

# Building Successful Mentor-Mentee Relationships

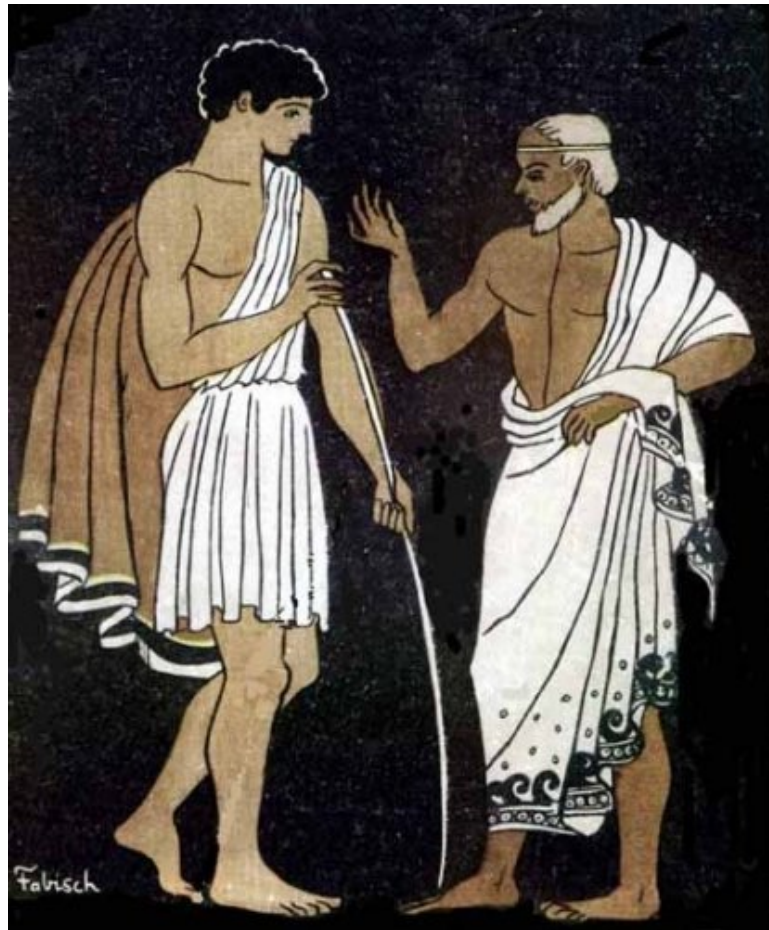
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# Who was Mentor?

Telemachus



Mentor (Athena)



# Why Might You Consider Taking My Advice?

- Three decades of mentoring and learning with many mistakes and a few successes
- Trying to apply QI principles to improving my own performance as a mentor
  - Mentoring is a learning opportunity for both mentor and mentee
- Lucky to have a few great mentors and mentor role models, even in advanced stages of my career
- Benefitted by a very good mentoring program at Boston Children's Hospital



# Why Mentoring Matters

- Lack of good mentoring is a major impediment to professional advancement, meeting personal life goals, and finding work-life balance
- Lack of appropriate mentoring has been problematic for breaking “glass ceilings” for women and minorities
  - Experience suggests that women and people of color are especially likely to benefit and advance professionally with good mentoring
  - A huge gap in having influential mentors/sponsors....and an enormous opportunity\*
- Too many people are shy about seeking mentors – **at any age or career stage** – and most people cannot name a key mentor
  - This includes those of us who have volunteered to be mentors
  - At the very least, we can all benefit from coaching!

\* <https://www.bentley.edu/files/2017/09/29/Bentley%20CWB%20Mentorship%20Sponsorship%20Research%20Report%20Fall%202017.pdf>



# Unfortunately, developing superb mentors and a mentoring program seldom is an institutional priority....

- Mentoring experience and ability tend to be secondary considerations in the promotion and advancement process
- Institutions rarely assess the depth and breadth of their mentoring programs (if there even is a formal “program”)
- Institutions rarely consider the mentoring needs of a diverse workforce
- These failures impair an organization’s ability to sustain and grow its mission and threaten diversity and inclusion efforts
- Healthcare organizations should make mentoring a key part of professional development and to grow a cadre of experienced, diverse mentors



# Mentor Definitions

Term found in fiction and non-fiction literature, military training, sports, business, academia, and government. Commonly cited attributes include:

- Advocate
- Coach
- Career enthusiast
- Teacher
- Guide
- Advisor
- Role model
- Door opener
- Valued friend
- Benevolent authority
- Available resource
- Supportive critic



# Mentor Definitions

- IHI (and my) definition of “mentor”
  - A trusted counselor or guide, sounding board, thought partner, and advisor.
- Merriam-Webster Dictionary definition of “mentor”
  - A trusted counselor or guide.



