

# Best practices in mentorship

This document was produced by the Kx Unit for internal use but has been made available to the UBC community as it compiles Kx-related resources that may prove valuable to mentorship initiatives. Please note that this is not an exhaustive resource.

## Best Practices for Mentors and Mentees in Academic Settings

(Michigan State University)

- *Identify your strengths, weaknesses, and biases:* mentors need to be sensitive to the mentee's perspective. They should consider their assumptions about mentorship, how it should work, and whether or not these assumptions best serve the mentee's needs. ([Moore, A.A., Miller, M.J., Pitchford, V.J., Jeng, L.H. \(2007\). Mentoring in the millennium: New views, climate and actions. New Library World, 109\(1/2\).](#))
- *Assess and build your communication and listening skills:* mentors should be clear yet succinct in comments and explanations. Their feedback should include both criticism and praise.
- *Build productive mentor/mentee relationships:* mentors and mentees should establish clear shared and mentee-specific expectations and have frequent assessments/reflections of progress. ([Zachary, L.J. \(2000\). The mentor's guide: Facilitating effective learning relationships. San Francisco: Jossey-Bass.](#) For specific recommendations about how to prepare for a relationship with a mentee, see page 82.)
- *Assess and address concerns about mentoring:* a common concern for mentors is not having enough time for good mentoring. To help make things more manageable, it is crucial to set agenda items in advance, and communicate regularly over email or brief meetings.
- *Fostering own career advancement:* mentees should be open to mentor suggestions and actively practice what they learn. They should engage in providing honest feedback during the evaluation process.

## Mentoring: A Personal Perspective From Academia and Industry

(Bruce F. Scharschmidt, Hyperion Therapeutics, Inc, Brisbane, California)

- Initiating and sustaining a successful mentor-mentee relationship requires hard work on the part of both the prospective mentors and mentees and continuous monitoring of progress by the training program director and faculty. It should not be left to chance and is best institutionalized.
- Requiring each trainee to pick a laboratory or clinical research project early in their training catalyzed the mentee-mentor search and relationship by providing common focus and incentive.
- Developing good interpersonal skills is often overlooked in academia where the emphasis is placed on individual achievement and productivity. It is important to address interpersonal skills and issues if they arise.
- Mentoring is not the same as coaching in that a successful mentor-mentee relationship typically matures over years and coaching may be as short as 1 – 2 sessions. Mentoring is more commonly seen in academia, where there is lower employee turnover.



**Table 1.** Mentoring: The Ten Commandments

For the Mentor	For the Mentee
1. Be a role model	1. Take initiative
2. Be an advocate	2. Choose a role model
3. Be enthusiastic and encouraging	3. Find a niche
4. Critically evaluate projects and career goals	4. Look for compatible interests and communication styles
5. Encourage individuality and differentiation	5. Define your projects and role
6. Guidance not ownership	6. Think big
7. Focus, focus, focus	7. Focus on concepts and techniques as well as topics of study
8. Take the long view	8. Focus, focus, focus
9. Push the limits	9. Seek advice
10. Market your product	10. Shop around

NOTE. These 10 Commandments are based on unpublished work by R.S. Brown RS (personal communication, 1993).

## Description

### [Early Career Faculty Mentoring Handbook](#)

(UBC Faculty of Medicine)

“Finding a mentoring relationship that works for both parties requires patience and perseverance. Mentees may find that many people, rather than one person, fill the mentoring role. The specific person who becomes the mentor may not be as important as the functions that this person (or persons) serves for the mentee” (Jackson et al. 2003, 331).

Finding a successful mentoring relationship requires that the mentee audition many different potential mentors in order to ensure a good match

“Mentees should be explicitly aware of the personal and professional qualities that they value in a mentor and discuss these with potential mentors to find the right match” (Jackson2003, 333).

Mentees should remember that mentoring relationships are with a more senior faculty member which can result in power indifference that could render the mentee vulnerable.

“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 pursuing unwanted directions” (Detsky and Baerlocher 2007).

## Role of the mentee

- Accept personal responsibility for career development;
- Set goals and timetables for completion of projects and invite reflections on progress towards them. These action plans can be reviewed at each mentor/mentee meeting;
- Be open to suggestions, advice, feedback;
- Listen and ask questions;
- Be open about thoughts and feelings, provide feedback on what works and what doesn't;
- Undertake honest self-assessment regularly;
- Share mistakes and perceived areas for improvement;
- Identify barriers to goal achievement and provide potential solutions;
- Maintain confidentiality of relationship; and
- Commit time and energy to mentor/mentee relationship Participate in evaluation of program annually (brief survey)

Figure 1. Advice from the literature (page 5).



