ACTIVITY #2:

PERSONAL ASSESSMENT OF YOUR MENTORING NEEDS


1. Establish a framework for decision-making:
   a. What is my mission?
      * (e.g. What motivates you to work so hard?)
   b. What do I hope to achieve?
      * (e.g. Medical director, Innovative program, outstanding clinician, supervisor)
   c. How do I define success?
      * (e.g. Well respected, autonomy, independent funding, being home for dinner)

2. What are my professional and personal goals?
   a. Short term (e.g. submit manuscript, strong match):
   b. Intermediate (e.g. promotion, pay raise):
   c. Long term (e.g. national reputation, career satisfaction):
3. Assessment of strengths and challenges (personal and institutional):
   a. Strengths
      \(\text{(e.g. networking, enthusiasm, teaching, interpersonal skills, professional \)
      demeanor)}\)
   
   b. Challenges
      \(\text{(e.g. organizational skills, time management, coping with stress, information technology)}\)

4. What is my working style?
   a. What helps me work more effectively?
      \(\text{(e.g. deadlines, clear expectations)}\)
   
   b. What makes work challenging?
      \(\text{(e.g. interruptions, unreasonable expectations, computer literacy, lack of support)}\)

5. What are my specific mentoring needs?
   \(\text{(e.g. grant writing, office management skills, work-life balance, curriculum development, professional development)}\)

6. What qualities do I value in a mentor?
   \(\text{(e.g. availability, expertise, reliability)}\)
Activity 3a: INTERNAL Mentoring Mosaic

1. Place the initials of your mentors in the box that describes how they mentor you. The same person can be used multiple times. Create new categories that are specific to your needs.
2. After each set of initials, add a dash (-) and indicate whether they are senior (S), peer (P), or junior (J).
Activity 3b: EXTERNAL Mentoring Mosaic

1. Place the initials of your mentors in the box that describes how they mentor you. The same person can be used multiple times. Create new categories that are specific to your needs.
2. After each set of initials, add a dash (-) and indicate whether they are senior (S), peer (P), or junior (J).
Mentorship Malpractice

The delicate balance of mentoring someone is not creating them in your own image, but giving them the opportunity to create themselves.

Steven Spielberg

The word mentorship evokes strong emotional and intellectual chords. In formal parlance, mentorship has been defined as "a dynamic, reciprocal relationship in a work environment between an advanced-career incumbent (mentor) and a beginner (mentee) aimed at promoting the career development of both. ¹ In our careers in academic medicine, we have seen mentor benefit from mentors through development of critical thinking skills and advice on research ideas, scholarship, and networking opportunities. Similarly, as mentors we have also benefited by gaining an ally to support our work, developing our professional skills, and establishing legacies as academic leaders. It is thus not surprising that mutually beneficial mentor-mentee relationships are a key predictor of academic success.²

While much has been written about the qualities that constitute an ideal mentor,³ little attention has been given to behaviors that make one less desirable. This gap important because mentor-mentee relationships are, by definition, unequal, with mentees being more vulnerable. Mentees are also likely to disproportionately suffer in a dysfunctional relationship, behoving them to be cognizant of mentor behaviors that threaten success. In our combined 50 years in academic medicine, we have borne witness to—and, sadly, even occasionally participated in—suboptimal mentoring. While small intermittent lapses are natural when managing various responsibilities, mentor behavior that puts a mentee's academic career at risk cross a threshold we term mentorship malpractice. Here, we outline active and passive prototypes of mentorship malpractice, using tongue-in-cheek names to portray behaviors and characteristics of the unwanted behavior. We then offer solutions for mentees to approach these important mentorship problems.

Active Mentorship Malpractice

Characterized by dysfunctional behavior, active mentorship malpractice is often blatant and easy to spot. Three classic phenotypes exist.

The Hijacker

Hijackers are bullies who take hostage a mentee's ideas, projects, or grants, labeling them as his or her own for self-gain. Mentors who engage in this form of malpractice often do so in the setting of career challenges such as shortages of funds, publications, or intellectual creativity. Notably, some mentees are unknowingly complicit in this behavior, comforted by feeling valued regardless of the underlying pretext. Like a Stockholm syndrome variant, the mentee willingly gives up lead positions on manuscripts or grants, mistakenly expecting that the success of the mentor will ultimately cascade down to him or her. It is only when this fails to occur that mentees realize they have been cheated, but usually the damage from such a negative association is already done.