Thanks to Christine Pfund of the University of Wisconsin Entering Mentoring Program and Center for Improving Mentored Experiences in Research (CIMER) for sharing advice and resources, which have a strong emphasis on equity and diversity (<https://www.hhmi.org/developing-scientists/entering-mentoring>)

And to the Boston Children's Hospital mentoring program for its useful resources and Jessica Kahn, director of mentoring programs at Cincinnati Children's Hospital Medical Center for sharing its faculty mentoring handbook and other materials





# Matching Mentors and Mentees

- This is a painstaking, participatory process, not arbitrary or random
- Prospective mentees should play an active role in sharing their needs and priorities, as well as in identifying and vetting mentors
- Mentors should be candid with themselves about biases they may bring to the relationship
  - Intrinsic bias and equity training for mentors is highly desirable
- Mentors should share their interests and experience to help with matching
- Mentors and mentees should not feel locked into a relationship; “chemistry” counts, as does accountability for meeting mutual expectations
  - No guilt! Mismatching happens sometimes and is normal



Sometimes the mentors who change your life just appear – if you have an open mind and are receptive

Jonathan Freeman



1939-2000

Doug Richardson

*Sic transit gloria*  
No pictures available on the Web

There is no age limit for acquiring a mentor



Sometime mentors can be largely behind the scenes, watching out for you

David Nathan



# Long-Term Benefits and Joy of Mentoring

“I’ve always wanted to tell you that you changed my life”

Ingrid Holm



# Some Characteristics of Prized Mentors

- Committed to growth and development of mentees
- Knowledgeable (but not necessarily “content experts” in your project or area of research)
- Knowledge of own limitations; **willingness to collaborate with a mentor team/network**
  - Career mentors + content/project/mentors
- Able to provide personal and emotional support
  - Superb listeners
  - Value lived experience of mentees
    - What Jacqueline Hunt taught me
  - Trained to recognize implicit biases and to address them
- Generous with credit; willing to step aside
  - “Credit is infinitely divisible”
- Protective of mentees (abuse, time, pressure)
- “Clout”
- Well-connected



# Components of a Mentor-Mentee Relationship

- Set personal goals and show how they align (or not) with the sponsoring organization's goals for the fellow
  - A “personal driver diagram” can be very helpful
- Charter a project related to the overarching organizational goal to gain experience and practice learned skills
- Forge links to key people and resources at your organization and beyond (with active help from the mentor)
- Enroll in IHI or comparable development programs; make external site visits/field trips to fill gaps in the personal driver diagram
- Establish schedule for check-ins with home institution sponsor
- Develop and rehearse “pitch” for your background and goals
- Begin discussions about reentry (or, if indicated, moving on)



# Project *versus* Life Course Mentoring

- Helping mentees with specific projects or grants is important, but a potential trap
  - Make sure that others are available to monitor and support the project work
  - Look at the big picture and overall progress – slow progress may be a “tell” that there are other personal issues and priorities
  - A good mentor has “skin in the game” for the mentee, but not the mentee’s project itself
    - Allows for a more objective assessment (“Tell me again why you are doing this research? How are you feeling about this work right now (fundamental doubts, anxiety?)



# Components of Mentor-Mentee Relationship

- Ensure confidentiality and establish trust
- Agree on a “compact,” including:
  - Meeting/communication schedule
  - Key goals, action plan, and milestones (perhaps embodied in a personal driver diagram)
  - Timeline for “homework” and deliverables
  - Elements of a respectful relationship
  - ....and other elements in the Compact you have been given





# Components of Mentor-Mentee Relationship

- Promoting personal and professional advancement tailored to the mentee's personal goals
  - Local/regional/national presentations (strategic invitations from mentor's buddies)
  - Publications, videos, white papers, blogs, web content (making sure mentee is 1<sup>st</sup> author; handing over senior author position when appropriate to demonstrate mentee's independence; eventually foregoing authorship altogether)
  - Role on grants and contracts (mentor PI for early support and “credibility”, but early transition to co-investigator to demonstrate independence) (e.g., IHI/CMWF project)
  - National organizations, committees, and editorial boards (calls and emails)
  - Honors (nominating and supporting letters)
  - Opening doors for job opportunities for people who want to move on (more calls and letters)
  - Initiating promotion procedures for those on a leadership of academic track (more very strong letters and testimonials)