“...successful mentoring is less distinguished by innate personality than by supportive behaviours” (Rabatin 2004).

“One of the most important functions of a mentor is to teach the rules of career advancement. These rules are seldom written down and sometimes inscrutable” (Lee2005).

“Good intentions and knowledge and experience of a subject are not sufficient pre-requisites for good mentoring. For good mentoring it is important that the approach of the mentor is constructive and non-judgemental and the process is positive, facilitative, and developmental. A good mentor should also have good interpersonal skills, adequate time, an open mind and willingness to support the relationship” (Taherian 2008).

### Role of the mentor

- Meet with mentee at least twice per year to discuss career goals and progress
- Document that meetings have occurred and file with the Department Mentoring Advisor
- Maintain confidentiality regarding shared information
- Be prepared to advocate on candidate’s behalf if required and with the mentee’s permission
- Participate in any evaluation of program annually (brief survey)
- Avoid abuse of power
- Help to build professional networks
- Hold a high standard for mentee’s achievement

Figure 2. Advice from the literature (page 6).

- Recognize the mentee’s potential and envision possibilities
- Protect the mentee from sometimes harsh interactions in academe
- Help the mentee gain access to otherwise closed academic circles
- Teach the mentee to promote him/herself

Information on “Role of the Organization” on page 7

### [Characteristics of Successful and Failed Mentoring Relationships: A Qualitative Study Across Two Academic Health Centers](#)

(Sharon E. Straus, MD, professor, Mallory O. Johnson, PhD, associate professor, Christine Marquez, research associate, and Mitchell D. Feldman, MD, professor)

“Purpose: To explore the mentor-mentee relationship with a focus on determining the characteristics of effective mentors and mentees and understanding the factors influencing successful and failed mentoring relationships.” (Straus et al., 2014)

#### Characteristics of effective mentors:

- Most commonly, participants mentioned that mentors should be *altruistic*: “They have a huge responsibility not to transform that potential into what the mentor sees where it should go but to be detached from that and making sure it’s in the best interest of the mentee.”
- Mentors as active listeners: “I think that the mentor should play the role of listener so it’s important to listen to what the mentee is saying in terms of what their important goals and objectives are when you’re sort of working through a problem as far as trying to give advice. It’s hard not to kind of impose your ideas and what you think would be right for yourself onto the situation but I think a good mentor kind of listens to each individual mentee and tries to give advice ... tailored to that specific person and their own goals and objectives with respect to the certain problem.” (participant)
- Mentors with substantial experience: “Having a wealth of experience to draw from in terms of prior mentor-mentee relationships that at my stage and my career I wouldn’t be obviously looking for a junior mentor because I myself mentor other people so I would be looking for more senior mentors who



*have a wealth of experience and can reflect on sort of where I am in my stage of my career and ... find someone at the appropriate stage of their career who has had significant personal life experience in the "school of hard knocks" but also has prior mentor-mentee relationships over a number of years or the number of different mentees so that they've been able to draw from that wealth of experience."*

(participant)

- Mentors who exhibit important relational characteristics, including being accessible and able to identify and support the development of potential strengths and skills in their mentees: *"is approachable and available when they need them."*

#### Characteristics of effective mentees:

- Mentees should be respectful of mentor's time and input by following through with things and being prepared for meetings.
- Mentees should be responsible, paying attention to timelines, and take responsibility for "driving the relationship." *"You can't just go in and be an undifferentiated blob about what you want, you have to really have thought before you go in and meet with your mentor about what the issue is that you need help with and you know it's much more useful if you bring your own analysis in with you and then the mentor can give you their analysis and you can talk."*
- Mentees must respect deadlines and allow the mentor enough time to look over documents. Otherwise, they may increase the stress on mentors, leading to burnout and inability to provide specialized support.

#### Characteristics of a successful mentoring relationship

- Reciprocity: bidirectional nature of mentoring, including consideration of strategies to make the relationship sustainable and mutually rewarding
- Mutual respect: respect for the mentor and mentee's time, effort, and qualifications
- Clear expectations: expectations of the relationship are outlined at the onset and revisited over time; both mentor and mentee are held accountable to these expectations
- Personal connection: connection between the mentor and mentee
- Shared values: around the mentor and mentee's approach to research, clinical work, and personal life

#### Characteristics and consequences of a failed mentoring relationship

- Poor communication
- Lack of commitment
- Personality differences
- Perceived or real competition
- Conflicts of interest
- Lack of experience

General mentor-mentee tips: <https://firstround.com/review/we-studied-100-mentor-mentee-matches-heres-what-makes-mentorship-work/>