The Exploiter

The Exploiter torpedoes mentees' success by saddling them with low-yield activities. Typified by self-serving advice, Exploiters commandeer mentees by usurping their scientific agenda or nonacademic responsibilities onto them, often justifying such behavior as "the price of mentorship" or "a valuable learning experience." Exploiters may assign mentees to mentor other trainees, supervise project staff, or manage projects central to the mentor, but not the mentee's area of expertise. In this way, Exploiters value managers, not independent scientists, and have no interest in cultivating mentees.

The Possessor

The trademark of the Possessor is domination of the mentee. Possessors are insecure and view seeking assistance from others as a threat to their position. Such anxieties lead possessors to take a passive-aggressive approach to collaboration, disparaging potential co-mentors or demeaning the mentee for reaching out to others. Like a battered spouse, mentees in this relationship become isolated from social and collegial interactions, making it difficult to recognize or be rescued from the Possessor. Rather, mentees are often lured into feeling special by the attention of the Possessor, who does so only to fulfill his or her own needs.

Passive Mentorship Malpractice

Passive mentorship malpractice is insidious and shares inaction by the mentor across three distinct subtypes.

The Bottleneck

Bottlenecks are preoccupied with their own competing priorities and have neither the bandwidth nor the desire to attend to mentees. Their internal focus quickly diminishes mentee productivity, a phenomenon that is particularly problematic for early-career researchers. The rate-limiting behavior of Bottlenecks is accentuated when they insist on signing off on a work product, essentially handcuffing mentees to their timeline. While the quality of the feedback may offset this cost, mentees always pay the price in diminished academic output when working with Bottlenecks.

The Country Clubber

The mentor who wants to be everybody's friend and evades conflict—regardless of need—is the Country Clubber. These mentors avoid engaging in difficult but necessary conversations on behalf of the mentee such as negotiations regarding protected time, authorship po-
Table. Diagnosing and Treating Mentorship Malpractice

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Phenotype</th>
<th>Underlying Pathology</th>
<th>Diagnostic Symptoms and Signs</th>
<th>Complicit Mentee Acts</th>
<th>Potential Countermeasures</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Active Mentorship Malpractice</td>
<td>The Hijacker</td>
<td>Self-preserving behavior related to string of failures.</td>
<td>Academic and intellectual insecurity, financial challenges, limited creativity, fear of being overtaken by others.</td>
<td>Quick and complete exit. There is no way to protect yourself in this relationship.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>The Exploiter</td>
<td>Self-serving philosophy with tendency to self-worship; promotes personal interests over mentees.</td>
<td>Assignment of tasks such as supervising staff, managing projects unrelated to mentee. Believes mentee should be privileged to work with them.</td>
<td>Trial of firm boundary setting and use of additional mentors to evaluate results. If or when mistrust ensues, exit the relationship.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>The Possessor</td>
<td>Anxious personality with powerful feelings of inadequacy, fears loss of alienation to others.</td>
<td>Specific instructions to not engage with other mentors or collaborators; constant supervision of mentee activities.</td>
<td>Insist on a mentorship committee, confront mentor with concerns regarding siloed approach.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Passive Mentorship Malpractice</td>
<td>The Bottleneck</td>
<td>Internal preoccupation coupled with limited bandwidth or interest to support mentee growth.</td>
<td>Often busy with own tasks or projects; limited time to meet face-to-face; inadequate response to requests for help; delays in feedback.</td>
<td>Set firm deadlines and be clear about what happens on those deadlines; follow through with action and articulate frustration with mentor inability to prioritize.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>The Country Clubber</td>
<td>Conflict-avoidant personality, needs to be liked by colleagues, values social order more than mentee growth.</td>
<td>Avoids advocating for mentee resources such as staff, protected time; discourages mentee from similar debates.</td>
<td>Develop a mentorship team so other mentors may engage in conflict on your behalf. Approach conflict/debate with focus on impact if not addressed.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>The World Traveler</td>
<td>Academic success feeling personal ambitions, travel requirements, desire for fame/appreciation.</td>
<td>Internationally renowned, highly sought-after for speaking engagements. Limited face-to-face time due to physical unavailability.</td>
<td>Establish a regular cadence of communication. Reserve time well in advance for in-person meetings. Use alternative methods for communication.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

sitions, or research support. They minimize the importance of conflict and encourage mentees to do the same. Country Clubbers view mentorship as a ticket to popularity, with the number of mentees serving to promote social capital rather than responsibility. Mentees in this relationship are not only unsupported, but also find it difficult to assert themselves given the “nice guy” routine.

