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WHY BE A MENTOR?

Mentoring is as essential to faculty success as teaching, research, and publication. Both have the same benefits of advancing the discipline, and ensuring quality and commitment to the next generation of scholars. Despite the many competing demands on your schedule, the thought of mentoring has probably crossed your mind, even if only for a brief moment.

Actually, there are several benefits of mentoring:

- The satisfaction of helping someone else
- Attracting good students
- Staying on top of your field
- Building your professional network
- Extending your contribution to the field

BENEFITS OF MENTORSHIP

Mentorship has many rewards. For most, one of the greatest benefits is helping mentees avoid the pitfalls that serve as barriers to career development. The end goal of mentorship is to help mentees produce better research, manuscripts, grant proposals, and health for the population overall. If your mentee is successful, you will be too; sending successful scholars into the field increases your professional stature.

Throughout your role as mentor, you become committed to your mentee’s progress, giving solid advice and being his or her advocate. This can help lower his or her stress and build confidence. If you mentor well, you will have an easier time recruiting and retaining outstanding students. Your relationship with your mentee can also keep you abreast of new knowledge and techniques in the field. Ultimately, the results of mentorship live after you, making a contribution to the field of research even after you retire.

CHALLENGES OF MENTORSHIP

There are several challenges to mentorship, but they can be overcome. Some challenges include:

- Fostering mentee’s independence
- Deciding on the best solution to a given mentoring challenge
- Setting limits and boundaries for the mentor/mentee relationship
- Addressing lack of planning
- Giving negative feedback to the mentee on lack of progress
- Allocating time
- Finding resources

Solutions for handling these challenges will be discussed further in this packet.
YOUR ROLE AS MENTOR

Your role as a mentor is to help your mentee develop into a successful professional. Your mentee has already undergone, or is currently undergoing, an extensive educational process; your role is to optimize the educational experience and socialization into disciplinary culture.

Mentoring is a personal relationship. Here are some of the ways in which you may interact with your mentee:

- Foster growth
- Enhance skills
- Promote agency
- Provide critical and caring evaluation and feedback
- Increase practical wisdom
- Promote opportunities
- Offer counseling and advice
- Give or facilitate emotional support

Being an outstanding scientist is not sufficient (and perhaps not necessary) to be a good mentor. Your basic responsibilities as a mentor are to model professional responsibility, encourage the effective use of time, oversee professional development, and assist with finding other mentors. You should also keep track of the mentee’s progress and achievements, setting milestones and acknowledging accomplishments. As a mentor, it is important to establish an environment where student’s achievements are limited only by his or her talent.

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MENTORING 101
MENTOR-MENTEE RELATIONSHIPS

“People who lack the time or inclination to provide an educational experience should not accept the responsibility of mentoring ...”

-National Academy of Sciences
Enhancing the Postdoctoral Experience for Scientists and Engineers

TIPS FOR A SUCCESSFUL RELATIONSHIP:

- Establish clear expectations in the beginning of the relationship
- Mutual respect, trust, understanding, and empathy
- Use concrete language to critique the mentee’s work
- Communicate in a timely, clear, and constructive manner
- Critical feedback is essential but will be more effective if tempered with praise when appropriate
- Stimulate creativity, independence, and confidence in mentee

The mentor serves as an advocate and guide, empowering the mentee to move from novice to professional. In some ways, mentors are the gatekeepers of the mentee’s professional future.

The mentee sets the tone for mentorship. Always leave the door open for the mentee to end the relationship. You should also provide support for the mentee and be mindful of emotional and physical distress.

There are several ways in which your relationship may take shape:

First Steps. Help your mentee develop a training plan very early in the program to stimulate early communication, to teach the importance of strategic thinking, and to move the mentee forward.

Selecting a research problem. Help the mentee to frame a good research problem that they care deeply about; share in their enthusiasm.

Guiding the research. Guide the mentee toward becoming a better researcher by introducing him or her to potential collaborators or influential colleagues, ensuring the mentee has adequate resources, and advising against being trapped in a narrow line of work.