# Components of Mentor-Mentee Relationship

- Recognizing impact of personal life on work and encouraging work/life/family balance (**and** vice versa!)
  - Instruction in time management
  - Sensitivity to issues of gender, race, ethnicity, culture, finances, etc.
  - Recognizing when the mentee is struggling
- Recognizing individual goals
  - Not everyone wants to be an executive or professor, or be famous, or write papers or grants/contracts
    - No shame and lots of skill in being a “follower”
    - Respect for introverts
- Encouraging “being bold” (even right out of school or training) - nurturing risk-taking (while keeping a life-line handy)
  - OK to fail, but fail fast, fail well



# An Effective Mentor...

- Is willing to think outside of his/her own experience
- Validates and challenges
- Pushes you beyond what feels like your limits – but supports you at the same time
- Pushes you towards independence when you're not sure you're ready – and fishes you out if needed
- Says good things about you to others; looks for opportunities to advance your career
- Has the courage to give negative but constructive feedback (kindly)
- Is honest about his/her limitations, availability, goals
- Forces you to set an agenda and get organized
- Is invested in your success



# Meetings

- Meet formally at least every month initially
  - Frequency of meeting may change over time with mutual agreement
  - Be sure to include other members of the mentor team if appropriate
- Use brief huddles, phone calls, FaceTime/Skype, emails to monitor progress
  - Be vigilant for cancellations, avoidance, excuses
    - Personal struggles
    - Frustrations, failures, delays
    - Unsuccessful mentor-mentee fit

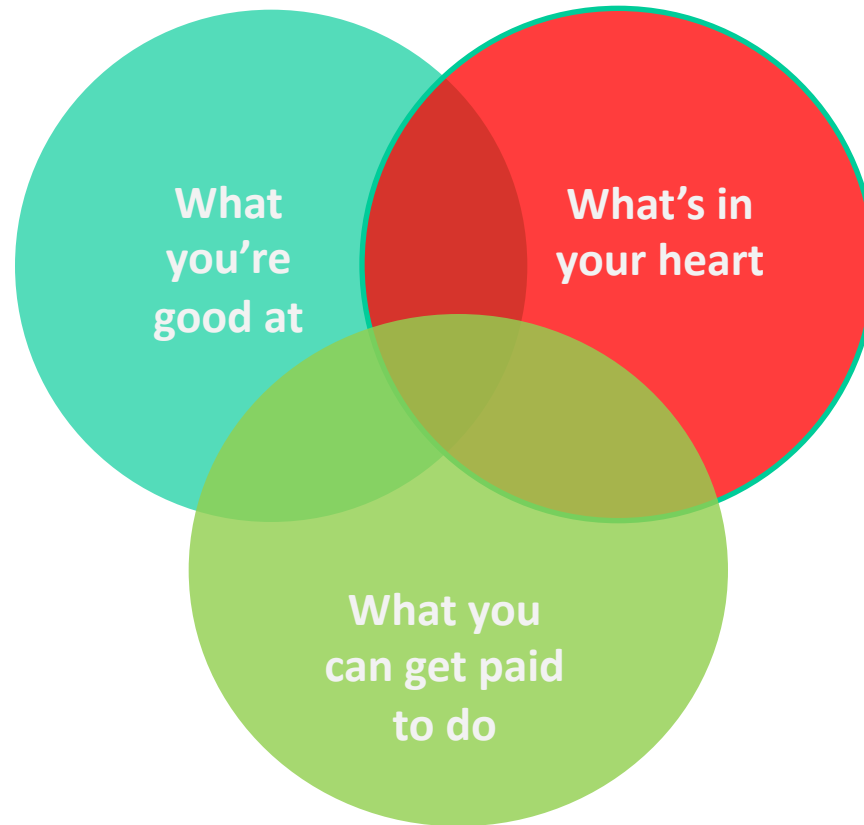


# Some questions to ask a mentee...

- Balance:
  - Your **passion** – what is your **heart** telling you
    - In times past, the heart was believed to be our “brain”
    - Aristotle: The seat of intelligence, motion, and sensation; “Educating the mind without educating the heart is no education at all”
    - Galen: "The complexity of [the heart's] fibers... was prepared by Nature to perform a variety of functions... enlarging when it desires to attract what is useful, clasping its contents when it is time to enjoy what has been attracted, and contracting when it desires to expel residues."
  - What you are **good** at (or can become good at)
  - What you can **paid** to do



# Self-reflection



# Some more questions a mentor might ask a mentee

- Can you express your 3-5 year goals in a **personal driver diagram**? (Note that a goal is not necessarily a “position”)
  - Where are the gaps in your plan to reach your goal
    - Do you have a personal “back pack” of “creds” and skills?
  - Did you remember to include work-life balance, and do you have a concrete, measurable goal for that?
    - Can this be a topic for personal improvement
  - Have you and your mentor considered the life-long trade-offs (including financial issues) of pursuing your goal?
- Does your calendar reflect your goals and priorities?
- How and when do you reward yourself for just being you?
- What are you most anxious about?