The World Traveler

These mentors are highly successful and sought after for meetings, speaking engagements, and leadership positions. Consequently, they have little time for their trainees on a day-to-day basis. Ironically, the more successful a mentor becomes, the more at risk of developing this form of malpractice. The world traveler can take a laissez-faire approach, leaving the mentee effectively mentorless from lack of face-to-face time and direction.

Preventing Mentorship Malpractice

It is important to understand that mentorship malpractice does not occur in a vacuum: rather, such dysfunctional relationships require both parties to participate either willingly or unknowingly. Therefore, a key step in preventing mentor malpractice is recognition of the malady and deployment of key strategies (Table).

Don’t Be Complicit

Whether it is sacrificing papers to the Hijacker or accepting chores with no academic yield for the Exploiter, mentees are tacitly complicit when mentors malpractice. Mentees must therefore insist on change when mentors malpractice.

Set Boundaries and Communicate Needs

Effective communication helps prevent mentorship malpractice. This is particularly important when dealing with passive phenotypes; with active phenotypes, mentees must set firm boundaries and confront mentors when violations occur.

Establish a Mentorship Team

All forms of mentorship malpractice become more dangerous when the mentee is dependent on one mentor. Having several mentors allows mentees to not only learn from each advisor, but also more easily recognize dysfunction. For example, Hijackers stand out like a sore thumb in comparison to Country Clubbers, whereas the World Traveler’s lack of availability can be partly overcome by the involvement of others.

Know When to Walk Away

Some malpractice is so egregious and refractory to countermeasures that it should be viewed as a deal breaker. This is most true of the Hijacker but should be considered for others when countermeasures fail. If a mentor is sabotaging the mentee’s career, consciously or otherwise, mentees must be prepared and willing to end the relationship.

Conclusions

In times of tight research funding, the need for effective mentors has never been as acute. Mentorship malpractice is a serious barrier to achieving this goal. Mentees must identify these problems within themselves and their mentors in order to remedy such issues. Failure to do so can result in catastrophic loss. Academic medicine can no longer afford such behavior.

Mentee Missteps
Tales From the Academic Trenches

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Mentorship takes many forms, from personal and professional counseling to clinical and research guidance. The wisdom and guidance of experienced mentors not only help mentees ascend the academic ladder, but also prevent burnout. Given the importance of this relationship, it is imperative that mentees put their “best foot forward.” Unfortunately, young physicians are rarely taught what is expected of them as mentees, and mentors vary in discussing “menteeship” with protégés.

Many mentees overlook the fact that they are still learning. Instead, they may feel pressure to appear immediately successful. This desire to please, admitted with paroxysmal bouts of self-doubt, may work against trainees. Rather than appear flawed—or risk displeaseing mentors—a mentee may unintentionally “misstep.” These missteps could have devastating consequences, including rejection by a mentor and career implosion.

Mentee missteps are thus paths by which mentees might undermine their careers. We outline six such missteps, using colloquial names to portray extreme examples of what are otherwise common, intermittent mentee behaviors. Our aim is to help mentees self-diagnose before a single misstep becomes a pattern.

Types of Mentee Missteps
The Overcommitter
The Overcommitter is a “yes person.” Overcommitters have a difficult time refusing a request, regardless of relevance or benefit to their career. If they are able to actually fulfill all of their commitments, the end result is often disillusionment and burnout. Often, Overcommitters surpass their capacity, resulting in high-output failure typified by diminishing quantity and quality of work product.

The Ghost
“Ghosting” in US vernacular is the act of “trying to remain out of sight, especially to avoid confrontation.” In academia, ghosting occurs when a mentee hides from a mentor, hoping that poor performance will be forgotten. At best, avoidance is a temporary fix, as a mentor may assume that silence equates to progress. Eventually, evasion does the relationship as mistrust accumulates. Ghost mentees thus risk joining their supernatural counterparts in being rarely seen or heard.

