How to Work with Your Mentor

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Professional Development Boot Camp
Mentor and Telemachus

Odysseus → Trojan War

Son Telemachus had some issues maturing, couldn’t defend his home.

Athena, goddess of wisdom, courage, inspiration, strategic warfare, mathematics, arts, craft, etc, disguised herself as Odysseus’ old friend Mentor.

Taught Telemachus the courage and skills he needed → trusted advisor, teacher, friend.
The Art of Mentorship

• The art of “mentor acquisition” in any field remains not only an elusive concept, with significant variability in the adoption of structured versus organic relationships that develop more naturally throughout an individual’s career, but also an occasional challenge in pragmatic implementation.

• Mentorship in surgery is not “one-size-fits-all”

• Mentorship setting varies significantly
  • clinical
  • academic/research
  • administrative or leadership pursuits (career development)

• Guidance comes in many forms
  • mentor
  • coach
  • sponsor
Mentorship

1. **Long-term, ongoing relationship**: relationships often last for years, allowing mentee to benefit from the mentor's wisdom and guidance over time.

2. **Focus on holistic personal and professional development**: addresses various aspects of mentee's life, including career, personal growth, and work-life balance.

3. **Informal and flexible structure**: Mentoring is typically less structured than coaching, with meetings scheduled as needed and conversations covering a wide range of topics.

**Benefits of mentoring**

Mentoring helps individuals gain valuable insights and advice, leading to increased self-awareness, personal growth, and career development.
Coaching

1. **Time-bound and goal-oriented**: Coaching relationships are usually short-term, with specific, measurable goals.

2. **Focused on specific skills and performance improvement**: Coaching addresses particular skills, behaviors, or performance issues.

3. **Formal structure and accountability**: The coaching process includes regular, structured meetings with clear expectations and progress tracking.

**Benefits of coaching**
Coaching helps individuals improve their skills and performance, leading to increased confidence, productivity, and career growth.
Sponsorship

1. **Advocate for the individual's career advancement:** Sponsors actively promote the individual's achievements and potential within the organization.

2. **Focus on visibility and opportunities within the organization:** Sponsors help the individual gain exposure to decision-makers and secure promotions or high-profile projects.

3. **Influence and decision-making power:** Sponsors hold positions of power and can directly impact the individual's career trajectory.

**Benefits of sponsorship**
Sponsorship helps individuals gain access to career-advancing opportunities and positions them for long-term success within the organization.
What’s the purpose of mentoring relationship?

Career Enhancement

- Scholarly productivity
- Provide challenges
What’s the purpose of mentoring relationship?

Career Enhancement

• Networking
What’s the purpose of mentoring relationship?

Career Enhancement

- Sponsorship
- Faster time to promotion
- Higher salary
What’s the purpose of mentoring relationship?

Career Enhancement

- Protection
What’s the purpose of mentoring relationship?

Psychosocial Support

- Confidence in academic roles and skills
What’s the purpose of mentoring relationship?

Psychosocial Support

- Professional Identity
- Academic Career Choice
- Specialty Choice
What’s the purpose of mentoring relationship?

Psychosocial Support

- Stress Reduction
Finding the right mentor(s)

- Accessible and makes time for you, but doesn’t expect monogamy
- Considers your ideas seriously
- Prioritizes the human relationship (not boss vs. employee)
  - Prioritizes your professional/personal development
- Keeps things confidential

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What’s the purpose of mentoring relationship?

Psychosocial Support

• Sense of belonging
How to have a high-yield mentoring relationship

Self-assessment first

Identify your own preferences and needs
   - consider personal and professional domains
Identify goals, opportunities for growth
Identify productive and unproductive habits
How to have a high-yield mentoring relationship

Find the right mentor(s)

Traditional mentor
Sponsor
Coach

Seek mentoring:
early
from multiple places
from junior- and senior-level faculty
for different goals
How to have a high-yield mentoring relationship

Take an active role

- Be engaged
- Follow up
- Solicit feedback

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How to have a high-yield mentoring relationship

