



How to Approach Mentorship: A Student's Perspective

Frederick Grady

Introduction

Students and mentors will have different perspectives on the approach to mentorship. The role of the student in a mentoring relationship is to inquire and absorb information and to learn from the experiences of those who have walked the path before. The role of the mentor in the mentoring relationship is to provide support for the student's educational growth.

Clarity, commitment, and consistency are vital to a successful mentorship experience. Students and mentors, ideally, should be in sync about their expectations of one another, creating mutual respect and appreciation for the time spent together. Accountability in the mentorship relationship builds trust between the student and the mentor. Students should engage in activities to enhance their progress in academic medicine, while mentors should participate in guiding these activities directly or indirectly.

Students endure an incredible amount of stress in their careers and may benefit from emotional support, career guidance, and sponsorship. It is especially important for mentors to help students in academic medicine to remain inquisitive by allowing students to express their creativity and discuss new ideas without fear of being shut

down before the idea has had the opportunity to grow or move in a different direction.

The student must be clear about what he or she is looking for in a mentorship relationship. Once the student's needs have been established, the mentor can decide how best to approach guiding the student. It is important to understand that there is a difference between sponsorship and mentorship. Sponsorship is a model used most frequently in business [1] that involves what a mentor says about a student outwardly. Sponsorship can play a critical role in a student's development in academic medicine. Sponsorship and inclusion in grant writing are some examples of how to provide educational opportunities for students. Mentorship allows the student to continue growing in academic medicine and allows the mentor to sharpen his or her mentoring skills. In this chapter, insight into the components of a good mentoring relationship, based on experience as a medical student, are discussed.

Commitment and Consistency

Mentorship is a key component of the academic development of students in academic medicine [2, 3]. Mentorship requires more than an email once a month and casual salutations when passing in the hallway. For the student, an important part of mentorship is the mentor's commitment not only to the student as an individual but also

F. Grady (✉)
Meharry Medical College, Nashville, TN, USA
e-mail: fgrady17@email.mmc.edu

to the student's goals in academic medicine. It will take time for the mentor to understand the student's goals and motivation for seeking guidance. Placing mentorship on the priorities list is an excellent way to work toward commitment.

Being a conscientious mentee involves considerable time and energy – two things that students in academic medicine have very little of. Students should make a conscious effort to show that they are committed to the mentorship that is being offered. This can be done simply by following through with verbal commitments, tracking events in a calendar, and communicating when plans change. This is a great way for mentors and students to stay on the same page and prevent falling out of touch. Mentorship should not be taken for granted, nor should the efforts of a good mentor. The student must remember that the mentor is not obligated to extend help and wisdom.

The relationship between the mentor and the mentee should be a priority for both. Students will appreciate a mentor that is willing to make time for them. Each student will require a different time commitment, and it is up to each mentor to use their best judgment on how much time to invest in order to have a successful mentoring experience. When students see that a mentor is organized and intentional about setting time aside for them, they will be encouraged to keep the mentor updated about their academic activities. Commitment and consistency build trust between the mentor and the mentee. Standards on how mentorship in academic medicine should be approached can be modeled after the 6Cs standard for nurses (care, compassion, competence, communication, courage, and commitment) [4].

Accountability

A professional relationship of any kind is based on accountability. Between a mentor and mentee, accountability is especially vital. People are generally more willing to help another person when that individual is accountable. It is imperative that mentors hold themselves accountable to check in with their mentee as often as necessary.

A good mentor will also hold his or her mentee accountable to reach out when he or she requires assistance. Barker, Rendnon, and Janis found that postgraduate mentees contacted their mentor once a week, mostly via email [5]. The mentor and mentee can ensure accountability by having mutual respect for one another's time, asking for help when necessary, and owning mistakes in order to absolve difficult situations.

Academic medicine is a non-stop, dynamic journey. Students can show respect for their mentor's time by acknowledging that their mentor wears many hats and by doing their best to navigate through challenges within their scope independently. Students should seek assistance when a situation becomes too taxing for their level of experience.

Students and mentors that are able to own and talk about their mistakes show integrity and willingness to improve. Mentors who show that imperfections can always be improved can facilitate the development of an organic professional relationship and possibly strengthen the ethical and moral compass of students.

Foster Student Growth

Sometimes students have to take initiative to advance their education. A mentor will surely be enthralled when a student asks for more tasks instead of waiting around for added responsibility. A mentor guides a student's growth; however, students are responsible for initiating and completing this growth. Students should not pester or harass their mentor for new challenges just to show that they are able to complete assignments quickly. Students should become active participants in their personal and professional growth [6]. A mentor can step in and put the student back onto the path to success when things go wrong on a specific task.