The Doormat
Doormats are rarely noticed but often used. Despite doing most of the work, they receive little glory. Doormats often spend their time doing grunt work for their mentor. These tasks usually require extensive time and effort but offer little reward or advancement. This type of mentee may be cultivated by mentors that “malpractice”—especially those who are possessive or exploitative.

The Vampire
The Vampire drains the lifeblood of his or her mentor. Vampires are typified by countless emails, text messages, phone calls, and meeting requests. Although these mentees are often intelligent, they are paralyzed by decision making and rely on mentors for validation. Regardless of the mentor’s generosity, the Vampire demands more, eventually forcing the mentor to sever the connection.

The Lone Wolf
The Lone Wolf appears to have no need for a mentor. This type of trainee has often succeeded previously sans assistance and boldly carries forth this behavior. Although Lone Wolves may appear stubborn or confident, internally they fear asking for help lest they appear weak or foolish. This fear becomes their undoing when a preventable but highly embarrassing error occurs due to lack of guidance.

The Backstaber
By the time the Backstaber is identified, it is often too late for the mentor. Backstabbers may initially appear idyllic; they accept challenges, work hard, and perform well. However, Backstabbers are peculiar in that they resent criticism and produce excuses for every failure. This inability to accept culpability eventually leads Backstabbers to sacrifice others when errors occur, shunning blame rather than accepting responsibility.

Origins of Mentee Missteps
These characterizations represent extreme examples of what—in their mild form—are paroxysmal but highly detrimental mentee behaviors. The tendency for these missteps to occur often stems from uncertainty about—and mentors’ failure to address—mentee responsibilities. Relatively simple diagnostic and therapeutic treatment plans can help overcome mentee missteps (Table).

For example, the Overcommitter, Ghost, and Doormat share maladaptive methods of conflict avoidance. Rather than speak openly about their goals, mentees who make these missteps accept tasks in which they have little interest. Once on this path, they fear letting down their mentor and instead work tirelessly to either succeed or avoid their mentor when they fail. Conversely, the Lone Wolf, Vampire, and Backstaber suffer from lack of confidence and failure to understand the expectations of menteeship. The Lone Wolf is afraid to ask for advice and equates success with independence. This type of fixed mindset can lead to lack of...
Table: Diagnosis and Treatment of Mentee Missteps

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Phenotype</th>
<th>Description</th>
<th>Diagnostic Signs</th>
<th>Potential Solutions Mentee</th>
<th>Potential Solutions Mentor</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Conflict Averse</strong></td>
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<tr>
<td>The Overcommitter</td>
<td>Lacks the ability to say no. Ends up overcommitted and underproducing.</td>
<td>Résumé is filled with a host of committees, volunteer roles, etc., yet few have resulted in academic products such as publications.</td>
<td>Learn to use your mentor or allocated effort as a reason for saying no. Before saying yes to a project, determine which project is now getting a no.</td>
<td>Add new items to this mentee’s list only after old ones are crossed off. Have mentee identify his or her career goals, then stick to projects that align.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The Ghost</td>
<td>Appears extremely enthusiastic and energetic, but then disappears without a trace and without notice—especially when problems arise.</td>
<td>Mentee may agree to assignments but fail to follow up. When questions regarding project deadlines arise, the mentee avoids discussion.</td>
<td>When uninterested, suggest an alternative person who may be interested. Address issues early. To reduce anxiety, be prepared with a planned solution.</td>
<td>Mentees should gauge their true interest in new projects and be allowed to decline. Set goals to address problems forthrightly, and praise mentees for their candor when issues raised.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The Doormat</td>
<td>Mentee is on the receiving end of a manipulative mentor. The mentee’s energy is used for things that do not further their career, or for which they do not receive credit.</td>
<td>Mentee spends time on work unrelated to their own career. Review of mentee’s progress shows few first-authored papers in mentee’s field of interest.</td>
<td>Ask directly how new projects align with goals. Trial of setting goals and boundaries. Seek new mentors. Establish a mentoring committee.</td>
<td>Before assigning a project to a mentee, evaluate if it is in their best interest. Allow mentees to use you as an excuse not to participate in another’s projects.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Confidence Lacking</strong></td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>The Vampire</td>
<td>Mentee requires constant attention and supervision, leaving mentors drained and empty.</td>
<td>Mentee requests approval or clarification for every step of a project, regardless of prior or similar discussions. Lacks conviction pivots to mentor.</td>
<td>Recognize and embrace feelings of insecurity; talk with other junior faculty likely struggling with similar decisions. Before taking questions to a mentor, vet a solution with a colleague.</td>
<td>Set clear goals and boundaries, including what questions require approval and what do not. Have mentees “put their nicked down” when asking for help.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The Lone Wolf</td>
<td>Assertive, self-motivated, and determined; prefers working alone; believes mentorship is a luxury, not a necessity.</td>
<td>Does not trust others or is afraid to ask for help. Does not work well as part of a team.</td>
<td>Realize that asking for help is critical for learning, not a sign of weakness. Appreciate that working as a team is a key skill for success.</td>
<td>Be specific in things that can be done with and without mentor consultation. Define the mentor’s role, as well as the role of other team members.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The Backstabber</td>
<td>This mentee rarely falls, but when this does occur, makes excuses or assigns blame to others rather than to personal missteps.</td>
<td>People who work with this mentee once often don’t want to do so again. Not difficult accepting responsibility for any mistake; avoids negative feedback.</td>
<td>Reframe mistakes as a learning opportunity. Make giving credit and accepting responsibility a daily goal.</td>
<td>Emphasize that honesty, not perfection, is critical in a mentee. If mentee cannot accept this responsibility, seek a new mentee.</td>
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</table>

