Making the Most of Your Mentor: A Guide For Mentees

Surviving and Thriving in the Research Years
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Agenda

- Introduction to mentoring
- Stages of mentoring
- Special Situations
- Cases and discussion

From the mentee’s perspective!

Originally presented at Society of General Internal Medicine 2006 and 2007
Judy Zerzan, MD, MPH, University of Colorado
Introduction to Mentoring
What is mentorship?

- Dynamic
- Collaborative
- Professional Development
- Two Way Street
- Personal Development

Mentoring: Advancement and enjoyment of career
A Mentor is different than a...

- **Manager**
  - Directs work
  - Focus on performance
  - Motivated by organizational needs

- **Role Model**
  - A distant relationship
  - Passive role

- **Sponsor**
  - Champions
  - Focus on career development
  - Motivated by advancement goals
Why do I need a mentor?

- Increase productivity
- Improve career advancement
- Increase achievement of grant funding
What does a mentee do?

**Mentor**
- Advanced rank/experience who guides, teaches, develops novice
- Skill development
- Academic guidance
- Research
- Personal development

**Mentee**
- Active role: plan and set agenda
- Follow through
- Ask questions
- Ask for feedback
- Listen
- Managing up
How can I be good at it?

Mentor
- Available and accessible
- Coach & role model
- Recognize potential
- Provide opportunities
- Inspire to take risks
- Improve
  - Sense of identity
  - Competence
  - Effectiveness

Mentee
- Well organized and takes initiative
- Creativity and motivation
- Open to new ideas
- Seeks feedback
- Respectful and considerate
- Know resources
  - especially other people
Stages of Mentoring
Initiation: Initially hierarchical
Cultivation: Interactive sharing
Separation: Plan to independence
Redefinition: Collegial relationship
Stages of Mentoring

Initiation: Positive emotions
Cultivation: Relationship reality
Separation: Negative emotions & stress
Redefinition: Gratitude
### Initiation: First Steps

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<th>Clarify <strong>Needs</strong></th>
<th>Set A <strong>Clear Vision</strong></th>
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<td>- Write down goals</td>
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<td>- Be specific</td>
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<td>- Even if you don’t know – try!</td>
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Securing A Mentor...or two!

Where to Look
- Target those you know & respect
- Look w/in your department & outside
- Conduct informational interviews
- Ask for recommendations

Common Difficulties
- Perceived unavailability
- Fear of rejection
- Career indecision
- Trying to find “all-in-one” mentor

What to Do
- Be persistent and don’t give up
- If uncertain, seek someone to guide
- Find more than one
- Find junior and senior mentors
Tips for the First Meeting

- Market yourself: you are recruiting mentor
  - Don’t have to ask formally at a 1st meeting
- Communicate clear goals & needs
  - Being prepared demonstrates organization
- Give positive feedback
- Bring a specific and limited request for help to engage the prospective mentor (e.g., research idea)
  - Ask permission to request more help later
  - State exactly what the help might be
- Be accountable: follow up & stay engaged
  - Make mentor feel appreciated
Cultivation
Cultivation: Agreement on Structure and Objectives

- Frequency of meetings
- Key responsibilities & needs
- Confidentiality
- Mutual expectations & goals
- Measures of success & progress

Make Relationship A High Priority
Cultivation: Managing Up

- Understand yourself and your mentor—Goal is to develop a healthy working relationship compatible with each person’s work style and expectations
- The mentee takes ownership of the relationship
  - Let your mentor know what you need
  - Set own goal schedule and stick to it
  - Be responsive to suggestions
  - Make yourself available, be flexible
  - Straightforward, bring up issues
  - Directly ask how success judged
Managing Up

Let your mentor know what you need
What is your work style?

What is your mentor’s work style?
Managing Up - Communication

- Manage the flow of information
- Ask directly about mentor’s preferred style
  - Detailed facts/figures vs. overview
  - Email vs. phone
  - Listener vs. reader
- Listen actively, ask questions
- Avoid defensiveness—your goal is to improve
- Think very carefully if disagree
  - Should put forth own ideas
  - Disagree respectfully, ask clarifying questions
Meetings

- Agree on regular meeting schedule
- Set agenda for meetings
  - Check-in
  - Discussion of 2-3 topics
  - Long-term goals
  - Short-term action items
- Actively inform on progress in preferred style
- Identify what is expected prior to next meeting

Use your mentor’s time wisely!
Stages of Mentoring
Kathy Kram

- **Initiation**: Initially hierarchical
- **Cultivation**: Interactive sharing
- **Separation**: Plan to independence
- **Redefinition**: Collegial relationship
Separation

- A natural evolution
- Ideally, a planned separation as mentees achieve goals and independence
- Are there future mentoring needs?
- Work toward a collegial relationship
But…