It is imperative that students are able to plan, ask questions, listen, and request feedback [6]. When receiving feedback, and especially when receiving criticism from a mentor, students should try to keep an open mind. Even if the mentor's delivery is experienced as harsh, the student

should attempt to actively listen and effectively hear what is being said. It is crucial to remember that a good mentor will have students' best interest in mind. Students would also do well to remember that their mentor has a different perspective based on his or her own experience.

Allow Open Thinking in a Safe Space

A student may not always have the answers to everything; that is why good mentorship is valuable. It is important, however, for mentors to allow students to think and speak openly about their ideas. Some of the greatest interventions and discoveries have come from the minds of students. For example, heparin, insulin, the sinoatrial node, and ether anesthesia, all of which contribute to the practices of medicine and surgery, have come from medical students [7].

Mentors should allow their students to dream and create big goals. These aspirations should be within reason of course, but mentors should try to encourage their mentees rather than tearing down their ideas. Using phrases such as "That's a great start, have you considered..." or "Brilliant, what are your thoughts on adding..." could be beneficial in facilitating critical thinking. Finding a balance between creating a close professional relationship and providing educational opportunities in order to set goals is imperative to a good mentorship experience [8]. A simple strategy to guide students in completing their goals is to allow creativity, facilitate the production of a feasible plan, and set reasonable checkpoints for the student to adhere to.

Mentors can teach students strategic development skills. The ability to create a plan is useful in academic medicine, where there are always deadlines to meet. Teaching students a fluid system that can be used to plan, execute, and adjust where necessary is essential to their development as part of the academic medicine workforce. Gaining insight into different planning techniques will not only benefit students in their education but also in their careers as professionals.

Types of Support for the Student

Students gravitate toward mentorship for various reasons, particularly because they are in need of guidance. Discovery of each student's reason for seeking mentorship will help mentors with developing an approach to best guide their mentee(s). Examples of support for students include, but are not limited to, emotional support, career guidance, and sponsorship (discussed later in this chapter).

Emotional support can be taxing on the mentor; however, it has been shown that students' self-reported mental health improves when they receive appropriate emotional support [8]. Additional recent studies have shown that medical students' sense of anxiety decreased when changes such as increased emotional support were implemented [9, 10]. Mentors can play a pivotal role in teaching students the skills needed to handle the intense emotions they may experience while making their way through the milestones of academic medicine.

Students that are looking for emotional support are seeking someone who will actively listen to them. Active listening involves using words to signify that an individual is paying attention [11]. Active listening can include eye contact. Active listening requires mentors to be intentional about the concerns of their students. When active listening occurs, it facilitates longer speaking times, thus increasing the chances of the student sharing shortcomings and problems in an open and honest way [11].

While some students may only need emotional support, others may also need career guidance.

Career guidance is an important reason why students look for mentorship. Mentorship will bring benefits to students throughout their educational development and career. It has been demonstrated that mentorship in career guidance plays a key role in the professional development and career satisfaction of students [2, 12]. Career guidance may potentially lead to a life-long mentor-mentee bond in which both parties can share the joys of the student's success. Career guidance can direct the course of a student's path in academic medicine; therefore, it is important

that the mentor is committed to the best interests of the student.

It is imperative to work with the student to come up with a plan regarding the progression of his or her career. A mentor can then determine which personal career experiences are relevant to share with the student and how best to assist the student on his or her journey.

The Importance of Sponsorship

Sponsorship is a concept that is mostly used in the business world but has applications to academic medicine. Sponsorship has been defined as the active support of a person highly placed in an organization who is willing to advocate for those with incredible potential [1, 14–16]. Sponsorship is one of the aspects of mentorship most valued by students. An established individual advocating for a student can lead to critical changes in the student’s career [1]. There are several important differences between sponsorship and mentorship (Table 1); in mentorship, the relationship is confined to two individuals (the mentor and mentee), while in a sponsorship, the relationship is more complex and involves the network of the sponsor [1, 14].

