

Residents' Perspective

Mentorship: Through the Looking Glass Into Our Future

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You can impress people at a distance, but you can impact them only up close.—Howard Hendricks

Mentorship has always been an integral part of the medical profession. Historically, medical knowledge and philosophy were handed down from one generation to another through close, interactive apprenticeships, many evolving into mentoring relationships. With today's changing world of medicine, where the future faces such uncertainty, mentorship is vital to our profession. It encourages continued success in very difficult times. However, this very personal, dynamic relationship is seldom discussed and difficult to describe. This "Residents' Perspective" includes a historical foundation for a current definition, the importance of generational views, and the benefits to and responsibilities of both the mentor and protégé.

WHAT IS MENTORSHIP?

Mentorship is a close, noncompetitive, deeply personal relationship between 2 people that evolves over time. This relationship is formed and develops because both who participate feel enriched through their association. The mentor is "a wise, experienced

and trusted counselor engaged in the active guidance and maturation of a younger individual."¹ This person guides the professional, intellectual, and personal development of the protégé.

The origins of mentorship date back to Homer's *Iliad* and *Odyssey*. When Odysseus had to leave for battle, he entrusted his son to a beloved friend named Mentor. After Odysseus did not return from the war, his son, accompanied by Mentor, set out to find him. Mentor assisted the son by advising him during difficult situations, teaching him how to think independently, and demonstrating strong character and spirit. Athena, the goddess of wisdom, intermittently took the form of Mentor to give critical advice during the difficult journey. In so doing, she demonstrated how this personal relationship was a "gift of the gods."¹ From this relationship comes the characteristics of a mentor: a nurturer; supporter; advisor; assessor; developer of talent, skills, and knowledge.² The word "mentor" is often mistakenly interchanged with "role model," "preceptor," or "advisor." Although these may be part of the spectrum, they are evolutionary phases on the continuum toward the highest honor of mentor. The relationship may begin with a role model, who becomes an advisor then ultimately a mentor.

Mentorship is founded in trust which is the cornerstone of the relationship. Each develops a true belief in the other's character, sincerity, and integrity. Trust allows for honest communication about difficult situations. It allows the protégé to seek, truly hear, and choose to act on the advice of the mentor without fear of rejection. In turn, the

mentor develops a level of confidence in the protégé that encourages active support. A distinguishing difference between the advisor and the mentor is that the mentor actively participates in the junior's development by not only guiding and advising the protégé but by providing opportunity. The mentor seeks opportunities that provide experience, development, and success. He encourages accomplishment by guiding the protégé toward opportunities that spark interest, develop strengths, and challenge weaknesses. The mentor sees in the protégé things the protégé does not see in herself or himself and actively engages in creating successful outcomes where only potential exists. An almost parental pride may develop as the mentor sees the protégé mature and succeed, even beyond the level of the mentor.

This level of protégé development is a testament to the mentor. It demonstrates a true sincerity of spirit in the relationship. Only a very special, dedicated person can groom another in such a heartfelt and productive way. Sincerity and trust built through such experiences solidify each person's belief in the other and combine to form a path to a level of true friendship that few ever attain—an eternal bond of friendship without the divisions of a power structure. Each eventually becomes both teacher and student to the other. Such a relationship withstands the test of time. The protégé will always feel comfortable calling the mentor for counsel. The door is always open. Regular contact is not important in an established mentoring relationship. When there is need or desire, each welcomes the presence of the other. Daloz effectively describes the relationship, saying "Mentors are guides. They lead us along the journey of our lives. We trust them because they have been there before. They embody our hopes, cast light on the way ahead, interpret arcane signs, warn us of lurking dangers and point out unexpected delights along the way."³

WHY IS MENTORSHIP IMPORTANT?

Touching the heart of one may influence the minds of the world.

Mentorship influenced the careers of many great achievers throughout history. Some of the historical contributors were orig-

inally distinguished as students with potential; others were originally labeled as struggling. However, all demonstrated how guidance and belief from a respected supporter provide the strength to overcome obstacles placed by the most doubtful critic... even if the worst critic is the protégé.

