

BEHIND EVERY GREAT STAR:

A Mentoring Guide for School of Medicine Faculty and Administrators

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Ecologists tell us that a tree planted in a clearing of an old forest will grow more successfully than one planted in an open field. The reason, it seems, is that the roots of the forest are able to follow the intricate pathways created by former trees and thus embed themselves more deeply ... Similarly, human beings thrive better when we grow in the presence of those who have gone before.¹

Every faculty member at the University of Colorado School of Medicine should have at least one career mentor. The reason is simple: Having a mentor is critical to building a successful academic career.¹⁻⁹ Strong mentoring relationships are positively associated with career satisfaction, promotion, research grants, publications and other measures of academic productivity.^{1,6,7,10,11} Faculty who have mentors are more confident, enthusiastic and successful in their jobs.

Mentoring is also mandated by the Rules of the School of Medicine, which state: *“All Instructors, Senior Instructors and Assistant Professors will be assigned at least one mentor by the department chair ... within three months of the start of the appointment period.”* Unfortunately, there are significant gaps in our mentoring programs, despite this rule. In a July, 2005 survey only 52 percent of junior faculty reported that they have a mentor to assist with career development; basic science faculty were more than twice as likely to have a mentor (68%), compared with clinician-educators (31%).¹ Even among junior faculty who did have a career mentor, 24 percent reported they had never met to discuss career progress, and an additional 33 percent had met only once.

This article was written to help SOM faculty members, especially new Instructors and Assistant Professors, understand the goals of mentoring relationships, the characteristics of ideal mentors and the responsibilities that are assigned to mentors and mentees. This article also includes recommendations for department chairs, senior academic leaders and administrators seeking to strengthen their departmental mentoring programs.

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Mentoring: Is there really a need?

Arnold Rice Rich, who served as professor of pathology at the Johns Hopkins University School of Medicine from 1919-1958, observed that, in his day, medical school faculty could enjoy “the element of repose, the quiet pursuit of knowledge, the friendship of books, the pleasures of conversations and the advantages of solitude.”¹² Those times are long gone. Today, medical school faculty face relentless pressures to generate revenues from direct patient care or grants.^{2,13,14} Administrative and regulatory burdens are ever-increasing. And, as academic medical centers increasingly emphasize payer mix, managed care, business models and the “bottom line,” it is becoming more difficult to find time to teach, balance family and career, keep up with advances in medicine and science, gather with colleagues or engage in meaningful scholarship.^{1,6,12,15-21} For medical school faculty, wrote Strasburger, “These are the times than can try one’s soul.”²²

Why focus on junior faculty?

The need for skilled mentors is especially great in the first 2-3 years of a faculty appointment. This is because a successful transition from superb trainee to junior faculty member is not easy or automatic. As Bachrach has pointed out, “it is not that faculty members fail completely when embarking on their academic careers, but that some faculty don’t thrive early enough in the process.”²³ In a 1991 study of college and university faculty, just 15% of new faculty were “quickly successful.”²⁴

If faculty do not thrive early, it is not because they lack education, intelligence, drive, native ability or commitment. Rather, it is because these innate traits are not enough. Novice faculty members should not have to rely on trial

and error, bootstrapping or “muddling through.” And “see one, do one, teach one” is ineffective.ⁱⁱ According to Boice, “Almost all the failures and miseries of new [faculty] hires owe to misunderstandings about effective ways of working and socializing. Never, in my close observations of over a thousand novice professors did I see someone falter for reasons of inexpertise in his or her area of scholarship. Or from lack

ⁱSimilar results have been reported in published studies of clinician-educators. Compared with faculty scientists, clinician-educator career pathways are routinely characterized by: less frequent feedback from department chairs; inadequate mentoring; poorer understanding of institutional promotion criteria; less protected time for scholarship than promised; and lower levels of overall career satisfaction (See, for example, Farrell et al, 2004).

ⁱⁱIn 1997, Jessica Waugh published a practical guide for faculty mentors and mentees at the Medical College of Virginia (See Waugh, 1997). She observed: “An age-old argument against mentoring has been that it is unnecessary if only the best and brightest faculty are recruited in the first place. The father of this argument [was] Franklin Mall, Chief of Anatomy at the Johns Hopkins Medical School ... One anecdotal story about Mall concerns his wife questioning him on how to bathe their first baby. He is said to have replied, ‘Just throw her in the water, and let her work out her own technique.’”

of desire.²⁵

What, exactly, do mentors do?