Effort and poor resilience after failure. Vampires, on the other hand, lack confidence in their abilities and struggle when making decisions. These mentees may suffer from the imposter syndrome, a common psychological phenomenon marked by an irrational fear of being exposed as an “academic fraud” and inability to “internalize accomplishments,” despite recurrent success. Backstabbers feel that admission of failure is an attack on their personal worth. By not accepting responsibility for their mistakes, they can neither grow nor learn from them.

**Revisiting Mentoesship**
To avoid missteps, mentees should begin by delineating personal and career goals. Explicitly stating these objectives can help minimize conflict and maximize benefit for both mentees and mentors. This exercise also enables mentors to pick projects more suited to the mentee while helping the mentee say no to tasks. Mentees must also embrace the fact that their role is to learn, not be perfect. Mentors and mentees should therefore reframe mistakes as improvement opportunities, not evidence of failure. When the inevitable misstep does occur, they must be addressed directly and candidly. Mentees should understand that such constructive criticism is not judgment of character, but the building blocks of future success.

**Conclusions**
The relationship between mentors and mentees is bidirectional and critical to academic success. However, mentees may unintentionally jeopardize this relationship when missteps occur. Awareness of these pitfalls and proactive menteeship can not only prevent failure, but can also propel the evolution of mentee to mentor. Those are steps in the right direction.

**Conflict of Interest Disclosures:** The authors have completed and submitted the ICME Form for the Disclosure of Potential Conflicts of Interest and none were reported.

The mentor-mentee relationship is a tango between a more senior person and a junior one. Just as in dance, coordination and orchestration between parties is necessary for grace and success. And while we and others have written about what makes the ideal mentor, comparatively less attention has been given to the other partner. This gap is unfortunate because, like mentorship, menteeship requires specific behaviors —
What Mentors Wish Their Mentees Knew

without which the mentee's success may be threatened. In this article, we outline six habits of ideal mentees and provide anecdotes and views from our combined years of academic experience. While we focus on the relationship in academic medicine, the takeaways apply to most any field.

Clarify what you need. "I need a mentor" is a plea often heard in the hallowed halls of hospitals, especially academic medical centers that serve as the training grounds for future physicians. As academic physicians, we have responded to this overture countless times in our careers. The first thing anyone seeking a mentor must do is determine what kind of support they need.

While many mentees—people aspiring to become physician-scientists, for instance—require formal, long-term guidance, others may just need support with one-time needs. For example, they may need advice on negotiating a job offer, speaking at a national meeting, or finding a job at another hospital. These latter situations require distinct types of mentors, ones we classify in an upcoming JAMA Internal Medicine paper as coaches, sponsors, and connectors. Some mentees with specific, narrower challenges such as preparing for a speaking engagement often benefit from a coach—someone who helps improve performance related to a particular issue. "Coaching done well may be the most effective intervention designed for human performance," says Atul Gawande, the surgeon and writer who enlisted a coach to improve his surgical technique.