Harvey Cushing, a brash surgical house officer, was molded into a beloved leader of medicine by a charismatic, well-respected internist, Sir William Osler. During their 20-year relationship, Osler became Cushing's role model, advisor, assessor, friend, and mentor. Osler guided his protégé's professional development by securing apprenticeships with colleagues across Europe. He fostered personal and intellectual growth through their frequent interactions and by sending him scientific and philosophical readings, which Cushing excitedly received as "mysterious brown-wrapped parcels with foreign stamps."⁴ Cushing became a respected general surgeon best known for pioneering the specialty of neurosurgery. His initiative, combined with Osler's guidance, allowed Cushing to follow Osler's example with contributions that changed the face of medicine.

They later demonstrated how this relationship can evolve into an eternal bond of friendship that serves to strengthen and console the hearts of both the mentor and the protégé. During World War I, Cushing found himself rushing across Europe to the bedside of Osler's wounded son, Revere, who was critically wounded in battle and fighting for his life. Although Cushing worked through the night with a team of surgeons, morning brought the sight of Revere being escorted to his grave nestled under the British flag. He recorded this event in his journal, noting Osler's continued impact, this time on medical servicemen half a world away: "Strange scene—the great-great-grandson of Paul Revere under a British flag, and awaiting him a group of some six or eight American Army medical officers—saddened with the thoughts of his father."⁴ The one comfort that aided the Oslers in their grief was knowing that Cushing had been by their son's side during his final hour.

Ultimately, Cushing paid tribute to his mentor in a Pulitzer Prize-winning biography, *The Life of Sir William Osler*. Cushing honored a physician who had touched a heart and

influenced the world. His dedication read: "To medical students, in the hope that something of Osler's spirit may be conveyed to those of a generation that has not known him; and particularly to those in America, lest it be forgotten who it was that made it possible for them to work at the bedside in the wards."⁵

MENTORSHIP TODAY: A GENERATIONAL OUTLOOK

The students, residents, and young physicians of today will be medicine's care providers, teachers, researchers, and leaders tomorrow. A great testament to a leader is when a legacy is so well founded in focus and direction that it continues to flourish even after the originator is gone. The continued development of legacies established by current leaders will depend on how well their protégés have been groomed in task and vision. To develop these relationships, both generations must understand their differences to see their similarities. People with different perspectives can still have the same ultimate vision if each is approached with understanding and acceptance.

Today's generation is more likely than the generation before it to rely on and seek mentorship. People born between 1946 and 1959 (baby boomers) were taught the Andrew Carnegie philosophy that generally emphasizes corporations and professional organizations.⁶ They were taught that if they got a good job with a stable company, the organization would take care of them as loyal workers through career advancement and retirement. In contrast, those born between 1965 and 1975 (the "Buster Generation" or "Generation X") have seen their parents laid off just short of retirement from managerial positions they held for many years.⁶ As corporations continue to affect the medical profession, many of today's residents and young physicians have the same professional doubts and fears as their generational colleagues in the business world. Bruce Tulgan, author of *The Manager's Pocket Guide to Generation X*, discusses how these experiences confirmed in their minds that "... the old workplace bargain of loyalty in exchange for security is obsolete."^{7,8}

The origins of this philosophy are demonstrated through views on retirement. For example, pensions are viewed as an extinct

or endangered entity that few from this generation will ever encounter. Only 5% of the Buster Generation believes that Social Security will be a primary retirement income source, whereas 61% believe they will need to rely on their own savings as the primary income source during retirement.⁹ Consequently, this generation believes that skills and knowledge alone lead to job security. They look to people they respect to teach them the skills they need to advance in their careers. Therefore, their allegiance and energy are directed toward individuals, not institutions.⁶ The "busters" are intensely loyal to individuals they consider mentors.