Table 1 Contrast of sponsorship and mentorship

Sponsorship	Mentorship
Sponsor is to protégé	As mentor is to mentee
Using senior position to promote students with excellent potential	Offering advice and support to students
Utilization of influence to promote student progress	Utilization of discussion to help students build skills and confidence
Driving career vision	Crafting career vision
Gives access to network and helps new connections form	Gives suggestions for networking
Utilization of reputation to increase the visibility of a student	Gives insight on how to improve visibility

Adapted from The Key Role of Sponsorship from the inclusion department at SLAC from Stanford University [17]

Mentorship involves the relationship between the mentor and mentee, in which the mentor provides wisdom, inspiration, or advice based on his or her professional experience to the early career mentee [13]. Sponsorship involves the act of speaking about the mentee in a positive way in public situations, which can lead to opportunities for the mentee [14, 15]. Acts of sponsorship are astronomically important gestures; some mentees have felt that sponsorship was necessary for the advancement of their careers in academic medicine [1]. Mentors can act as sponsors by publicly advocating for their mentees. Sponsors can also act as mentors [1, 14].

While students may avoid speaking highly of themselves so as not to be labeled cocky or pompous, sponsors are able to praise students more freely. Still, sponsorship has its risks, as it requires the sponsor to publicly vouch for the skills and abilities of the student [13]. Sponsoring only those that are deserving of high praise is good practice.

Mentors can provide students with important educational opportunities [7] and foster the development of skills not necessarily obtained through the curriculum. For example, mentors might encourage students to work on grant writing techniques or to attend academic and medical conferences.

Including students in grant writing meetings is one way of fostering important educational growth. Exposure to the style of writing that is necessary for a successful grant can be beneficial in the early career of a student. Grant writing is a key component of academic medicine (see chapter “[How to Approach a First Grant Application](#)”); however, this is not always apparent to someone early in their career.

Allowing students to attend medical and academic conferences is another way of contributing to their educational experience. This is a great way for students to gain insight into where a certain field is heading in regard to science, medicine, and technology. Conferences are also a great way for mentors to help their students practice networking skills.

Guidance for Students Seeking Mentorship

Students are often unfamiliar with how to navigate mentorship, especially early in their careers. There are many different ways to seek mentorship, and each mentor will bring a different perspective. Some tips for students approaching mentorship include the following: have more than one mentor, ask questions, take information with a grain of salt, make the most of opportunities, and pay it forward.

Having more than one mentor will allow for multiple perspectives on the same situation. Students will come to realize in their careers in academic medicine that what works for one person may or may not work for them. Students can use advice from more than one mentor to shape an approach that is best for their individual situation. Information from mentors should be taken with a grain of salt, as not all information will apply directly to a student's situation.

Students should always ask questions to ensure that they receive the information they need. If students do not speak up, their mentor may not know how best to support them. Asking questions is always good practice.

Students can show appreciation for the wisdom received from their mentors by "paying it forward" to others. Mentees can use what they have learned to help individuals on the same path. Paying it forward is a good way to signal to mentors that they have made a positive impact.

Conclusion

Commitment and consistency when mentoring students is key. Mentors and students must communicate with one another and must have mutual respect for one another's time (Table 2). Accountability in the mentoring relationship builds trust between the student and the mentor. Students should take responsibility to engage in activities that can enhance their development in academic medicine, while mentors should par-

Table 2 Communication tips for mentors and students

Mentor	Student
Share applicable experiences	Ask for guidance, listen with intention
Be open to students' ideas	Share ideas openly
Balance praise and constructive criticism	Be open to criticism
Check in with students	Update mentor often

ticipate in guiding these activities directly or indirectly. Creating an open learning environment allows for ideas to be discussed without fear. Students endure an incredible amount of stress and may benefit from emotional support, career guidance, and sponsorship. Sponsorship and inclusion in grant writing are some examples of how to provide educational opportunities for students. Mentorship allows students to continue growing in academic medicine and allows the mentor to sharpen his or her mentoring skills.

Key Concepts

- Commitment and accountability by both the student and mentor are crucial to a good mentoring relationship.
- Educational opportunities are valuable to students.
- Students may require different types of support from their mentor.
- Mentorship is one on one, while sponsorship is a publicized acknowledgment of a student's.

Words to the Wise

- Create an open dialogue with mentees in order to build a strong professional relationship.
- Don't be afraid to challenge mentees, but remember to stay positive and to offer encouragement.
- Sponsorship speaks volumes.
- Realistic expectations on behalf of mentees and mentors will help maintain a professional and mutually beneficial relationship.

Ask Your Mentor or Colleagues

- What methods have you found to be most successful in maintaining accountability in your professional relationships?
- What techniques have you found to be most successful in providing educational opportunities for your students?
- What methods have you found to be most successful in providing appropriate emotional support for students?
- What methods have you found to be most successful in promoting mentorship?

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