The job of the mentor is straightforward: He or she seeks to provide the faculty protégé with the ancillary knowledge, skills and resources necessary to build a successful and rewarding academic career. These skills include self-promotion (and preparation for promotion), getting started in research, identifying writing and funding opportunities, establishing colleague networks (within and external to the School), learning presentation skills, identifying appropriate university and community service opportunities, time management, laboratory management, negotiation for resources and the tricks of successful navigation through the political workings of the modern medical school.

According to Waugh,²⁶ Hitchcock,²⁷ Berk²⁸ and a

large body of research about medical faculty development, a new faculty member needs mentoring in at least three critical areas: 1) development of career management skills; 2) understanding and adapting to the values and norms of the discipline and the institution; and 3) establishing a productive network of colleagues. Having productive colleagues is a particularly strong predictor of academic career success. According to Hitchcock et al, “the evidence of their importance is so compelling that if one were allowed only one line of inquiry to predict a faculty member’s future success in the field, it might well be, ‘Tell me about your colleagues.’”²⁷ Carr et al observed that “the greatest danger for junior faculty in academic medicine is isolation.”¹

A mentor is at least as important to a new Assistant Professor as library access, close-in parking, a high-speed internet connection or the other resources that we take for granted.

Table 1 lists some of the specific ways that a successful mentor assists and instructs the protégé. In a word, mentors help their protégés "get off to a quick start" in their academic work. *I would argue that a mentor is at least as*

Table 1: WHAT THE MENTOR DOES

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| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Assists with career planning and establishing short- and long-term goals |
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Explains the promotion and tenure process (after gaining a thorough understanding of them himself) |
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Suggests writing, research and grant-writing opportunities that will advance the mentee’s visibility and reputation |
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Reviews grants, manuscripts, book chapters and scientific presentations and provides honest, constructive critique |
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Helps mentee gain “high-visibility” positions and introduces mentee to interesting, productive and influential colleagues and academic and institutional leaders that “the mentee should know;” helps mentee gain national exposure; nominates mentee for awards or to membership on scientific panels; recommends him/her to write an invited manuscript or for speaking engagements; includes mentee in important meetings |
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Advocates for mentee and helps mentee secure resources; teaches the mentee about negotiation (for salary, space, equipment, time and needed resources) |
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Assists the mentee in starting or managing a laboratory |
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Helps mentee win important teaching assignments |
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Listens carefully, offers advice and does not betray the mentee’s confidences |
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Helps mentee avoid common career “derailers,” such as service over-commitments, exploitation by senior faculty, lack of focus, burnout, ennui, isolation and PAIDS (<i>Paralyzed Academic Investigator Disease Syndrome</i>)²⁹ |

important to a new Assistant Professor as library access, close-in parking, a high-speed internet connection or the other resources that we take for granted.

What makes a good mentor?

In the literature describing mentors, several words and phrases are often repeated: trusted advisor; career coach; sponsor; teacher; advisor; tutor; cheerful critic; strategist; confidant; and guide. More interesting, perhaps, are the general descriptions of mentors offered by experts in the field:

A mentor is a person "of greater rank or expertise, who teaches, guides and develops a novice in the organization and in a profession...The mentor possesses both professional expertise and political know-how and makes these available to the student. Mentors teach what textbooks cannot."³⁰

"Mentors are senior persons within their fields. They are chosen, specifically, for their ability to use the power of their positions and experience to develop the careers of those less powerful and experienced. A mentor has moved beyond preoccupation with self to foster the growth of a developing professional."²⁶

A mentor "helps a more junior person develop professionally through a combination of advising on projects, skills development, creation of opportunities and personal growth over an extended period of time."³¹

Several functions are considered integral in the mentoring relationship: teaching, sponsoring, guidance, socialization into a profession, provision of counsel and moral support. Of all of these, the most important function of a mentor is assisting in the realization of a dream.³²

"The most successful mentoring occurs when the mentor guides the mentored in such a way as to become competitive for the mentor's position ... A confident and competent mentor is able to ask, 'You want my job? I'll teach you how to get it.'"³³

