

Academic Life Series

Mentoring: On Having One and Being One

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The concept of mentoring derives from the classic story of Odysseus and his son. As Odysseus was about to embark on his journey, he asked his friend Mentor to provide guidance to his son Telemachus during his absence. From this beginning, mentorship has come to mean a relationship in which a mentor (usually a senior or older individual) takes on all or some of the following tasks with a mentee: advisor, teacher, protector, role model, sponsor, counselor, coach, boss or advocate. From research studies to personal anecdotes, it has been reported that successful people tend to have good mentors.

Good mentors can bring intellectual, political, and social expertise to the mentoring relationship. They can accelerate the speed of a mentee's career development or influence the mentee to explore new career opportunities. Unfortunately, not all mentors are equally capable. While individuals can succeed without a mentor or in spite of ineffective or bad mentoring, career-building is more difficult without the assistance of a good mentor

Traditionally the mentor-mentee relationship begins when two people meet at work or socially, and there's a chemistry between the two (similar to the unquantifiable something that leads to a good friendship). The timing is right for both to begin a mentoring relationship (one has the need to be mentored, the other has the desire to mentor). This fortuitous happening is generally how mentoring is envisioned and for some lucky individuals it does in fact happen this way.

But for many people, passively waiting for the "right" mentor or mentee to fall into their path has yet to happen and for some people it never will. An alternative approach is to gain insight into the intricacies of mentoring and engage in an active search for a mentor or mentors.

Since mentoring requires a commitment of time and effort, what do mentors and mentees gain in expending time on this one-to-one venture?

The Value Of Mentoring: For The Mentor

- A mentee can help mentor establish a legacy.
- A mentee can provide the mentor a role in the molding of successors.
- A mentee can provide an extension of the mentor's power base.
- A mentee can reinforce a mentor's professional identity.
- A mentee passes on personal knowledge that will help the mentor stay up-to-date in the field.
- A mentee can provide assistance with the mentor's projects.
- A mentee can bring to the mentor a sense of achievement or accomplishment.
- A mentee can help the mentor acquire new technical knowledge.

The Value Of Mentoring: For The Mentee

- A mentor provides a fund of knowledge that can expand a mentee's current information base and point her toward new resources.
- A mentor can "target" the skills needed by the mentee for successful career development by identifying the specific areas of improvement that will need to be addressed.

- A mentor provides individual recognition and encouragement that is particularly important in competitive fields.
- A mentor gives honest criticism and informal feedback and keeps the mentee's work "on track" and directed toward career goals and minimizes unnecessary career digressions.
- A mentor can demonstrate an increased awareness of the formal and informal rules of the organization and keep a mentee abreast of these sometimes conflicting sets of rules. A mentor brings political savvy.
- A mentor can advocate for the mentee (for promotion, salary, resources), keep the mentee's name before the people who make organizational decisions, and recommend a mentee for tasks useful to her career.
- A mentor can protect a mentee, particularly important during times of downsizing, management restructuring, or changes within the profession.
- A mentor may, if willing and competent, give advice on balancing multiple career and or personal tasks.

Before Initiating A Mentoring Relationship

For both mentors and mentees it is important not to limit the choice of mentor or mentee to only mentors narrow the available pool of talent, missing many qualified mentees with different backgrounds that may broaden their views as well as the perspectives of the organization and the profession.

Not all mentors can or will bring all the above mentioned elements of sponsor, counselor, etc., to a relationship. Which ones are most important need careful consideration by both mentor and mentee and should be clear to both parties. Otherwise, unstated and unmet expectations may lead to disappointment and a relationship that ends in anger and bitterness. While some experts suggest developing a written contract at the onset of the relationship clearly outlining the expectations of both parties, this is rarely done. As a minimum, though, both parties should understand the expected outcomes and goals to be realized. Issues of time commitments, the exact nature of the personal relationship, agreement on the anticipated course of the mentee's career, and mutual work demands should be clear to both mentor and mentee.

A mentee should examine a mentor's background to ensure that this is an individual who will be a good mentor for them.

Before Choosing A Mentor, Consider the Following:

- What does the mentee want from a mentor? Career guidance? Lifestyle advice? Both?
- Has the potential mentor been a good mentor to others? Contact previous mentees and ask them to describe what their experience was like, and then compare it to what you are looking for.
- Is this person known to advocate for others? Anyone can call herself a mentor, but a true mentor provides assistance, as needed.
- What is the mentor's standing, power and influence in the organization or in the discipline? The mentor need not be the CEO, president of a national association or a department head, but 'Feminine pronouns are used throughout for editorial simplicity. should be respected and well known for her position or expertise.
- What is the mentor's field of interest? It does not have to be the same as the mentee's, but it should be related enough that the mentor understands the rules for success in the mentee's field.
- Where is the mentor in her own career? Is the mentor just beginning or so deeply involved in her own career that she really won't have the time to mentor? Is the mentor at a career stage where she is still competitive about her own status or is the mentor advanced enough that a mentee's success is not a threat to her own standing.

