mentor,

You must HAVE

a Mentor
Roles of a Mentor

• **Teacher or Tutor**
  – Orients Mentee, helps locate resources

• **Counselor/Coach/Advisor**
  – Gives career advice and personal support; serves as sounding board and problem-solver

• **Intervener**
  – Intercedes on Mentee’s behalf; runs interference

• **Sponsor**
  – Recommends and promotes career of Mentee

• How many of you have primary mentors?

• What are examples of important things your mentor does or has done for you?
Traits of a Good Mentor

- Objective
- Established in field
- Able to critically evaluate new ideas
- Able to invest in another’s success
- Accepts responsibility
- Approachable
- Available
- Enthusiastic
- Respectful of others
- Insightful
- Empathic
- Honest

A Good Mentor Knows:

- Good science and how to guide a Mentee to it
- Requirements for Mentee’s career track
  - Stages of a career and promotions processes
- “The rules of the road” – the informal ones
- How to get funding, get published, manage staff...
- How to balance multiple demands both personally and professionally
A Good Mentor is Able to:

• Communicate this knowledge
• Listen well
• Give effective and constructive feedback
• Evaluate progress
• Identify and help remove obstacles

Everyone Should Have a Primary Mentor

BUT,

you may need more than one person advising or mentoring you.

Develop a Network of People
Junior vs. Senior Faculty

- Junior
  - More approachable
  - More available
  - Closer to the struggles

- Senior
  - More experienced
  - More established
  - More connected
  - More resources

Consider a paired approach

Questions?

Comments?
Everyone is an Good Example of something, even if it is a Good Example of what not to do.

Or

How to Spot a Toxic Mentor

The Avoider

- Initially enthusiastic, later inaccessible
- Not available when the need is greatest
- Difficult to get to know personally
- Forgets to share important information

“Of course we’ll get together, but I’m too busy today.”
The Dumper

• Opposite of the Avoider
• Delighted to give you opportunities, extra work, assignments, more responsibility
• Does not give adequate guidance

“A Protégé?
I’d love a dedicated assistant.”

The Criticizer

• Believes mentoring is a license to point out mistakes
• Gives you responsibility, maybe too soon, then criticizes you for inexperience
• Unconsciously keeps you subordinate

“Let me show you why that wasn’t the right way to do it...”
**The Grinch**

- Is sour about everything, the institution, the management, peers
- Gathers a group of malcontents around to trade gripes and grievances
- No mentoring – just poisoning

**The Lone Wolf**
(or Queen Bee)

- Doesn’t believe that you should **show** you need help
- May not **really** believe that you **need** or **deserve** help

“*When I was at your stage in my career...*”
The User

• Uses Mentee as spy in the ranks
• Uses Mentee to do all the work
• Uses Mentee as pleasant companion, source of ideas, target of sexual advances

“Could you just do this for me, it’s important.”
“My spouse doesn’t understand me.”

Getting Started
One Step at a Time

• Meet with a variety of different faculty members
  – Do some homework beforehand

• Find those with mutual interests, who seem to be experienced, yet interested and accessible

• Go back and meet with these
  – Get “the scoop” on their track record; ask around

• Identify the one (or two) that “clicks”
  – You will be spending a lot of time with this person, it should be a good fit

Close the Deal

Select the person you want to mentor you

Make an explicit request
Set the Foundation

• Frequency of Meeting
  – Will depend on need, but set schedule and adjust
  – Every 1-2 weeks is recommended during fellowship

• Mentor’s expectations

• Consider a contract or compact
  – AAMC Compact: [https://www.aamc.org/initiatives/postdoccompact/](https://www.aamc.org/initiatives/postdoccompact/)

Commitment of Mentee (PostDoc)

• I acknowledge that I have the primary responsibility for the development of my own career.
• I will develop a mutually defined research project with my mentor that includes well-defined goals and timelines.
• I will perform my research activities conscientiously, maintain good research records, and catalog and maintain all tangible research materials that result from the research project.
• I will respect all ethical standards when conducting my research ...
• I will show respect for and will work collegially with my coworkers, support staff, and other individuals with whom I interact.
• I will endeavor to assume progressive responsibility and management of my research project(s) as it matures.
• I will seek regular feedback on my performance and ask for a formal evaluation at least annually.
• I will have open and timely discussions with my mentor concerning the dissemination of research findings and the distribution of research materials to third parties.
• I recognize that I have embarked on a career requiring “lifelong learning.”
• I will actively seek opportunities outside the laboratory (e.g. professional development seminars and workshops in oral communication, scientific writing, and teaching) to develop the full set of professional skills necessary to be successful for my chosen career.
Commitment of Mentor

