

Mentor-Mentee Relationships

The goal of this session is to discuss the key components of a successful mentor-mentee interaction and to understand the value of having multiple mentors. By the end of the session, participants should be able to apply several simple steps to maximize their own relationship with their departmental mentor.

During the session, we will discuss the following case scenario and think about some general themes including:

What constitutes a mentor-mentee relationship?

What attributes should mentors and mentees possess?

What key steps can be taken to ensure a productive relationship and when should they take place?

Case Scenario:

As a first year resident, you were recently assigned to Dr. X to be a mentee. As it is still the middle of the year, you have not yet actually interacted with Dr. X. So you send an email to Dr. X and have gotten no response. You send a second email and still do not get a response. The next month, you happen to be on rotation and Dr. X is your attending for readout. You ask Dr. X if he/she would have time to meet with you since you would like advice regarding your career. How should you respond to the following responses from Dr. X?

- A) Dr. X states that he does not believe in mentoring and is only “participating” in the departmental program as the Department requires him to do so. He suggests that you figure it out on your own.
- B) Dr. X states that he does not have time to mentor since he already has too many other commitments.
- C) Dr. X tells you that he has this research project that he must finish and that he wants you to do all of the data entry since you are his mentee.
- D) Dr. X tells you to think about what you want to get from the relationship and tells you to contact his administrative assistant to set up a time to formally meet.

You decide to set up a one hour mentoring meeting with Dr. X. After having to reschedule the meeting several times, you are finally set to meet.

Question: What should you discuss at this first meeting?

After meeting with Dr. X for the hour, you decide that Dr. X is not a “good fit” for you since Dr. X cannot help you find ways to juggle career and family. However, Dr. X probably can help you become a successful researcher. You are intrigued by this opportunity but know that given that you have a young family, you are concerned that Dr. X really does not understand the challenges that you are facing. You are worried that you will not be able to live up to Dr. X’s expectations.

- A) By meeting one time, has a mentor-mentee relationship been formed?
- B) Should you just find another mentor and not tell Dr. X that you have chosen someone else?
- C) Should you keep Dr. X and also find another mentor? Is it okay to have more than one mentor?

You decide to keep Dr. X and begin a research project with him. You meet with him every month to review the data and plan out the next steps. One day, Dr. X friends you on Facebook.

Question: Should you accept his offer to become friends on Facebook?

In the meantime, you find another mentor, Dr. Y, who has a family and has been juggling their career and family for the past 10 years. You meet with Dr. Y to get advice as the research with Dr. X is taking up more and more of your time and your partner is not happy since you are not available to help out at home as much as you used to. Dr. Y suggests that you tell Dr. X that you need to slow down for a bit of time so that you can better balance all of your competing demands. Following Dr. Y’s advice, you meet with Dr. X and tell him that you need to cut back on the research.

Question: As your mentor, should Dr. X understand or is it okay for him to be upset since he has invested so much time in your career? How can you prevent him from having a negative response to your request?

Table 1: Questions to Ask Before Becoming a Mentor

What is your motivation for becoming a mentor?

What are your major professional or personal accomplishments?

What skills can you offer to potential mentees?

Might include networking, time management, problem-solving, feedback, goal setting, work-family balance, conflict resolution, negotiation, or research

Do you have time to be a good mentor?

Are you approachable?

Can you create a confidential and safe mentoring environment?

Are you able to provide constructive feedback?

Table 2: Questions a Mentee Should Ask Before Seeking a Mentor

What are your personal and professional accomplishments to date?

What challenges are you currently facing and what specific goals do you have?

In order to meet those goals, what specific qualities are you seeking in a mentor?

In your current environment, can you identify any potential mentors?

Do you have time to commit to maintaining the mentor-mentee relationship?

Are you open to constructive feedback?

Table 3: Steps to Maintaining a Successful Mentor-Mentee Relationship

Establish specific goals for both mentee and mentor.

Establish ground rules for accountability, confidentiality, and boundaries up front.

Create a workable plan with timelines to accomplish both short-term and long-term goals.

Set aside time to meet at regular intervals to assess progress and provide feedback.

Be open to criticism, be respectful, and listen attentively to each other.

Regularly reflect on the relationship with regard to what is working or not working and what challenges remain to be addressed.