These definitions share a simple message: Wisdom, experience, seniority, "career incumbency"³⁴ and national standing do not become mentoring, unless the senior faculty member who has them is committed to developing them in the protégé. As two experienced mentors wrote, "Success does not simply rub off the mentor and onto a [mentee]."³⁵ The benefits of mentoring may be greatest if mentors and mentees are engaged in collaborative academic projects.²⁸ But in all cases, the mentor invests time, energy, experiential learning, Socratic dialogue,²³ sharing of practical tips, introductions to influential colleagues and active engagement and advocacy. That's how it happens: Mentoring is a contact sport. Martin added, "Mentorship is a labor of love, its success as likely to depend on the labor as on the love parts of the equation."³⁶

Table 2 lists some of the traits and competencies frequently found in a prized mentor.



Table 2: WHAT MAKES A GOOD MENTOR
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Accomplished, senior, secure faculty member with a track record of academic success
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Open-minded, supportive of protégé and his/her dreams; has high expectations for mentee's projects
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Has research and grant-writing savvy; knows how to formulate crisp research questions, analyze data, anticipate methodologic flaws and bring projects to completion
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Approachable; willing to spend time regularly with mentee; has a desire to work with mentee to plan strategically and to help build mentee's career
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Knows the political ropes and inner workings of the institution; also knows the tricks of career-building, including how to establish connections, marketing and self-promotion
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Helpful if mentor and mentee share clinical, research or teaching interests and can collaborate on important projects
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Secure enough to "let go;" assists mentee to become independent, to garner credit and recognition that he or she as earned and to establish a unique professional identity
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Does not seek to "clone" the protégé or to monopolize or exploit the protégé's time

Part 2

*The initiative, assertiveness and talent of a younger generation are rare commodities that we can ill afford to waste. Mentorship provides a unique framework to ensure that we do not.*³⁶

Finding a good mentor

Message to new Assistant Professors: It is unlikely that a senior faculty member will knock on your door and ask to take you in. You must search diligently for mentors, in many places, within and outside your department.⁷ Here are some tips for identifying promising mentors:

Observe senior faculty members in laboratory, clinical, classroom and conference settings --- even during meetings. Select one or two whose interests, style and professional and personal characteristics match your own.

Set up appointments to meet with some of the faculty in your new division or department; you may be able to discover some who might become natural mentors, people with whom you will share interests, professional values and "chemistry."⁷

Personal style and compatibility matter: For example, according to Waugh, "if you want to protect limited family time, the senior faculty member you choose should probably not be the person known to work a 90 hour week and sleep in the department lounge."²⁶

Use word of mouth (or the internet) to ascertain whether a prospective mentor has published interesting particles in respected journals, holds national leadership positions or is "known for something" that also interests you. Locally, inquire about a prospective mentor's clinical or teaching reputation.

Learn whether the prospective mentor's previous protégés have been successful in their own academic careers.³⁷

Keep in mind that the best mentor is probably someone who is doing what you hope to do.²⁶ Look for someone who is a role model for the kind of academic physician, teacher, scientist or administrative leader that you want to become.

Should a department pre-assign a mentor to each new faculty member? The answer is (at best) a qualified "yes." As noted earlier in this article, the Rules of the School of Medicine mandate that department chairs assign mentors within three months of the start of a new faculty member's appointment. But self-selection and voluntary, matching are probably more effective. According to Waugh and others, "the most effective mentoring occurs when the seeker

and the sought mutually agree to the relationship."^{26,36} The genesis and maintenance of such a relationship is mostly up to the mentee.

Can a department chair or division head be a good mentor? The answer is also a qualified "yes," and there are many successful examples. But the chair's responsibilities as a mentor are different from his (her) responsibilities as supervisor, evaluator, grader and salary setter. Conflicts may arise when a mentor also sits above the mentee in the direct line of authority.³⁸ According to the Minority Corporate Counsel Association, which advocates for the expanded hiring and promotion of minority attorneys in law firms, "Supervisors and mentors do not necessarily have the same commitments ... A supervisor's primary concern [is often] getting the work done for the client, whereas a mentor's interest ... is in the junior lawyer's learning and growth."³⁹

Mentoring "across differences"⁴⁰

Faculty of color typically have fewer mentors, role models, colleague relationships and other resources that positively influence career success.