Advancing the career. Help your mentee acquire necessary career skills, including communication, publication, grant writing, and management. If your mentee is interested in professorship, independent research, or research management, he or she must be assisted in appropriate, educational ways.

Balancing the needs of the program and the needs of the postdoc. It is your responsibility to help the mentee see a project to completion in a reasonable time; future employers will want to see evidence of perseverance in attaining closure on research problems.

You cannot teach a man anything; you can only help him find it within himself. ~Galileo Galilei
Fostering mentee's independence. To help your mentee become independent, be sure to define what an independent researcher knows and then help your mentee develop those skills. Be sure to create an environment where your mentee can achieve goals independent of you.

Deciding on the best solution to a given mentoring challenge. There are a myriad of challenges your mentee may face and you may not always have an answer immediately. Be honest, and let them know you will have to think about it more. The following resource offers solutions to many common problems faced by mentees: http://ctsi.ucsf.edu/training/mdp-cases.

Setting limits and boundaries for the mentor/mentee relationship. When in doubt, ask someone you trust (e.g. department chair, your own mentor). Clarity in the relationship is key. Be transparent about the form and function of the relationship, about what is reasonable to expect and what is not. Respect personal and professional boundaries—respect theirs as much as you expect them to respect yours.

Addressing lack of planning. Your mentee may have little experience in organizing tasks and making good use of time. You can begin by using simple scheduling to help him or her acquire this skill; mentoring appointments can serve as a framework.

Style of Mentorship

Your mentoring style should vary by mentee needs. You should always be approachable and available. Remember, mentees oftentimes don’t know what they don’t know (e.g., what questions to ask, what information they need, what their career options are). Consider your experience with mentors in the past and use it to help you develop a vision of the kind of mentor you want to be.

TURNING RESEARCH INTO MANUSCRIPTS

Emphasize the importance of publications with your mentee. Inform them that 1) research accomplishments usually occur in small steps, 2) feedback from colleagues after publication is essential to further steps, and 3) one’s career may stall unless work is communicated in public. Few fellows have a basis for understanding when and how much to publish; they need the advice of experienced mentors.

-National Academy of Sciences
Giving negative feedback to the mentee on lack of progress. It is important for you to match the degree of openness with that of your mentee. You should strive to balance praise and constructive feedback. Remember to focus on behaviors rather than personality traits. In addition, problem solve with your mentee, allowing him or her to think through strategies and options.

Allocating time. The best way to allocate time to your mentee is by making a plan to invest your time each month in the relationship. Prepare for each meeting and stay engaged and focused during your meetings. Be sure to measure your successes.

Finding resources. Most mentees lack strong institutional connections. You can help your mentee by making him or her aware of the nature and location of department offices and by introducing him or her to other faculty and staff. You can also encourage your department to include fellows in their seminars, retreats, and meetings with speakers.

ADVICE FOR NEW MENTORS

For most people, good mentoring, like good teaching, is a skill that is developed over time. Here are a few tips for beginners:

- **Listen patiently.** Give the student time to get to issues they find sensitive or embarrassing.
- **Build a relationship.** Simple joint activities—walks across campus, informal conversations over coffee, attending a lecture together—will help to develop rapport. Take cues from the student as to how close they wish this relationship to be. (See “Sexual harassment” in section on Population-diversity issues.)
- **Don’t abuse your authority.** Don’t ask students to do personal work, such as mowing lawns, baby-sitting, and typing.
- **Nurture self-sufficiency.** Your goal is not to “clone” yourself but to encourage confidence and independent thinking.
- **Establish “protected time” together.** Try to minimize interruptions by telephone calls or visitors.
- **Share yourself.** Invite students to see what you do, both on and off the job. Tell of your own successes and failures. Let the student see your human side and encourage the student to reciprocate.
- **Provide introductions.** Help the student develop a professional network and build a community of mentors.
- **Be constructive.** Critical feedback is essential to spur improvement, but do it kindly and temper criticism with praise when deserved.
- **Don’t be overbearing.** Avoid dictating choices or controlling a student’s behavior.
- **Find your own mentors.** New advisers, like new students, benefit from guidance by those with more experience.

