

Choosing a Mentor

Carol C Nadelson, MD

Professor of Psychiatry, Harvard Medical School

Director, Office for Women's Careers, Brigham and Women's Hospital



A mentor's role

- A mentor (or mentors): essential for success
 - A major predictor of academic and career success (publications, confidence)
- There are multiple models of mentoring
 - Individual
 - Group
 - Peer



A mentor's role

- Teacher/coach
 - Counselor/confidant
 - Protector/cheerleader
 - Promoter/advocate/guide
 - Facilitator of other mentoring relationships
 - Professional soulmate/friend
- A mentor has credibility, power, expertise/experience, empathy, tenacity



One mentor is usually not enough

- Different mentors may be important at different career stages and for different reasons
- 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”
 - Research mentor may not have great interpersonal skills; administrative mentor may not have research expertise



Most cited reasons for needing a mentor (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 mentor's responsibilities

- Facilitate professional development
 - 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
- Recommendations



A mentor's responsibilities

- 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 - sustained relationship








"Let me try that!"



Choosing a mentor

Consider







-  What skills you need to learn/improve?
-  What can be changed/improved?
-  What networks/contacts would facilitate your goals?

THERE IS NO PERFECT MENTOR



Choosing 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
-  Will actively include and invite you



Choosing a Mentor

- Essential Information for mentee to gather
 - Expertise: gather data on potential mentor including cv
 - Record with other mentees
 - How many mentees does he/she have? (too many?)
 - Experience of other mentees with mentor?
 - Alternative agendas (service required 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 mentoring relationship
 - Define your priorities



Mentor/mentee relationship - a two-way commitment

- Mutually identify assets, needs, short and long term goals
- Jointly set ground rules
 - Time, frequency, location and duration of meetings
 - Agree upon focus of work
- Trust is built on MUTUAL respect and confidentiality



A mentee's responsibilities

- Collaborate with mentor
- Be honest
- Be prepared to be challenged
- Be open to advice and criticism
- Attend to details and deadlines
- Take initiative



When relationships don't fulfill expectations

- Failure to help build professional networks, advocate, and create opportunities
- Inadequate 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



When relationships don't fulfill expectations

- ❖ Disrespect; expectation that mentee should defer
- ❖ Boundary violations -- personal and professional; ethical problems
- ❖ Use of 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





"Might I sound a note of caution?"



Mentoring issues for women and minorities

- Relationships seem easier between “like” individuals:
 - Difficulty empathizing with a minority/woman
- Performance of minorities/women scrutinized more closely: higher hurdles to prove themselves to potential mentors
- Minority/women contributions may be undervalued
- Same sex mentoring is not more successful than opposite sex mentoring

Bickel, J, AAMC, 1998
Harvard Business School 3/29/95



Center for Faculty Development and Diversity

www.brighamandwomens.org/cfdd



Center for Faculty Development and Diversity

BWHCFDD@partners.org

617-525-7646



Office for Women's Careers

BWHOWC@partners.org

617-732-8595



Office of Multicultural Faculty Careers

BWHOMC@partners.org

617-525-9324



Office for Postdoctoral and Research Careers

BWHORC@partners.org

617-525-9323

