

Choosing a Mentor: What Goes Into the Decision?

Mercedes Carnethon, Ph.D., FAHA
Associate Professor of Preventive
Medicine

November 15, 2014





"I'm looking for a mentor who can show me how to get rich without boring me with a lot of advice."

Outline

- How to identify a mentor
- What a mentor should do for you
- A better system for mentoring

Identifying a Mentor

Overview: Different Roles for Mentoring

- Primary mentor
 - Clinical or research “supervisor”
 - Shared substantive research or clinical area
 - Semi-regular engagement
- Career Mentor
 - Broad perspective on career
 - May not share research/clinical/education interests but can provide perspective on the steps required for success in the field

Researching a Mentor: Due Diligence

- **Reputation**

- What do senior colleagues and peers in your field think of the mentor?
- What has been the experience of existing and prior mentees?
 - Independence
 - Publications & Grants
 - Well-being

- **Professional Productivity**

- Publications
- Grants

What a Mentor Should Do For You

The “Interview Guide” for a Mentor

Will you do the following? Help me do the following?

1. Help you develop your career path
2. Provide an atmosphere of safety and trust
3. Follow through on commitments
4. Ensure appropriate academic and intellectual credit
5. Develop your network
6. Serve as a role model

1. Develop a Career Path

- Help mentees understand where their interests and strengths lie
 - Identify training opportunities needed to develop their skills
- Help select research questions, educational areas, leadership or clinical areas that are important to them
- Guide mentee's career path based on available science, protected time, divisional priorities, etc.
- Shared substantive research interests are helpful, but not required

2. Provide Atmosphere of Safety and Trust

- Avoids pushing his/her own agenda
- Encourages their mentee to speak freely
 - Confidentiality is ensured
- Willing to seek honest and frank feedback and formal evaluation
- Listens to words and the emotions behind the words

3. Follow Through on Commitments

- Reads manuscripts, grants, view teaching encounters, observe clinical performance and provide useful timely feedback
- Meet with mentees on a regular basis
- Has a manageable number of prior mentees so that he/she can meet commitments
- Gives mentees full attention without distraction

4. Ensure Academic and Intellectual Credit

- Open discourse about intellectual credit
- Gives mentees credit for their ideas, contributions and work
- Protects mentees who collaborate with other colleagues to ensure they receive credit

5. Help Expand Your Networking

- Connects mentees to other scientists and potential mentors
 - Provide opportunities for collaborations
- Introduces mentees to clinical, teaching, research leaders in their specialty or research area
- Helps mentees network with project officers, funding agencies and foundations

6. Role model

- Enthusiastic about their work
- Excited about clinical, teaching, research and leadership
- Perspective
- Work balanced with family and personal life
- Nice person who garners respect

A Better Way. . .

What is a Mentor?

Domains	Value
Role Model	Inspiration
Ethicist	Moral compass
Content	Expertise
Personal	Work-life integration
Strategy	Political management
Coach	Foster realistic self-appraisal & independence
Sponsor	Advocate in the system
Networker	Connecting to collaborators
Booster	Cheer-leader

T Together E veryone A chieves M ore

- Too many roles for a single person
- A single mentor offers a single perspective
- Some mentoring roles can conflict with one another
 - Supervisor/ boss as mentor (productivity vs. career advancement)
- Mentoring needs change as career advances
- ***A mentoring TEAM can overcome these limitations***

Summary

- Mentor can be useful in many ways
- Choose your mentor wisely
 - Do your research and interview tactfully and wisely
- Consider the ways in which your mentor can help you and the characteristics that you value in a mentor
- A mentoring team can be the most productive approach