Other times, mentees need a sponsor: senior physicians (such as chiefs, chairs, or deans) who have garnered substantial social and political capital over their careers. Sponsors use their cachet to help high-potential individuals join prestigious committees, study groups, or honorific societies.

And finally, some mentees need a connector, a seasoned guide who can help the
mentor and mentee unite, or build a mentorship team. In *The Tipping Point*, Malcolm
Gladwell describes connectors as multipliers who help create relationships between
people.

**Choose wisely.** Knowing what you need is the first step; finding the right person is the
second. Like selecting a partner for marriage, your choice of a mentor affects 95% of
your success and happiness. Begin by identifying highly successful individuals whom
you like, respect, and trust. Just as the accomplishments of your mentor matter, so
do their personal attributes, such as altruism, work-life balance, and patience. Find a
mentor whom you can relate to and who shares your goals and understands your
priorities. And remember that someone at the top of their field may not necessarily be
ideal. We tell mentees to find mentors they can see themselves becoming — and make
sure they are up to the challenge.

**Underpromise and overdeliver.**
Remember that mentors are looking for
closers: those that finish what they start.
So make sure you know the Golden Rules.
Ideal mentees share certain qualities: They
are enthusiastic, energetic, organized, and
focused. They embrace feedback while
remaining honest and responsive. They always behave with integrity and recognize
that hard work and sacrifice pays dividends down the road. Ideal mentees thus learn
to underpromise ("I’ll have a first draft to you in one week") and overdeliver ("I know
it’s only been three days, but I have a first draft ready to share with you"). And they
always make sure their work is high quality. Always.
Mind your mentor's time. Good mentors are successful for a reason: They manage their time wisely, often doing multiple things at any given time in order to ensure success. As a mentee, you must learn to respect your mentor’s time. For example, give your mentor enough time to review work products (for example, one week for abstracts and at least two to three weeks for grants). Define goals for meetings ahead of time by knowing what you want to discuss and accomplish during your meeting. Importantly, avoid long, winding emails with little in the form of an answerable question. Rather, frame questions so that they can be answered with yes-or-no answers, while reserving longer concerns for face-to-face meetings. Your mentor’s time is a precious commodity, and thinking about how best to use it — both in their physical presence and outside of it — is important for success.

Beware of pitfalls. Just as in the world of management, mentees must learn to manage up — that is, to help their mentor guide them. When mentors go awry, mentees must be ready. “Mentorship malpractice” represents a set of mentor behaviors that — whether intentional or not — will disproportionately affect your success. Recognize the warning signs and know what countermeasures to employ. For example, if your mentor becomes a bottleneck, set firm deadlines and clearly state what will happen when they arrive. Conversely, if your mentor begins to hijack your ideas, more drastic measures might be necessary. Equally, you must be careful to avoid missteps that might jeopardize your success. For example, do not “ghost” on your mentor, keeping out of sight to avoid dealing with a difficult issue. Similarly, don’t be a “vampire,” draining the life from them by asking many questions or sending excessive communications. Mentee “missteps” are avoidable but require recognition and careful monitoring during training.

Be engaged and energizing. The best mentees are fun to work with. They are energy donors, not energy recipients. They come to work with enthusiasm, excitement, and eagerness to move projects forward. Mentors are more likely to respond positively to
What Mentors Wish Their Mentees Knew

A mentee who presents the upside to their efforts rather than the downside. With this in mind, avoid excessive complaining about other people or a particular situation. If problems arise — and they usually do — it is best to frame your problem as a growth opportunity. Present several solutions, and see if your mentor advises one course of action over the others.

Relatedly, maturity is important, especially when receiving feedback about a manuscript, grant proposal, or talk. Avoid being defensive and putting your mentors in the awkward position of having to be responsible for your well-being. We know of mentors who have exited relationships with overly defensive mentees because giving constructive feedback to these individuals became quite time-consuming and emotionally fraught for both parties. Such an outcome disproportionally hurts the mentee. And remember that generosity goes far: Acknowledge and thank those who help you succeed.

Just as in other fields, the relationship between a mentor and mentee in medicine is a two-way street. In addition to producing high-quality results with integrity, excellent mentees know what type of help they need, select the right people to help them, finish tasks ahead of schedule, are mindful of their mentor’s time, are energized and engaging, and credit others liberally. Do you have what it takes?