Be an Active Listener

Write down advice

Be observant
How to have a high-yield mentoring relationship

Managing up makes it easier for the mentor to be helpful

Set the meetings

Figure out the agenda
Frequency of Meetings

Depends on:

- Goals
- Availability
- Active Issues
Content of Meetings

• Research projects
• Clinical issues
• Life issues
• Don’t forget the big picture

“At this point in the meeting we’ll open a discussion of whether or not we needed to have this meeting.”
Transition

• Relationship with mentor ideally changes as your career advances
• Relationship may need to change for other reasons – communication is key
• May require new and different mentors for next stage in career/life
Do’s and Don’ts
DO: Take the driver’s seat in the relationship
DO: Define 2-3 specific goals of relationship

**Career goals**
- Research
- Networking
- Job
- Setting up a practice

**Psychosocial issues**
- Confidence
- Professional identity
- Work-life balance
DO: Initiate and schedule regular meetings
DO: Come to every meeting with an agenda
DO: Come to every meeting with an agenda

- Progress on research projects
- Other topics for discussion:
  - Specialty choice
  - Clinical issues
  - Fellowship/job
  - Society participation
  - Personal issues
DO: Follow-up on previous meeting’s agenda
DO: Give us a couple days to look over a draft

If you wait until the last minute,

It only takes a minute
DO: Ask for feedback
DO: Pick a project you are truly interested in

Developer after one year on the same project:
- Bored
- Happy

Developer after one month of switching context:
- Bored
- Happy
DO: Reassess relationship
DON’T: Suffer in Silence

I did a bad thing.

Does it affect me?

No.

Then suffer in silence.
DON’T: complain to people who can’t help
DON’T: send TOO rough of a draft
DON’T: become a clone
DON’T: Go radio silent for a long time

- Set up the next meeting
- Update them in-between meetings on progress
How to Break Up with Your Mentor
by Carolyn O’Hara

Take stock of your needs and goals
Consider giving your mentor a second chance
Don’t draw it out
Be transparent and direct
Disengage with gratitude
Keep the door open
Power of mentorship for civilian and military acute care surgeons: identifying and leveraging opportunities for longitudinal professional development

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<th>Mentorship Categories</th>
<th>Pearls</th>
<th>Pitfalls</th>
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| Clinical              | • Select a mentor who is relatable in terms of clinical practice  
                        • Cultivate a psychologically safe environment to discuss challenging case or request intraoperative guidance | • Failure of the mentor or mentee to openly and honestly acknowledge successes and failures  
                        • Self-critical or punitive attitudes toward clinical complications |
| Research              | • Maximize meeting productivity with a focused agenda  
                        • Keep the mentee’s best interest in mind in terms of authorship, recognition, promotion | • Engaging in a research mentorship when one or both parties lack bandwidth  
                        • Failure for both parties to set clear goals and meet deadlines |
| Executive Leadership  | • Identify mentors who have followed a similar leadership pathway (e.g., advanced degree, administrative role, etc.) to understand the nature of the commitment  
                        • Mentors should help seek out leadership and job opportunities, committee participation and national or global engagement | • Not being open to ongoing mentorship as one progresses through their career or inability to consider “non-traditional” opportunities  
                        • Choosing leadership roles, pathways or mentors that do not align with one’s interests, strengths and academic mission |
| Professional Societies| • Be strategic and pragmatic in selecting the organization that best fits your needs and try to diversify your mentors across institutions  
                        • Identify at least one “hard target” or deliverable from committee or professional society engagement | • Avoid overcommitting to multiple mentors or committees and not being able to deliver  
                        • Do not use professional society mentorship as a substitute for local mentorship, as the mentor will lack specific insight for local programmatic issues |
Clinical Research Executive Leadership Professional Societies

Clinical

• "Stay honest and humble, don’t be afraid to discuss failures"

Research

• "Meet deadlines and master the art of the gentle nudge"

Executive Leadership

• “Successful leaders encourage transparency and open discussion of ideas, providing an environment of psychological safety”

Professional Societies

• “Expand your network of mentors to national leaders in the field”
Good luck!