

Original Publication

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Fundamentals of Mentoring: Three Steps to a Mentee-Driven Relationship

Julie L. Welch, MD*

*Corresponding author: jlwelch@iupui.edu

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Abstract

Introduction: Mentoring in academia is considered a fundamental element of career choice, satisfaction, and productivity. While there is an expectation that trainees and junior faculty will have a mentor, there is no standard practice for training or establishing mentoring relationships. This mentoring workshop is designed to help leaders in academic medicine train mentees. This workshop is built around the fundamental belief that training the mentee to be proactive, take ownership, and drive the relationship will not only jump-start the mentoring process but also cultivate a more sustainable mentoring relationship.

Methods: The materials for this workshop include instructor and participant resources to facilitate self-reflection and group discussion. Tools include a mentee needs self-assessment and a mentoring network map. **Results:** Implementation of the workshop was successfully carried out in a residency program with 21 interns in their first year of training. Participants believed the workshop was appropriate for their needs and provided useful knowledge and tools to enhance their mentoring relationships. **Discussion:** This workshop is the first session in a mentoring training series designed to provide ongoing mentoring training, resources, and tools to encourage both the mentor and the mentee to cultivate a productive relationship.

Keywords

Mentors, Mentoring, Professional Development, Mentee, Mentorship, Mentoring Relationship

Appendices

- A. Resource 1 - Instructor Copy.docx
- B. Resource 2 - Participant Copy.docx
- C. Resource 3 - Mentee Self-Assessment.docx
- D. Resource 4 - My Mentoring Network.pdf
- E. Resource 5 - References .docx
- F. Resource 6 - Workshop Evaluation.doc

All appendices are peer reviewed as integral parts of the Original Publication.

Educational Objectives

At the end of the workshop, participants will be able to:

1. Appreciate the utility of completing a mentee self-assessment to guide future career development needs.
2. Discuss strategies to identify a mentor (or mentors) with character qualities and skills to match a mentee's mentoring needs.
3. Recognize and reflect upon the important mentor and mentee character qualities that lead to more effective mentoring relationships.

Introduction

Mentoring in academic medicine is considered a fundamental element of career success, satisfaction, and productivity.^{1,2} During medical school and residency, mentoring influences a trainee's specialty choice, personal development, and professional growth.^{3,4}

While there is an expectation that trainees and junior faculty will have a mentor, there is no standard practice for establishing mentoring relationships.⁵⁻⁷ In reality, many trainees and junior faculty report a lack of effective mentorship and do not experience the benefits of a mentoring relationship. The reasons for failure are likely multifactorial and may be due to a lack of accessible mentors, unclear expectations, ineffective communication, mismatched mentoring pairs, gender or diversity differences, and/or poor preparation of the mentor and mentee for a mentoring relationship.⁸⁻¹⁰

One proposed solution to address these issues is mentoring training to educate both parties on their roles and expectations.¹¹⁻¹³ If leaders in academic medicine truly believe that the purpose of a mentoring relationship is to meet the needs of the mentee, then training the mentee is critically important. However, in most training programs, the approach to finding a mentor and building mentoring relationships is variable and follows no set standards.

This workshop is the first in a mentoring training series. It designed to help leaders in medical education train mentees. This workshop is built around the fundamental belief that training the mentee to be proactive, take ownership, and drive the relationship will not only jump-start the mentoring process but also cultivate a more sustainable mentoring relationship. Specifically, the goal of this session is to (1) empower mentees with mentoring knowledge and skills to enhance their future mentoring relationships and (2) offer tools to support the professional development of mentees.

Future workshops in this series will include the following. “Fundamentals of Mentoring: Three Elements of Effective Mentoring Relationships” will explore the three key elements of mentoring (i.e., purpose, clarity, and commitment) that promote a more reciprocal and productive mentoring relationship. Supporting toolkits will offer a guided, structured approach. The third workshop will be “Fundamentals of Mentoring: Work-Life Well-Being.” The goal of this hands-on session will be to assist learners and junior faculty in managing work-life conflict in the context of a busy academic career and to provide specific skills, tools, and tips for enhancing work-life well-being.

Methods

Target Audience

The target audience includes junior faculty and trainees (medical students, graduate students, postdoctoral students, residents, fellows) in academic institutions who are seeking or engaged in a mentoring relationship. The ideal instructor to learner ratio can range from 1:5 to 1:20.

Instructor/Facilitator

The instructor should be a faculty member, program director, or leader who possesses both an understanding of the fundamental aspects of a mentoring relationship and firsthand experience as a mentor.

Setting

This workshop is designed to facilitate conversation, self-reflection, and strategy development. It can be adapted to a PowerPoint presentation or hosted as a distance-learning module.

Time Line

The session is intended to run for 90 minutes. If necessary, it can be divided into three shorter sessions of 30 minutes each, addressing each of the three steps outlined in the resources. For more detail, see the [Table](#).