The emphasis on mentoring and skill development by the Buster Generation requires a different type of working relationship from those that were successful in the past. Facts that reinforce clinical decisions or illustrate why specific treatment interventions are taken are respected and highly valued. This need for a foundation of decision-making demonstrates a desire to learn, illustrates an interest in the thought process leading to a decision, and enhances the resident's ability to think analytically. During a shift, if today's resident is simply told to "Do it because I said so," the job will get done, but not with the same level of respect one would obtain from a different approach. Many of today's attending physicians and administrators were trained in a very competitive and authoritative environment and probably heard forceful admonishment such as, "Look to your left. Look to your right. Only one of the three of you will be here at the end of your training." Such an interactive style does not work with today's younger generation. People of this generation are likely to acquiesce to an unexplained directive, thinking "I will do as you say because you are the boss. However, I will use what you say only if I understand it."⁶

Sir William Osler, who had long believed in the power of individualized instruction, defined the way the last 2 years of medical school are currently taught—in a small group by the bedside. Only, in his vision, it was not "work rounds" led by the senior resident but "educational rounds" led by the attending physician. Osler describes the optimal role and the approachability of the educator, whom he defines as the teacher, as "a senior student anxious to help his juniors. When a

simple earnest spirit animates a college, there is no appreciable interval between the teacher and the taught. . . both are in the same class, the one a little more advanced than the others."¹⁰ Although all generations desire the benefit of this kind of instruction, it is exceedingly important in a group that places greatest value on personal education and the least value on large group endeavors.

Investment in residents and young physicians today will influence the future course of our profession. To affect the future, we must inspire the present. This involves a level of understanding and connection. The current generation of physicians-in-training responds to personal involvement and interaction. They cannot be reached through organizations, mass education, or blanket directives. They must be reached one at a time. They seek professional relationships based on honesty because this generation has not experienced much trust. Tosteson described it well: "We must acknowledge that the most important, indeed, the only thing we have to offer our students is ourselves. Everything else they can read in a book."¹¹

BECOMING A MENTOR

Loving people precedes leading them. People don't care how much you know until they know how much you care.—John Maxwell

There are several well-defined qualities of a good mentor, each must be nurtured. Although a protégé may have more than one mentor, he or she chooses a mentor out of admiration for the qualities exhibited, coupled with the desire to be like that person. Qualities of mentoring relationships include the following.

Sincerity/trust

Sincerity is the core of trust, and trust is the foundation of any significant relationship. People know when someone cares and when someone does not. Sincerity and trust build attitude, so too does the attitude of an individual set the tone of their lives. The attitude of a department or institution can strengthen or destroy an academic or a private group. Attitude is exemplified and passed on by strong leaders. An excellent attitude pulls the senior attending, young physician, or resident members of a department together to form a team. It creates an

atmosphere of belief that each individual is working toward a common goal instead of just putting in the required time. When the focus is on making a difference instead of making a name, great things will happen. Consistent sincerity and development of confidence establishes a foundation that allows guidance during difficult times.

Integrity

Integrity is not always making the right decision, but in what you do when you realize you've made the wrong one.

Any person in a position appealing to others is a role model and potential mentor, whether or not being in that position is desired. Someone who aspires to grow into a specific position or profession will take note of the characteristics of someone who is already there. Make no mistake, in the eyes of a junior, an attending physician is a role model and a potential mentor. Whether or not an attending physician is an exemplary one is his or her decision. Anyone accepting a position that influences the education, work environment, or development of a resident or junior attending, also accepts the responsibility of being an example. As such, a standard of integrity and strength of character must be demonstrated for the junior to pursue.² This standard is exemplified through the attending's conduct after successful decisions and difficult mistakes.

Once a mentoring relationship is formed, the mentor teaches the protégé through actions and advice how to accept success in a productive and a graceful manner that will encourage continued accomplishments. He or she will also instruct the protégé in the very difficult journey of identifying, accepting responsibility for, and correcting mistakes. This will be one of the greatest and most appreciated lessons demonstrated and handed down by the mentor. How to handle successes and mistakes with professionalism and integrity will influence the protégé's professional and personal life far more than the project or situation that created the original necessity. John Maxwell summarizes this idea, saying "People do what people see. They forget your words but follow your footsteps."