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2/13/2018
What Mentors Wish Their Mentees Knew

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2/13/2018
Academic Mentoring—How to Give It and How to Get It

Allan S. Detsky, MD, PhD, FRCPC
Mark Otto Baerlocher, MD

Students, trainees, research fellows, and junior faculty all benefit from the direction provided by academic mentors and research supervisors. The literature contains numerous reports on the importance of mentorship in helping facilitate the future success of trainees, documenting benefits such as more productive research careers, greater career satisfaction, better preparation in making career decisions, networking within a profession, and aiding in stress management.1-10 This commentary describes several key points of advice both for individuals who mentor and those who receive mentoring (mentees). In some places, a mentor is an individual who is not the student's direct clinical, academic, or research supervisor. This advice applies to those kinds of mentors as well as the more traditional direct supervisors.

Determine How the Mentee Likes to Spend Time

Several years ago a faculty member who had worked in his profession for 10 years visited the corresponding author (A.S.D.) to announce plans for a career change. Until that time, this particular faculty member was a basic science researcher in the division of endocrinology who also provided clinical care to patients with diabetes 1 day per week. He was moving to a full-time clinical position in a non-teaching hospital and he described experiencing moderate career success and enjoyment from research activities performed during the first 5 years, but thereafter realized a dislike for the work. His clue about his career became evident when he noticed feeling excited about how the day would unfold seeing follow-up patients with diabetes and determining their clinical progress on the 1 clinical day per week vs the other 4 days of the week when he awoke, pulled the sheets over his head in the morning, and dreaded going to work in his laboratory. This realization led to an understanding that he was in the wrong job.

One of a mentor's most important jobs is to help mentees determine what kind of career they wish to pursue.11,12 Those who train in medicine can pursue at least 4 types: clinical care, education, research, or administration. Good mentors should present all 4 options without communicating value judgments. In particular, because the primary purpose of attending medical school is to learn how to provide direct patient care, it is inappropriate to cause mentees to feel this activity is less worthy than the others. The best way to help mentees choose a career path is to help them understand what day-to-day activities instill excitement. One suggested approach to determine this is for mentors to express the following: "Don't tell me what you want to be (ie, an academic physician). Tell me how you want to spend your time. What gets you out of bed in the morning? What really interests you? What jobs are fun for you? Design your position around those activities."

Be Honest

Mentors need to understand that mentees frequently are afraid to tell their supervisors what they want if they feel they will disappoint their mentors. It is important that mentors not promote their own agenda over that of mentees with aspirations of producing academic clones.11 The following has been stated (A.S.D.) to help the mentee become more honest: "I am a general internist, health economist, and I perform health care research. I am happy being me. I do not need you to be me to reaffirm that I made the right choice." Once said, the body language of the mentee is often observed to become much more comfortable. It is important that mentees not simply tell mentors what they think mentors wish to hear, but rather what they really think, without wasting time by pursuing unwanted directions.

At the same time, mentors need to understand that mentees may choose not to follow their advice. Mentors should not be disappointed when this happens. The nature of the relationship is that mentors and mentees should feel free to give honest expressions and advice without insistence from either side that mentees accept it.12

On a more formal note, some have suggested that mentoring relationships should undergo regular evaluations for process (clear objectives and regular, purposeful meetings), communication (feedback, mentees being able...
to challenge mentors), and outcomes (sense of progress and development, improved networks). Such periodic evaluations are valuable tools to help ensure ongoing honesty.

There are circumstances in which mentors should perhaps not be completely forthcoming. For instance, when the mentee tells of making a particular career choice (as opposed to asking for advice about the choice), the mentor should not show disapproval or state the choice is a mistake. In these circumstances, mentors must distinguish between the mentee's requests for advice and announcements of firm decisions (often not easy to do). Once mentees have decided, expressing disappointment can be a very bad way to end the communication. Mentors can make it clear that the door is open to reverse the decision, but should not say "You are making a mistake," because that phrase may be counterproductive and will not be forgotten.

**Follow Through**

It is important for mentors to be supportive. This can take the form of making the right introductions, dealing with individuals whose cooperation is required, or providing financial support. In other cases, providing support simply involves responding to the mentee's questions, reading manuscripts, providing advice, and following through on promises. Prolonged delays on either side are harmful to the success of mentees. Students should, therefore, carefully investigate the experiences of previous individuals who received mentoring from someone they are considering approaching. They should review a proposed mentor's curriculum vitae and determine how many students were overseen who now have successful careers. If the answer is many, it bodes well for the future. If a faculty member has been in a mentorship role for more than 20 years but has almost no successful disciples, the mentee might do well to avoid that person.