• I will ensure that a mutually agreed upon set of expectations and goals are in place at the outset of the postdoctoral training period, and I will work with the postdoctoral appointee to create an individual career development plan.
• I will strive to maintain a relationship with the postdoctoral appointee that is based on trust and mutual respect.
• I will promote all ethical standards for conducting research...
• I will ensure that the postdoctoral appointee has sufficient opportunities ...
• I will provide the appointee with the required guidance and mentoring...
• I will provide a training environment that is suited to the individual needs of the postdoctoral appointee in order to ensure his/her personal and professional growth
• I will encourage the interaction of the postdoctoral appointee with fellow scientists both intra- and extramurally...
• I will ensure that the research performed by a postdoctoral appointee is submitted for publication in a timely manner and that she/he receives appropriate credit for the work she/he performs.
• I recognize that there are multiple career options available for a postdoctoral appointee and will provide assistance in exploring appropriate options.
• I will commit to being a supportive colleague to postdoctoral appointees as they transition the next stage of their career and to the extent possible, throughout their professional life.

Getting Started

• Clearly lay out goals/objectives
  – Short-term \textit{and} Long-term
• Set timeline for achieving goals
  – Short-term \textit{and} Long-term
• Success criteria
  – How will you know if it is working?
  – Sets the stage for what to do if it is not
• Identify predictable barriers/challenges
  – Personal and professional
Communication: Getting What You Need

• Exchange contact info
  – Routine: email, office phone, pager, cell?
  – Urgent: cell phone, OK to call at home?

• Learn mentor’s schedule and habits
  – What days/times unavailable (eg clinic)
  – When is email checked

Project Specific Discussions

• Discuss precise role on project
  – Especially in setting of research team
  – Primary data collection? Data management? Data analysis?

• Discuss anticipated product(s)
  – Manuscripts
  – Abstracts and Presentations

• Discuss authorship for each product

• Projects may occur with someone other than the primary mentor
  – Discuss all projects with mentor
Universal Authorship Requirements

1. Substantial contributions to conception and design, acquisition of data, or analysis and interpretation of data

2. Drafting the article or revising it critically for important intellectual content;

3. Final approval of the version to be published.

Conditions 1, 2, and 3 must all be met; otherwise consider listing in Acknowledgments.

Order of Authorship

• 1st Author
  – Primary role on that paper/abstract
  – Submission to journal or meeting
  – Handles revisions, proofs, resubmissions

• Senior Author (last author)
  – Ultimate responsibility for project
  – PI or Senior Mentor

• All others secondary
  – Occasionally see 2nd author designated as having equal role as 1st author
What do Mentors Want/Expect?

- Honest, hard work by the mentee
- Receptiveness to feedback/ideas
- Some recognition / thanks for the time and effort they have spent
- Productivity
  - Mentors get recognized for the success of their mentees (papers, awards, grants)
- Like proud parents, ultimately Mentors feel successful when their Mentee is successful!

Hint: agree on definition of success

How to Be a Good Mentee

- Take responsibility for your own development
- Identify personal goals
- Assess your needs
- Actively seek feedback
- Use information to improve
- Show respect to your mentor
- Stay open to new ideas
- Observe your Mentor
  - Use as Role Model where appropriate
- Track your own progress
- Give your Mentor reasons to believe it is worthwhile to work with you
How to Act like a Good Mentee

• Meet with your Mentor, take initiative
• Pay attention to details and deadlines
• Be willing to ask for help
• Be flexible
• Demonstrate qualities that are “attractive”
  – Interested, energetic, enthusiastic, competent, creative, full of initiative, honest

Take Time to Assess Progress

• Periodically assess your progress towards your stated goals
  – Every 3-6 months early on
  – At least yearly thereafter

• Also assess the Mentoring process
  – Meeting frequency
  – Timeliness of meeting deadlines / feedback
  – Ability to get “urgent” help when needed
What to Do if It is Not Working

• If you can, try to figure out what is not working
  – Discuss with Mentor
  – Work it out
    • Involve a trusted 3rd party
  – If not resolved, end the relationship

• If you aren’t sure what is not working
  – Discuss with a trusted friend or advisor
  – Discuss with Mentor, work it out or end it

This can be easier if things were discussed up front

What to Do if It is Really Not Working

• In cases of Abuse, Fraud, Unwanted Advances
  – Find out University or School policies
    • JHSPH Policies and Procedures
      – Student grievance procedures (password protected)
      – https://my.jhsph.edu/Resources/PoliciesProcedures/ppm/Page s/default.aspx
    • JHSOM GME Policies
What to Do When It Is Working

• Continue to assess goals/progress
• Be flexible and open to change
  – Your needs and the mentors will change
• Over time, differentiate and become independent
  – Most relevant once on faculty
• Over time, become more like colleagues

Take Home Points

• Find a Mentor
• Outline an agreement, goals and timeline
• Develop a network of advisors
• Assess progress towards goals
• Assess mentoring relationship
• Work towards independence

Remember:
the experience should have
“an unusually beneficial effect on the protégé’s personal and professional development”
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My network of advisors

Final Questions?