Availability

To be available is to be approachable and give time. Relationship initiation may be situ-

ational. A junior attending or senior resident may have a specific career path in mind. His or her goals and objectives may not be shared by senior attending physicians within the institution. The junior attending physician may want to seek advice from a more experienced source from an outside institution who is accomplished in the field of the junior's interest. However, a less established person, such as an intern, may not be comfortable taking that step. Many new residents or young attending physicians who are overwhelmed by new responsibilities are feeling isolated from family and friends. They fear that they will not meet perceived expectations of their department and do not feel comfortable approaching the person they respect most. The potential mentor's reaction to or initiation of the first step in helping this person is critical for future relationship development. A positive, encouraging response gives the potential protégé permission to approach the mentor in the future for advice or guidance. The mentor must reinforce that he or she is available and wants to know how the protégé is doing. Being available demonstrates sincerity, provides consistency, and fosters trust, which combine to develop a strong relationship.

Assessor/acceptor

*An effective mentor gives liberal feedback.*¹—J A Barondess

The mentor must look out for the best interest of the protégé by providing insight into strengths and weaknesses. Both gifts are wrapped in the fine cloth of encouragement and sincere interest. Osler demonstrated this concept when he wrote to Cushing, concerned that his interpersonal skills were lacking and "would be absolutely fatal to your success. . . . I know you will not mind this from me, (as I) have your best interest at heart."⁴ The junior may be excelling in one area, but drifting in another of equal importance. The protégé requires guidance; the mentor provides it. However, all advice given may not be followed at the time it is given. The mentor should also consider that all perceived weaknesses may not be changed. It is important at these times that the mentor accepts the protégé and his or her decisions. The immediate results may or may not be in the protégé's best interest. However, the mentor understands the larger picture. Some lessons a

protégé must learn himself or herself. Although the mentor may not agree with the protégé's decision and may have correctly predicted a fall, it is exceedingly important for the mentor to support the protégé and assist in the junior understanding of a much larger lesson: Good judgment often develops from poor decisions; and true strength is not in never falling but in getting up after the fall. Balance and direction provided by the experienced guide contribute to a successful journey.

Believer/supporter

. . . the really great make you feel that you, too, can become great.—Mark Twain

An effective mentor will support the strengths, strengthen the weaknesses, and always encourage. People will live up to the expectations of those respected few who truly believe in them. Great power exists in the belief of another. A mentor's belief builds the protégé's confidence and capability, ultimately allowing achievements not previously imagined. Examples of the power of this quality can be seen in the accomplishments of 2 people who became great contributors to our world.

As a child, one small girl was never expected to achieve anything beyond existence; however, a nurse refused to accept this limitation. She mentored the child and encouraged understanding and intellectual as well as personal growth by refusing to believe the child was capable of less. . . . knowing she would do more. As a young woman, the child went on to become an example of possibility to the world. Later in life, as she stood in front of the Queen of England, accepting recognition for her achievements, she remembered her mentor. Helen Keller said that all she became was due to the belief and love of one woman, Anne Sullivan. Helen Keller was not considered teachable and was treated as such for years until her mentor opened her mind and guided her understanding of a world she never knew existed. Her mentor became a light in a sea of darkness, teaching Helen that vision is more than what is physically seen; it is what can be created.¹²

A second example of the power of belief is illustrated through the experiences of Albert Einstein. When he was 10 years old, he believed he would never be anything more than mediocre. In a dictatorial German school that

emphasized language and arts, he struggled and consistently fell short of defined expectations. He was drowning in a patriarchal environment that had neither the desire nor ability to tap and develop his true potential. The boy was discouraged and scared until he found hope in Max Talmey. Talmey, a medical resident who was a friend of the family, encouraged Einstein's interest in science. He gave the boy introductory books in science and math and would discuss theory and answer questions. The child's appetite for science grew as Talmey continued to feed Einstein's growing knowledge with books and feed his confidence with faith. Soon Einstein's understanding of math, science, and physics far exceeded that of his mentor, but the path of future contribution had been paved with encouragement and support.¹³

Helen Keller and Albert Einstein were touched by true mentors and went on to influence the minds of the world. Both were guided and encouraged by someone when they were at an impasse. Each had someone who believed in them when they did not believe in themselves. Both individuals demonstrated the power of the mentoring relationship for both the mentor and the protégé. Helen Keller and Albert Einstein illustrate that the "mediocre" or the "lost cause" may be untapped potential waiting to contribute new levels of understanding. They represent the power and influence of a mentor who was willing to take the time to encourage, support, challenge, and believe.

