

How to Take Advantage of Mentorship

Significant resources have been dedicated to training faculty physicians to become better mentors. As I reflect on my three years of fellowship and my time with the *ACG Case Reports Journal*, I find that mentorship requires significant effort from both the mentor and the mentee. Here are the lessons I have learned on how to take advantage of great mentors:

Pick the Right Mentor

Selecting a mentor can be difficult. While some lucky fellows find that their first attending on the inpatient service is the best mentor imaginable, most people have to put some time into searching for a good fit. Importantly, good mentors do not have to be in your specialty nor do they have to have the same interests, but they should have qualities that you aspire to. Find someone who you can trust with your concerns and with whom you feel comfortable being honest. Multiple mentors in different places and career stages will ideally take an interest in your future and give you career-long guidance.

Make Your Goals Clear

Mentors will find it difficult to help you if you are vague about your interests; they need guidance. Discuss with your mentor what like and dislike. Start a relationship with your mentor with a discussion of what you like and do not like. If you are interested in private practice gastroenterology, tell your mentors so that they do not guide you toward a career in academics. Likewise, if you want a career in research, give your mentors an idea of your study interests so that they can help you develop protocols.

Check in Early and Often

Generally speaking, you are not bothering your mentors when you have questions and need help. Although physicians are inundated with burdensome paperwork and clinical requirements, strong mentors find working with mentees to be refreshing and energizing. Your mentors want to hear from you! When writing a manuscript, let them know about your progress (“I just finished the results, and I am working on the discussion and tables.”) so that they can block out appropriate time to give you the guidance you need.

Share Your Successes and Your Setbacks

Your mentors enjoy hearing about your achievements (“My paper just got accepted to *The New England Journal of Medicine*.” or “I just got offered that job in New York City.”). They have invested valuable time in you, so let them share in your joy. When plans go awry, discuss your obstacles. Let your mentor be your advocate and take the opportunity to learn different ways to respond to disappointment. Good mentors are trying to improve at mentoring; by telling them how they helped you achieve your goals, you provide them with positive feedback and reinforce their valuable skills.

Take Responsibility for Your Goals

Manage the time you have with your mentors. Come prepared with thoughtful descriptions of your problems and possible solutions that your mentor can provide. Do your best not to overpromise; while it is hard to tell your mentor that you do not have time to write that review article, better to be honest than to agree and then not follow through.

Change Mentors

If you are dissatisfied with your relationship with a mentor, find another one. Mentorship relationships can change due to your evolving goals, or your mentoring relationship might not be mutually beneficial. If discussing such issues does not solve the problem, reach out to someone else who may be able to provide you the help and guidance you desire.

As physicians and trainees, it can be difficult to admit that we need help. Learning from a mentor is a rewarding journey in professional development, and can help mentees be better mentors in the future. I hope this advice helps you develop fruitful relationships with those you admire.

Very Respectfully,

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ACG Case Reports Journal