Table. Suggested Time Line for 90-Minute Workshop

Time	Item	Activities	Resource	Educational Objective
10 min.	Introduction & background	Whiteboard or flip chart for activities.	1 & 2	1
15 min.	Step 1: Figure out what you need as a mentee	Work in groups of 2-3 (pair) to discuss sections, then share in large group.	1 & 2	1
10 min.	Mentee self-assessment	Ask participants to complete. Then share with large group to identify commonalities.	3	1
15 min.	Step 2: Identify a mentor to match your needs	Work in groups of 2-3 (pair), and then share in large group to identify themes.	1 & 2	2 & 3
15 min.	My mentoring network	Ask participants to complete, then discuss.	4	2
20 min.	Step 3: Develop character qualities of successful mentees	Work in large group.	1 & 2	2 & 3
5 min.	Q&A and program evaluation	Open to discussion. Complete evaluation.	5 & 6	1, 2, & 3

Preparation

To prepare for the session, the instructor should review all of the materials and print Resources 2-6 (Appendices B-F) for each participant. In order to facilitate the workshop, the instructor will need Resource

1 - Instructor Copy (Appendix A), a whiteboard or flip chart, and markers. One option is to create an online survey version of Resource 3 - Mentee Self-Assessment (Appendix C) and request participants to complete the survey prior to the workshop. This provides the instructor with baseline mentee assessment data and saves time during the workshop. However, it does require supporting personnel to create, distribute, and analyze the surveys.

Resource Files

Resource 1 - Instructor Copy (Appendix A) provides a step-by-step guide for the instructor to facilitate the entire workshop. It contains suggested language to introduce each section, potential responses from the participants, questions to probe and encourage participation, and notes on how to organize the participants during the activities. Resource 2 - Participant Copy (Appendix B) provides the participants with a stimulus to guide their progress and record their work and reflections.

Resources 1 and 2 are parallel in design and correspond with the items on the time line in the Table. The session opens with a background exercise (10 minutes) to help the participants define and understand the key aspects of a mentoring relationship. The participants work in pairs to fill in the definition and then share their thoughts with the group as the instructor records responses. This serves to offer a foundation that emphasizes the importance of the reciprocal, collaborative nature of a mentoring relationship. In addition, it aims to facilitate the mentee's goals for professional growth and success.

The heart of the workshop addresses the three steps to a mentee-driven relationship, emphasizing the proactive, purposeful approach a mentee should take in preparing for and establishing a mentoring relationship.

- Step 1: Figure out what you need as a mentee.
- Step 2: Identify a mentor to match your needs.
- Step 3: Develop character qualities of successful mentees.

Too often, mentees fail to utilize the full capacity of their mentors because they cannot articulate clearly what they actually need from them. Thus, we start with Step 1.

Step 1: Three exercises are included to help the participants appreciate the utility of completing a mentee self-assessment and reflect upon their own personal and professional development needs (15 minutes). Resource 1 (Appendix A) guides the instructor through these three exercises with suggested language and stimulus questions. The first exercise examines the following questions: What career guidance and career advancement interventions can a mentor provide to a mentee? What personal development or support might a mentor provide? (Consider gender or diversity issues that are unique to your experiences.) The participants work in a large group and create a list of examples of how mentoring in academia answers these questions. Next, the participants are asked to reflect on the questions "How can a mentor help me? What do I need? Why do I need it?" with a partner and then share discoveries with the group. As the final exercise in Step 1, participants complete Resource 3 - Mentee Self-Assessment (Appendix C) to identify their own unique mentoring needs (10 minutes). Language to introduce this resource is provided:

This self-evaluation is designed to assess your skills, abilities, strengths and weaknesses in order to identify your mentoring needs. Not all aspects of this self-assessment may pertain to your career. Use the scale to rate your level of proficiency, and then check those items to identify the ones which you would like to work on. This will help you select the skills you need in a mentor.

Step 2: This section is structured to explore strategies to identify a mentor (or mentors) with character qualities and skills that match the mentee needs established in Step 1. Resource 1 (Appendix A) supplies the instructor with an exercise to assist the participants in identifying specific characteristics, or character qualities, that great mentors possess. Once the group creates this list, they are encouraged to use it in identifying the characteristics they desire in a mentor. Next, the instructor leads a discussion to explore ideas on how the mentees might approach finding a mentor with the desired character qualities and skills to match their needs (15 minutes). This step is concluded using Resource 4 - My Mentoring Network (Appendix D), which is designed to help the participants conceptualize and organize how their mentors

fulfill different professional and personal roles in their lives. The participants are given time to fill in their own mentoring network map and identify where they lack mentorship, then reconvene as a group to explore the questions “Where are they lacking mentorship? Does this match the needs they identified in Step 1?” (15 minutes).