BECOMING A PROTÉGÉ

To each one of you, the practice of medicine will be very much as you make it. . . to one a worry, a care, a perpetual annoyance; to another, a daily joy and a life of as much happiness and usefulness as can well fall to the lot of man.—Sir William Osler

Introspection/assessment

One definition of insanity is to believe that you can keep doing what you've been doing and get different results."—

Anonymous

Before developing a relationship with anyone else, one should do some introspection. To know if someone is going in the right direction, the individual must decide what

kind of person he or she wants to become. Each person must ask, "Who will I be in the future professionally, personally, intellectually, and spiritually?" Then, even more difficult, individuals must look at who they are now and decide if the current path will lead to the kind of person they eventually want to become. Once the right direction for each individual is known, each person will be able to identify the right guide and attract him or her to the journey.

Receptiveness

One difference between perseverance and obstinacy is that one often comes from a strong will, and the other from a strong won't.—Henry Ward Beecher

Attitude can be a supporter or a saboteur. It directs focus, defines character, and encourages commitment. With a poor attitude, the focus is on difficulties. With a positive attitude, the focus is on solutions. Solutions clear a path for renewed resolve and commitment. Commit to daily improvement: spiritually, intellectually, and professionally. Decide on a personal standard of excellence and have all actions reflect the commitment to that paradigm. Attitude, focus, and commitment will invite opportunity just as it invites individuals into one's life. Guidance can be provided only if someone is willing to receive it. Often arrogance is part of medicine but is counterproductive to developing the honesty that becoming a protégé requires. One must be willing to set aside superficial ego and receive both constructive criticism and positive comments.

Resources

Once interests and goals are determined, one will naturally be drawn to those who represent success in the chosen areas. An advisor should be sought first. If the relationship is comfortable for both parties, this person often becomes a mentor. One may have more than one mentor—each providing direction in unique areas. The mentor's guidance of each shapes the protégé's future and provides opportunities for growth. Mentors may be found within a department or institution, but mentoring can occur over distances with electronic mail, telephone calls, and national meetings. The potential protégé should look for someone established in the chosen

area(s) of interest whose personality enhances his or her own and demonstrates those qualities essential to a good mentor. If the junior is not aware of someone accomplished in a specific field of interest, a specialty society may provide assistance. Predefined career goals and ideas for implementation can direct what advice to seek and provide an organizational framework for the initial conversation.

Communication

When provided with an opportunity by a mentor, the protégé should complete it and provide follow-up. The protégé should communicate with the mentor about what happened and how things are going. It is also appropriate to show appreciation and thank the mentor for the opportunity provided. A mentor takes pride in the success of his or her protégé and finds joy in the accomplishments. The mentor should be recognized and thanked for the help and guidance. Sharing the celebration and satisfaction of a job well done strengthens the relationship further: the protégé's accomplishments will be a success for both individuals.

Responsibility

A guide may help one get to a destination more efficiently, but the protégé is ultimately responsible for the journey. One may be supported in his or her efforts, but the efforts should be the protégé's own. A mentor can show the way and provide opportunities, but the protégé must accomplish the necessary tasks for success. Realize that when one accepts an opportunity provided by the mentor, the protégé now represents not only himself or herself, but the mentor as well. One may be accepted for a specific opportunity based on the reputation of the person who referred the protégé. The junior might have a unique style, but he or she must be aware that what is expected of a protégé will be an extension of the quality of work and level of integrity of the mentor. One must conduct oneself accordingly.

In summary, a mentoring relationship provides many benefits for both the mentor and protégé. As mentoring has been important in the growth of many great individuals in the past, so it is extremely important in today's environment. The partnership of the mentor

and protégé fosters the best in each of us. Martin Luther King, Jr, stated it eloquently when he said, "There is an invisible book of life that faithfully records our vigilance or our neglect. 'The moving finger writes, and having writ moves on...' We still have a choice today..."^{14,15}

Choose to make a difference. Choose to believe, to support, and to encourage. Choose to be a mentor and be mentored. Choose to touch a heart today and you may influence the minds of the world tomorrow. The true legacy that stands the test of time is one left in the hearts of others.

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