- Marked by conflict and negative emotions
- Anxiety
- Guilt
- Abandonment
- Resentment
Redefinition

- A new relationship
- Peer and colleague
- Friendship
- Gratitude
Special Situations
Special Situations

- Multiple mentors
- Long distance
- Dissatisfaction/problems
Ways to make it work:
• Clear roles & expectations
• Good relationship among mentors
• Complementary experience

Potential problems
• Unclear expectations
• Disagreement or competition
• Inefficient/overlap
Long Distance

- **Ways to make it work**
  - Establish locally and then continue
  - Occasional face time at meetings
  - Clear expectations

- **Potential problems**
  - Not as effective as on-site
  - Lack of direct observation
  - Problems with email or phone
Dissatisfaction and Termination

- Society of General Internal Medicine mentoring survey
  - 84% unsatisfactory mentoring relationship
  - 23% terminated mentoring relationship
- Most common complaints
  - Mentee did not follow through
  - Mentee did not use mentor’s time effectively
  - Poor fit with work style and/or personality
Mismatch of goals, commitment, expectations

Reluctance to own and pursue own development

Reluctance to ask for personal help

Mentor or mentee can suggest change
  • Depends on style how approach
  • Ask for advice
Know yourself

Work style

Other important relationships
  • Parents, teachers, coaches, professors

Sources of conflict

Sources of stress

Common issues
  • Need to please others
  • Independence
  • Control
  • Confidence
Mentees have an active role in mentoring
  - Know values
  - Know needs
  - Know styles
  - Manage up
  - Show appreciation
Mentoring requires time and nurturing
  - Worth the effort!
Cases and Discussion
Thuy is a 3rd year resident. She is interested in studying clinic care coordination because she has seen many areas for improvement in the structure of her own continuity clinic. There is a senior mentor she has approached for advice about setting up a small project to study proposed changes in the clinic. He is excited about her interest and wants her to do one of the research projects he already has underway instead of her own study.

- Is this a good idea?
- When should you join on with someone else’s projects vs. starting your own?
- When do you begin to assert your own ideas instead of following along on all your mentor’s projects?
Watson is in his 4th month of research. He sets up a meeting with his mentor to discuss his project. He wants to discuss an idea for a dose-response study and adjustments to protocols for his immuno-assays. He states the problem as he sees it. The mentor then interrupts and spends the rest of the meeting talking about ideas for future experiments, including mouse genetics. Watson feels overwhelmed by all there is to do, stops the planned experiments and spends the week learning about conditional knockouts. Watson starts presenting what he has learned plans at next meeting, but the mentor says, “Oh, we don’t have the facilities ready to do mouse genetics now.” The mentor then wants to know the results of Watson’s experiments, but Watson hasn’t done them and leaves feeling awful.

- What are sources of conflict and stress in this mentoring relationship?
- How can Watson respond?
John just started a fellowship and is finding his mentor is somewhat absent. He finds it takes several emails and phone calls in order to set up a meeting and once he has a meeting with his mentor she interrupts their conversation to answer the phone and works on email while they are talking. He feels like she doesn’t have time to help guide him. He has asked her about other people who might be able to help him with his projects and the only person she suggested wrote back “too busy” to his email request.

- What should he do?
- How do you know if the problem is you?
- When do you end a mentoring relationship vs. trying to work on it more?
- How do you end a mentoring relationship?
Siri, a Fellow, has been working in her mentor’s large laboratory for several years. She has led several projects to completion and publication. Her mentor recently assisted her to write her K award, which scored well but was not funded in the first submission, and she is truly grateful for the time and work he put in. Recently, though, she feels annoyed that her mentor has been putting excessive demands on her unrelated to her own studies. He is increasingly critical of her work, and seems to be nit-picking her writing and proposed studies. She wants to stay at her current institution and her Dept. is supportive, but her mentor keeps talking about her role on his pending grants. Siri is thinking about seeking other positions where she can be truly independent.

- How are Siri and her mentor doing at managing Siri’s transition to independence?
- Is it necessary to move to achieve independence?
Bibliography

Thanks!

- Judy Zerzan
- My mentors and (getting to be…) colleagues
  - Dedra Buchwald
  - Jack Goldberg
  - Mike Schwartz
  - David Cummings
  - Ginny Broundy
  - Tom Grabowski
  - Joann Elmore
- For your time and attention
“M was always accessible, and she always made it abundantly clear to her students that she would rather talk about science with them than do just about anything else.”

Excerpted from: Nature’s guide for mentors, 2007
“On many occasions I remember walking into her office convinced that I had been wasting my time, and then ten minutes later walking out with a smile and the sure knowledge that what was a bad result was indeed just what I needed!”

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