Building Relationships
A Primer for Mentees

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Mentor was the teacher and guide of Telemachus, son of Odysseus, who searched for his father. Mentor was said to be the goddess Athena in disguise.

Homer, The Odyssey
Building Relationships: A Primer for Mentees

• A mentor is a:
  – Teacher/coach
  – Counselor/confidant
  – Protector/cheerleader
  – Promoter/advocate
  – Facilitator of other mentoring relationships
  – Professional soulmate

• A mentor has credibility, power, expertise/experience, empathy, tenacity
A role model is not a mentor

- A role model is an inspirational person who is emulated and should present an achievable goal, but may also be intimidating or inhibiting.
• For success, having a mentor is essential:
  – A major predictor of academic success (publications, confidence)
  – Different mentors may be important at different career stages
  – Multiple mentors are necessary and advantageous
    • one all-purpose mentor is rare
    • avoid over-reliance on one; less potential for “lack of fit” or “personality conflicts”
Isaac Newton

- If I have seen further it is by standing on the shoulders of giants.

Letter to Robert Hooke February 1675
Why do I need a mentor?

Most cited reasons (BWH)

• Self promotion
• Negotiation skills, conflict management
• Developing a promotion package
• Self assessment
• Integration of clinical and research activities
• Research design and funding
• Advice on papers

Weissman BA, Nadelson CC, Gould SL, 2000
A mentors role

- Help channel career course
  - Guide through academic politics
  - Encourage independence and collaboration
  - Link mentee to the organization and its priorities
  - Increase mentee productivity, creativity, satisfaction

- Provide contacts, network entry, opens doors
  - Recommend mentee for talks, study sections, societies, teaching and administrative assignments

- Obtain information about possible job opportunities and provide recommendations
A mentors role

- Facilitate applications for grants
- Protect mentee from project/research interference
- Assist in securing space, time, funding
- Provide useful feedback
- Give advice, support
- Foster transition to collegial status and sustained relationship
A mentee’s role:

– Collaborate with mentor
– Be honest
– Be prepared to be challenged
– Be open to advice and criticism
– Attend to details and deadlines
– Take initiative
Mentoring: Gender and mentoring

• Women get less mentoring than men
  – Fewer women available as mentors
    • Cross gender and cross race mentoring are successful
  – Potential men mentors sometimes assume that women are:
    • Less serious about their careers
    • Will require more caretaking, protection, time
    • Could become sexually involved or accuse mentor of it

Fried, 1996; Hopkins, 1996
Ramanan, et al, 2002
Gender and mentoring

• Greater influence on women than men measured by rate of promotion and career satisfaction
• Mentored women work more hours and publish more papers than non-mentored women

But,
• Women are less likely than men to:
  – be advised about promotion criteria
  – Be encouraged to participate in professional activities (meetings, presentations, organizations)
• Women are more likely to have a mentor use their work to advance the mentor’s career

Fried, 1996; Hopkins, 1996
Ramanan, et al, 2002
Mentoring issues for women and minorities

- Relationships seem easier between “like” individuals:
  - There may be difficulty in empathizing with a minority/woman mentee

- Performance of minorities/women scrutinized more closely: minorities may have higher hurdles to prove themselves to potential mentors

- Minority/women contributions may be undervalued

Bickel, J, AAMC, 1998
Harvard Business School 3/29/95
What does a mentee need?

• A mentor who:
  – You respect and are comfortable with ("fit")
  – Has similar goals, values, specific expertise
  – Has your interest/career as a priority
  – Keeps confidences
  – Follows through with commitments
When choosing a mentor

• Consider
  – What skills do I need to learn/improve
  – What do I want to change/improve in my work style?
  – What networks/contacts would facilitate my goals?

THERE IS NO PERFECT MENTOR
Choosing a Mentor

• Essential Information to gather
  – Expertise: review potential mentor’s CV
  – Mentor’s record with other mentees
    • How many mentees? Too many?
    • Experience of other mentees with this particular mentor?
  – Alternative agendas e.g., what service are you asked to provide in return for mentoring?
  – Reputation for failing to give credit to junior colleagues
  – History of harassment; sexual, intellectual
  – Time and interest in mentoring
  – Likely to leave the institution or take another position interfering with work together?
The mentor/mentee relationship is a two-way commitment

- Mutually identify assets, needs, short and long term goals
- Jointly set the ground-rules for the mentoring relationship
  - Time, frequency, location and duration of meetings
  - Agree upon focus of work
- Trust is built on MUTUAL respect and a high level of confidentiality
Harvard Medical School Mentoring Study
When relationships don’t fulfill expectations

- Fail to help build professional networks, advocate, and create opportunities
- Inadequate job search, career guidance
- Lack commitment; infrequent meetings
- Fail to provide feedback and challenge
  - Negative feedback without constructive criticism
  - Squelch enthusiasm/initiative
- Inadequate guidance on balancing collaboration and individual efforts; fail to facilitate independence
- Excessive non-career productive duties

Ramanan, et al, 2002
Bickel, 1998
Harvard Medical School Mentoring Study

When relationships don’t fulfill expectations

- Disrespect; consistently expects mentee to defer
- Boundary violations -- personal and professional; unethical research
- Use mentee to advance their own causes
- Disagreement on the potential of the mentee
- Poor “fit”
- Failure to involve other mentors or transition to collegial role

Ramanan, et al, 2002
Bickel, 1998
Models of mentoring

Assignment

• Pro: can be done very early and allow for (even encourage) change of mentor
• Con: can be like artificially arranged marriages – with unrealistic expectations and no agreement
Models of mentoring

Peer mentoring

• Pro
  – Release of frustration and tension
  – Good feedback and support
• Con
  – Can be competitive, esp. in hierarchical organizations where collaboration may not be valued
Models of mentoring

• Alumni and emeriti

• Pro
  – Faculty with more time, experience and institutional culture perspective from current and/or other institution

• Con
  – May not be current or as influential as in the past
Models of mentoring

Technology: email, phone

Pro:

• Expands options when face contact is insufficient or unavailable
  Exchange papers, drafts, etc., for feedback and information, may meet occasionally
• Avoid personality conflicts
• Facilitate work in atypical or emerging fields and inclusion in a larger community, esp. in a field where there is no one like you and your institution

Con:

• Not as regularly available
• Limited personal contact and/or influence

Models of Mentoring

Sustained mentorship

• Pro:
  – After one or both leave an institution
  – Ongoing need for mentoring, reference and promotion letters

• Con:
  – May foster dependency

Steiner, et al, 2004
Measuring successful mentorships

• Ongoing promotion of interests of mentee
• Publications
• Academic advancement
• Grants acquisition
• Administrative, teaching, clinical research advancement and/or improvement in skills
While HMS does not reward mentoring, neither is there a disincentive to “tor-mentoring!”

Wm Silen, 1998
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Bibliography

- *Homer, Odessey, Book II*, circa 8th century BCE.