# Remember to Use Quality Improvement Tools in Mentoring

- Driver Diagram
  - Clear aims
  - Theory about how the aims will be achieved
  - Key drivers
  - Gaps
- Personal improvement projects to related to the drivers
  - Systems diagrams
  - Priority matrices
  - Tests of change





# Cultural Humility is Important

Mentors and mentees should not make assumptions about each other



# Not all Relationships Work Out

- No-fault termination
  - Know when to let go
- Support finding a new mentoring arrangement
- No bad-mouthing
  - Loyalty and confidentiality are critical attributes of a relationship founded on mutual respect



# Tips for Mentees



# A Few Tips

- Find a mentor who is right for you
  - Generally not your work, clinical, or research supervisor
- Decide whether or not you want to be an executive, chief, or professor
- Plan your work-life balance, act on the plan, and monitor the results
  - Design and implement a personal improvement project
    - Don Berwick’s personal family dinner project
  - Use your vacation time to care for yourself!
  - Do not forget your core, “heart” interests – ever



## More Tips

- Be a good citizen (be strategic) but try to make the work you do “count”
  - Turn perceived “drudgery” (e.g. some project coordination tasks) into tangible work products (e.g., white paper, blog, toolkit, peer-reviewed paper) with your name on it
- Be strategic in building relationships (well, sometimes “calculating”)



# More Tips

- Mentees have responsibilities, too!
  - Focus on meeting goals and timelines
- Keep a checklist of what you need to accomplish by when – a personal “business plan” or even a Gantt Chart
- Keep a “parking lot” for novel ideas, unresolved problems
- Solicit advice actively
  - Never worry alone
    - Don’t make your mentor guess what you are worried about
  - Challenge your mentor with new literature, controversies, ideas, innovations
- Your mentor likes praise and feedback, too
  - Be courteous, say thanks
  - What Ingrid Holm did for me
- Devote time and energy to the relationship



# More Tips

- Try to find or create your niche
  - Is it methods-based, content-based or some other “unique” skill set?
- Document what you are accomplishing in real time
  - Every presentation, award, committee (meeting planning, professional society), skill (certificate, course completion)
    - Innovations, QI project results, non-print materials, websites, videos all can “count”
- Collaborate like crazy and grab “middle” authorship or credit on work products when you can
- Be selective about requests to contribute to optional labor-intensive, low leverage work products (e.g., chapter in a low-profile book)



# More Tips

- Encourage your mentor to create opportunities for you
  - Who will vouch for you when the time comes?
- Try to get on an influential local or national committee, advisory board
- Work towards meaningful managerial and teaching or training roles in the organization
  - Keep quantitative and qualitative data about how good you are
- Begin to mentor others early
  - Mentees/trainees look good on your CV/bio (and you will have a lot of personal satisfaction)





# Network Approach to Mentoring

- A single mentor, no matter how experienced and accomplished, may be insufficient to address the complex career and life course needs of a mentee
  - Remember all of the primary and secondary drivers in that “personal driver diagram” mentees may develop to make their goals and gaps concrete
- Perhaps collaborative/peer mentoring, leveraging virtual communication, can help address complex goals and needs?



# Changing the Terms of the Discussion

- *From...* dyadic relationships... *To* a network of support
- ...*From* the process of mentoring... *To* the goals for an individual



# Developmental Networks

- Derived from the work of Kathy Kram and Monica Higgins
  - “Developmental Networks” may include traditional scholarly/research mentors, advisors, peer mentors, e-mentors, colleagues, juniors, mentees, family, and friends who provide access to knowledge, opportunities, and resources across institutions and cultures
- “Reconceptualization of mentoring from a single dyadic relationship to a network of developers who are enlisted by the individual to enhance his or her learning and development.”
- Not your entire network
- Not your research or project oversight group
- A personal Board of Advisors



# Last Thoughts...

- Take time out to reflect
  - Beware of just putting one foot in front of another
  - Keep in touch with your “heart”
  - Time flies
- Be generous when people turn to you for help
  - Be a mentor (initially with coaching)
- Be bold and take risks
- It’s OK to be strategic and tactical in pursuing your goals (and dreams)
  - You are not a victim
  - Beware of the “impostor syndrome”