Step 3: The purpose of this exercise is to help the participants recognize the character qualities of successful mentees and consider how they might incorporate these characteristics into their own behaviors in order to be proactive and manage up. Participants are provided with a list of mentee behaviors identified in the literature that increase the likelihood of receiving effective mentorship. As a group, participants are asked to read each characteristic aloud and reflect upon each quality. They are asked to think of a time when they either succeeded or failed to display that quality. Then, they add ideas to the list to build upon the ideas provided (20 minutes).

Resource 5 - References (Appendix E) presents a list of mentoring articles that support this workshop and offer the instructor and participants further reading material.

The participants should complete Resource 6 - Workshop Evaluation (Appendix F) after the session to assess the content and impact on their professional development, as well as provide the instructor with feedback.

Results

This workshop was successfully implemented in an academic emergency medicine residency program. A midcareer faculty member in the department of emergency medicine with mentoring experience and a leadership role overseeing mentoring training served as the instructor. This workshop was given as a session for resident interns who were 6 months into their residency training. The residency program runs a mentoring program in which temporary faculty mentors are assigned to each incoming intern and provide specific instructions and expectations. Residents are expected to keep this mentor or identify a better-suited faculty mentor during the last 6 months of their intern year. This workshop was specifically timed to empower the residents with critical mentee skills in order to find a mentor and establish a mentoring relationship. The residency tracks additional metrics of mentoring effectiveness, including both qualitative and quantitative reporting.

A total of 21 interns attended the workshop (100% of the intern class). Although less than half completed formal evaluation forms, the workshop was well received. The respondents agreed that the workshop accomplished the stated objectives, was appropriate for their needs, and provided useful information.

Reflections from the Instructor

The overall discussion during the workshop was rich, and the participants were very engaged during the exercises to identify mentoring examples and character qualities of the mentors. Every intern completed the mentee self-assessment worksheet to identify his or her mentoring. However, many struggled to get started on the self-assessment, stating that they needed improvement in almost every item on the list and had not become proficient in anything. I asked them to identify the top three to five items that were the most important at this stage of their career and build upon those. This seemed to focus their efforts and generate a mentoring needs list. The idea that the mentee should take ownership and proactively drive the mentoring relationship was a new concept to several participants. We spent time thinking of concrete examples of how they might implement these behaviors in a mentoring relationship. The mentoring network map was well received, and the participants worked well in pairs discussing which aspects of their own map had or lacked mentorship and how they would strategize to complete it. In addition, we discussed the idea of identifying a mosaic of different mentors to address the variety of mentoring needs, as one mentor cannot possibly attend to every need. In addition, the idea of a mentoring team or mentoring committee, which utilizes mentors from both within and outside the institution, is an effective mentoring model utilized to provide a breadth of perspective and expertise to the mentee.

After the Workshop

To facilitate finding a mentor, the emergency medicine department maintains a detailed faculty niche list of all faculty members and their areas of interest, research, and/or career-related expertise. The interns were provided with this list at the end of the workshop and were encouraged to contact potential mentors to interview, share their mentoring needs, and choose one who seemed like a good fit. The faculty members were willing to serve as mentors and help facilitate this process. The interns have an annual review at the end of their first year at which time they discuss the progress in their mentoring relationship with the program director.

Discussion

This workshop is designed to offer mentees a better understanding of their role in the mentoring relationship. It empowers mentees to be proactive in assessing their needs, finding a mentor with a matching skill set, and driving the mentoring relationship. The workshop is appropriate for learners and junior faculty alike. It is also an appropriate session for new or struggling mentoring relationships, especially if the mentee is having difficulty understanding his/her role, as it offers specific exercises to establish a strong foundation within the mentoring relationship.

While this workshop was delivered to a health care audience, the content is based on universal mentoring principles that apply to all mentees and can be easily adapted to other professions outside of health care.

Limitations/Challenges

A potential limitation in offering this workshop might be securing buy-in from the training program or department to support mentoring practices or a mentoring program. A challenge in giving a workshop that encourages mentees to be proactive and find a mentor is having a supply of willing mentors. This can be a significant limitation for many departments or programs. Enlisting the input of senior faculty members and leaders might generate creative solutions to finding mentors. Ideas might include expanding your mentor pool outside of your unit or utilizing virtual (online) mentoring programs offered through your school or professional society. Finally, this workshop addresses only the mentoring skills of the mentees. A program should consider how and when to offer mentor training in order to solidify a unified approach to mentoring education.

For mentoring to flourish, it is important to providing ongoing mentoring resources and tools to encourage both the mentor and the mentee to cultivate the relationship. As a follow-up to this workshop, I am creating a series of training sessions that cover fundamental mentoring topics.

Julie L. Welch, MD: Professor, Department of Emergency Medicine, Indiana University School of Medicine; Director of Mentoring, Indiana Clinical and Translational Science Institute

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Prior Presentations

This workshop was presented January 5, 2016, for the Emergency Medicine Residency Program at the Indiana University School of Medicine.

Ethical Approval

Reported as not applicable.

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