



Editorial

Successful mentoring of women ☆



Mentorship is essential to the growth of an individual. A career in medicine is associated with tremendous challenges and opportunities during which mentorship can be particularly helpful. The benefits of successful mentoring extend well beyond those offered to the individual mentor and mentee. Organizations that embrace mentoring are rewarded with higher levels of employee engagement, retention, and knowledge-sharing (Benson et al., 2002). In fact, mentoring has proven so beneficial that more organizations, including academic centers, have been offering mentoring or professional development programs to their employees over time.

For an individual, successful mentoring can lead to greater career success, including promotions, raises, and increased opportunities. Research on the careers of academic professionals shows that junior faculty with mentors publish more articles, feel more confident in their capabilities, and are more satisfied overall with their career than those without mentors (Levinson et al., 1991).

For women, studies on the outcomes of successful mentoring demonstrate increased retention rates and more success in obtaining promotions and research grants for those who have mentors. Additionally, successful mentoring of women has been shown to help minimize feelings of isolation and contribute to increased self-confidence and work engagement (Dutta et al., 2011; Levinson et al., 1991; Varkey et al., 2012).

Previous studies have shown that women consider mentoring more important than men do. They also have a significantly greater improvement in professional development from mentoring; however, women are less likely to have mentors or receive formal mentorship early in their careers compared with men (Cross et al., 2019).

For women in medicine, mentoring can be complicated by organizational factors, such as a lack of formal mentoring programs for women, lack of older women available as mentors, and mentors with specific expertise. In addition, both personal and relational dynamics can play a role in finding a suitable mentor (Cross et al., 2019). Some attributes that should be considered when choosing a mentor are trustworthiness, shared values, and the ability of the mentor to facilitate networking. Multiple mentors or group mentoring can help expand the pool of mentors for women and may better suit the evolving needs of female faculty (Koopman and Thiedke, 2005; Welch et al., 2012).

Effective mentoring should not have a top-down approach. Both individuals must be involved in the relationship, and a specific skill set, consideration of personal/cultural/relational factors, and organization of communication and collaboration are required (Straus et al., 2013). To explore what specific skills or attributes allow for successful mentoring, one of the authors (A/G.P.) asked five prior and current female mentees, including the first author, to describe what attributes of mentoring were most valuable to them. Several themes emerged from this activity.

1. Be accessible

Similar to the results of prior studies, perhaps one of the most important skills an effective mentor can develop is to simply be there for the mentee (Cross et al., 2019; Straus et al., 2013). Mentees emphasized the importance of being accessible, approachable, and welcoming. Seek out and check in on mentees. This can help reaffirm a sense of commitment and show them they are a priority. A meaningful relationship is more likely to develop from an increased number of interactions and/or connections between both parties.

2. Be an active listener and study your mentee

Determine your mentees' strengths and weakness by both actively listening and observing. Pay attention to their plans, aspirations, hopes, dreams, challenges, and fears. Determine their gifts and talents and communicate these insights to them. Help them overcome obstacles. One mentee expressed her appreciation for the "open, honest, supportive, but realistic" relationship she had with her mentor. Remember, it is okay to gently shed light on unrealistic expectations, and most of the time critical feedback is welcomed (Straus et al., 2013).

3. Affirm your mentees

Do not forget what it is like to be new, afraid, and ambitious. Affirm your mentees' professional qualities (e.g., knowledgeable, efficient, precise, productive, credible, works well with a team) as well as their personal qualities (e.g., compassionate, caring, empathetic, kindhearted, joyful, good self-control). Withholding affirmation until goals are achieved is a mistake. Find ways to affirm mentees even in the face of failure because one of the best motivators for success is previous failure.

☆ No human subjects were included in this study. No animals were used in this study.

4. Be a catalyst for excellence

Expect more from mentees than they expect from themselves. Communicate your expectations for excellence and do not settle for mediocrity. “[You] pushed me to the point of maximum achievement,” commented one mentee who was grateful for the inspirational motivation. Modeling a high standard of excellence for mentees and providing a vision of the mentee as talented, competent, and capable of a high level of achievement is important; however, one must also never endorse perfection as a legitimate goal.

5. Be honest, trustworthy, discreet, and help mentees network with others

One mentee explained: “Not having to explain family obligations to the mentor because he understood the value of both family and work created less stress for me in our relationship.” In addition, the mentor’s ability to network on the mentee’s behalf helped “open the door to many opportunities.” Another mentee expressed appreciation for her mentor’s ability to “give her options,” reinforcing the value of a mentor to offer guidance instead of giving orders.

The consequences of inadequate mentoring for women include isolation, disempowerment, stress, and limited career development, which are all factors conducive to burnout (Cross et al., 2019). Because the number of women in leadership roles is low, often the only mentoring available is from men. Fortunately, satisfaction with mentorship is not influenced by the sex of the mentor (Wasserstein et al., 2007). Men often make great mentors, and developing a supportive relationship in which men can ensure that their mentees are protected, treated as valuable members of the organization, and reach their full potential is entirely possible. In an era where the #MeToo movement has brought anxiety in men about mentoring women, these fears should not deprive women of mentorship and encouragement from men, as long as the relationship is appropriate (Grant-Kels, 2018).

6. Conclusions

Notable outcomes of successful mentoring include professional and personal development, academic productivity, and job satisfaction. Successful mentoring requires a specific skill set from the mentor, which can be learned. These skills include being available, being an active listener, showing affirmation, being the catalyst for achieving excellence, honesty, trustworthiness, and being able to expand the mentee’s network. Without consideration of personal, cultural, and/or relational factors between the mentor and mentee, establishing a meaningful relationship can be challenging.

Until there are enough senior women to mentor junior women in academic medicine, women are more likely to be mentored by

men. Both parties need to be equally responsible for making each other feel safe. Multiple mentors, who are able to address multiple evolving needs, may better suited for female dermatologists. The successful mentoring of women will hopefully result in increased retention rates, more promotions and grants, less burnout, and increased self-confidence and work engagement.

Conflict of Interest

None.

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Study Approval

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