Adviser, Teacher, Role Model, Friend: On Being a Mentor to Students in Science and Engineering
National Academy of Sciences

We make a living by what we get; we make a life by what we give. ~Winston Churchill
MENTORING 101
WHAT MAKES A GOOD MENTOR

The Ideal Mentor

In a review of letters of support for mentoring excellence in the academic sciences, the top themes for excellent mentors were:

1) Exhibiting admirable qualities, including enthusiasm, compassion, and selflessness
2) Acting as a career guide
3) Making strong time commitments with regular, frequent, high-quality meetings
4) Supporting personal/professional balance, and
5) Leaving a legacy of how to be a good mentor through role modeling and setting expectations for mentorship.

-Cho et al, 2011
Am J Med

Good mentors are skilled in:

**Careful listening** – Be a good listener. Don’t pre-judge or assume what you think the mentee is saying. Pay attention to tone, attitude, and body language. Repeat the point back to the mentee to ensure you understand.

**Keeping in touch** – Amount of time required depends on the mentee. Don’t assume that the mentee does not need help if he or she does not ask for it.

**Encouraging multiple mentors** – Don’t be too “possessive” of a mentee. Everyone benefits from multiple mentors.

**Teamwork** – Don’t be afraid to work in a team. In certain cases, it may be helpful to the mentee to find others who work in an area where the mentee has a particular interest (e.g. private sector), who are more advanced than the mentee, or who are from a similar cultural background.

**Building networks** – Encourage the mentee to join professional or disciplinary societies to help guide him or her in networking. Introduce the mentee to other professionals around campus.

**Practicing good ethics** – It is important to model good ethics with your mentee. Be sure to discuss conflicts of interest, authorship credits, and who goes to meetings. More information on ethics can be found at [http://www.reflexives-lpr.org/webadmin/documents/On_being_a_scientist.pdf](http://www.reflexives-lpr.org/webadmin/documents/On_being_a_scientist.pdf)

Example is not the main thing in influencing others; it is the only thing. ~ Albert Schweitzer
MENTORING 101  
STYLE OF MENTORSHIP

Most of us have had this type of interaction with a mentor. Don’t let this become the pattern for interactions with YOUR mentee!

Meeting Agenda

Advisor’s office
9:30am Project Update
- Review goals from last week
- Present new graphs, data, hypotheses
- Feedback and discussion
9:45am Next Steps
- Clarify outstanding issues or questions
- Agree on goals for next week
- Evaluate overall milestones and general thesis progress
10:00am Conclude Meeting

Meeting Reality

9:30am Wait for advisor to show up.
10:05am Keep waiting. Ah, there he is.
10:10am Remind Professor who you are and what you do.
10:12am Review goals from last week
10:13am Admin. assistant interrupts.
10:17am Uncomfortable silence.
10:18am Phone call from someone more important.
10:29am Present plot you made an hour ago
10:30am Advisor tells you what to do.
10:31amOops! He’s late for another meeting!

The One Minute Mentor
From UCSF Academic Affairs

1) Assess the Mentee
Check In
Assess for any urgent issues
Use active listening skills

2) Set an Agenda
Review pending items
Assess time available
Prioritize

3) Assist with ongoing projects
Ask clarifying questions
Set clear and measurable goals
Give advice and suggest resources
Agree on timetable for deliverables

4) Provide career guidance
Review CV
Inquire about professional/personal balance

5) Wrap up
Clarify expectations of mentor and mentee
Schedule future meeting

A lot of people have gone further than they thought they could because someone else thought they could. ~ Unknown
MENTORING 101

THE TIME COMMITMENT

Mentoring is not your primary responsibility and it can take away from your own research. However, it is a very worthwhile endeavor that will hopefully be very rewarding. Remember, it does not take large amounts of time to be effective; asking the right questions can help save a lot of time. Your time is the most precious thing you can give. Give full attention to your fellow when he or she is talking to you. Try to minimize interruptions. Most importantly, have fun!

REFERENCES