**Do Not Become Friends**

In this relationship, mentors have power. The individuals can never be equal, and therefore should not establish a relationship as friends during the mentorship period. Doing so may result in complications, hurt feelings, and can be destructive. This is not to say that the mentoring relationship cannot be cordial, personal, enjoyable, or fun. This simply means that the appropriate professional distance must be maintained to protect both parties.

**Do Not Be Afraid to Terminate a Mismatched Relationship**

Personality conflicts in the mentor/mentee relationship may occur. If these conflicts are irreconcilable, to the point that a positive mentor/mentee relationship is unlikely, the relationship should be terminated. This advice applies for both mentors and mentees.

**Be Explicit About Credit for Work**

At the beginning of the mentoring relationship, the roles are usually very clear: mentors often provide the initial ideas, infrastructure, financial support, and supervision for a project and mentees often perform the day-to-day work. Over time, roles change. For example, original ideas or questions will ultimately be generated by mentees and mentors may increasingly play a more peripheral role. This may lead to difficulties in determining who gets credit for the work. The principal objective way of assigning credit is the designation of an individual's role on a grant application (principal investigator or coinvestigator) and the position of the names on the author list.

Early in the corresponding author's career (A.S.D.), an unfortunate interaction occurred between a mentor and mentee that best illustrates the problem. The mentee, who was then a junior faculty member, had an idea to use an existing medication to treat a genetic disorder and this intervention had a very positive result in 1 patient. Because there had been no similar descriptions in the literature, the mentee prepared a manuscript describing this case report, and the paper was subsequently accepted by a high-profile medical journal. The mentee did not include his mentor as a coauthor primarily because the mentee felt that the mentor, who was an internationally recognized expert in the field, would have received credit for the idea. The mentee claimed that the idea and work were entirely his and that the mentor had no role in the paper; moreover, the mentor certainly did not meet the current authorship criteria established by the International Committee of Medical Journal Editors (this episode preceded the development of those criteria by several years). The mentor learned about the paper and objected strenuously to being excluded from the author list. The disagreement ascended the chain of command at the university. Ultimately the paper was published in the high-profile journal without the mentor's name as an author. This episode led to the mentee leaving the institution because many of his colleagues reportedly ostracized him for this behavior.

The best way to avoid similar episodes is to be explicit from the beginning of a project about who is going to receive what credit, to acknowledge that the mentor/mentee relationship will change over time, and to follow the International Committee of Medical Journal Editors' established criteria for authorship, although this may require some subjective judgment. Mentors should not expect their mentees to include them as honorary authors.

Similarly, it may be common practice for some mentors to include their students as authors specifically to advance their careers even without proper contribution to warrant authorship. This is equally inappropriate. If mentors wish to include students as authors on manuscripts, an appropriate set of tasks that constitute grounds for authorship should be assigned and conducted by students.
Separate at the End

At some point, supervisors have to end the mentoring relationship with students. It does a junior faculty member no good to continue to put the supervisor's name on grants or papers. Doing so stunts the growth and reputation of mentees and is problematic when they are considered for career awards or promotions. The responsibility for separation lies primarily with mentors and at some point mentors have to state directly, "We will no longer write together." This does not mean that mentors stop providing advice. It just means that the names can no longer be attached to grants and articles. Although the exact publication record and length of time for mentor/mentee relationships is not well established, data from a preliminary survey suggests that the break point seems to be 5 to 10 papers and 3 to 5 years before separation typically occurs (unpublished data, A.S.D.).

What Mentees Should Do If Mentors Do Not Wish to Separate

In these situations, mentees should ascend the chain of command in the organization and solicit help of the division head, department chief, chair, or dean. These individuals will clearly understand the issue and broker the separation. After separation, mentors and mentees can become friends, assuming they actually (still) like each other, because at this point they will be equals. One of the wise mentors of A.S.D. taught the following: "I was always careful to be nice to the people I met on the way up. They were the same people I met on the way down."

The mentor/mentee relationship is an essential aspect of career development. These suggestions provide advice and helpful behaviors for this worthwhile and integral activity in academic medicine.

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