- Does the mentor have a broad collegial network? Is the mentor willing to share that network in advancing the career of a mentee?

What Does A Mentor Look For In A Mentee?

A mentee should know what she brings to a mentoring relationship that makes her attractive to a potential mentor:

- Intelligence
- Ambition
- Ability to perform a mentor's tasks
- Loyalty
- Similar perceptions of work and the organization
- Commitment to the discipline or organization

These are demonstrated early in the mentoring relationship. But even the best mentor cannot guarantee a mentee success without the mentee's active participation. Mentoring is a two-way relationship, and a mentee must be conscientious about fulfilling her part in the relationship. The responsibilities of a mentee include:

- Timely follow-through on tasks assigned or suggested by the mentor;
- Initiative beyond what the mentor requests;
- Willingness to grow and develop skills suggested by the mentor;
- Willingness to collaborate and share/ exchange information, technical skills, etc.; and
- Commitment of time as required by mentor.

These are serious responsibilities. A good mentor's expectations must be met. To do less is to endanger the relationship and risk losing the mentor's interest in developing a mentee's career.

No one, however, should enter a mentoring relationship lightly. It is important for both the mentor and the mentee to understand that there are:

Risks Of Mentoring

- Investment of time and effort may not prove fruitful for either the mentor or mentee or both.
- A mentor cannot think beyond her "own experience" and the mentee feels limited by the mentor's lack of vision.
- A mentee will not listen to a mentor's advice but insists on her "own approach."
- A mentor or mentee feels "used" - work done with the mentor appears to benefit only the mentor; a mentor does not feel valued by the mentee.
- A mentee is seen as lacking independent stature. Others cannot separate the mentee's work from the mentor's and assign credit for the work to the mentor as the more senior partner.
- Failure of mentee undermines a mentor's status in an organization or success of a mentee threatens the mentor.
- Relationships end badly with animosity that colors all future dealings.
- These risks should be recognized and monitored by both parties from the beginning of the relationship.

Ways To Minimize Mentoring Risks

- Address problems or difficulties immediately.

- Be clear about what is expected from the relationship (have a series of frank discussions or develop a contract that can be useful to revisiting the course of the relationship).
- Deliberately put a formal time limit on the length of the mentoring experience.
- Don't invest totally in just one mentor. Work with more than one mentor so if one mentor proves unhelpful, destructive, or unwilling to discuss lifestyle issues impacting on career growth, another mentor is available.

Even in the best of mentoring relationships, however, problems may occur that no amount of talking or negotiation can correct; and ending the relationship may be necessary,

Mentoring is often compared to a good friendship or a good marriage. As in a friendship or marriage, there will be difficult moments, but in satisfactorily resolving them, the mentor-mentee relationship will flourish, and professional and sometimes personal benefits can accrue to both mentor and mentee.

This manuscript, commissioned by AACP, focuses on the nature of formal, often short-term, mentoring relationships. Not described are those informal relationships many have experienced wherein a senior mentor fosters the growth, personal and professional, of a junior colleague. These informal relationships, often long-term, often develop serendipitously and do not lend themselves to the development of a contract as described within this manuscript.

The reader is also referred to the following papers that resulted from a session of the AACP Section of Teachers of Pharmacy Administration (now the Section of Social and Administrative Sciences) at the 92nd Annual Meeting of AACP in July 1991:

Mason, Holly L., "Mentoring of Faculty and Graduate Students: Introduction," *Am. J. Pharm. Educ.* 56:67 (1992).

Mullin, Joan, "Philosophical Backgrounds for Mentoring the Pharmacy Professional," *Am. J. Pharm. Educ.* 56:67-70 (1992).

Chalmers, Robert K., "Faculty Development: The Nature and Benefits of Mentoring," *Am. J. Pharm. Educ.* 56:71-74 (1992).

Campbell, William H., "Mentoring of Junior Faculty," *Am. J. Pharm. Educ.* 56:75-79 (1992).

Berger, Bruce A., "Mentoring Graduate Students," *Am. J. Pharm. Educ.* 56:79-82 (1992).

Lively, Buford T, Barnett, Candace W., Berger, Bruce A., Greer, Marianne L., Holiday, Monica G., "Summary and Bibliographic Report," *Am. J. Pharm. Educ.* 56:82-84 (1992).