Minority faculty members routinely report lower career satisfaction, greater isolation from colleagues and institutional leaders and a slower pace of academic progress, even after adjusting for academic credentials and productivity. Minority faculty members are also more likely to leave academic medicine.^{1,9,41-46}

Senior faculty members seeking to "mentor across race" must be aware of a variety of special challenges facing under-represented minority (URM) faculty members.⁴⁷ First and foremost is isolation --- both social and professional.⁴⁸ "Sheer numbers alone can alienate minority faculty members and mark them as 'outsiders.'"⁴⁸ In some cases, URM faculty "may not see a colleague who 'looks like them' for weeks at a time ... They cannot take for granted professional relationships that are an extension of a lifetime of social experiences for majority faculty."¹ Reflecting on the problem of isolation from professional colleagues and mentors, Herteis wrote that junior URM faculty feel "isolated and disconnected during their first years of work and many leave before achieving promotion or tenure ... while most are certainly not treated badly, they feel as if they do not belong and endure a kind of benign neglect."⁴⁹ There are other challenges as well. Junior URM faculty members may sense they are unqualified for their positions. At other times, they face limiting stereotypes, double standards or "snap judgments" regarding their abilities or potential.^{1,48} Often, URM faculty members are denied access to vital inside information, as they are isolated from key colleagues, potential collaborators, department chairs and institutional leaders.^{47,48} The definition of "institutional racism" is relevant here: According to Jones, institutional racism is "differential access to the goods, services and opportunities [of an organiza-

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tion] by race ... it is structural, having been codified in our customs, practices and law ... [and] manifests itself in material conditions and in access to power."^{1,50}

Mentoring across races may be weakened if the parties cannot acknowledge and address these diversity and inclusion concerns. Thomas has also described the dangers of "protective hesitation:" When a mentor fails to discuss issues that are controversial or fails to challenge the mentee, because either party fears offending the other, "a great disservice is done to the mentee."⁴⁷

Mentoring relationships: Till death do us part?

Mentoring is not the same as marriage. For example, some faculty members will need more than one mentor to assist in different facets of their careers. A mentor from within a division or department may be complemented by one or more mentors from other departments or universities. One mentor may provide personal advice and career coaching, while a second provides research, methodologic or "content" support. The literature includes descriptions of "layered" and "rolling" mentors;²⁶ according to Betz et al, rather than identifying the single best mentor to fill every need, one might think about building "a personal mosaic of influences, experts and guides."⁵¹

It is also likely that faculty members will change mentors, ending one relationship and substituting others to meet new or more specialized needs. Lifetime mentoring commitments may be unrealistic; instead, mentoring relationships can end naturally, "through rift, drift or transformation."⁵²

What is expected from the mentee?

"Being mentored is as much an art as mentoring."³⁸ The prosperous mentee: a) meets frequently and participates actively in the mentoring process; b) is receptive to criticism and to new ideas; c) enlists the mentor's help when difficulties arise; d) is respectful of the mentor's time (and occasionally expresses gratitude); e) commits time and energy to projects that will be beneficial to achieving career goals; f) has a strong desire to be productive academically; and g) does not seek to tether himself to his mentor or enmesh himself in his mentor's career.^{11,53} Some mentor-mentee pairs find it useful to formalize their shared commitments, meeting times and responsibilities in a written statement.

Of all of the attributes of a successful mentee, the most important is initiative --- combined with diligent follow-through. A mentee should take charge of his or her career, plan actively, establish and meet deadlines, probe and explore, ask tough questions and meet frequently with people who can teach new things. The mentee is always in charge and retains the responsibility for making or breaking his or

her own career. According to Waugh, "your mentor is there to help you in your career by pointing out the stepping stones, not being one."²⁶ Mentors and their protégés develop mutual respect but not interdependence. Mentors provide ideas for writing and research and often opportunities to publish, but not honorary authorship. In short, mentors do not offer a free ride. Souba explained the distinction clearly: "A good mentor is more of a coach than a chauffeur, someone who helps the mentee become a competent navigator in his or her own right."⁵⁴

What's in it for the mentor?

In a successful mentoring relationship, benefits also accrue to the mentor. In science, for example, the senior mentor is exposed to the protégé's energy and ideas.^{37,38}

And while the mentee is not expected to be a clone or simply an extension of the mentor, "as the mentee gains experience and standing in a field, the success of the protégé will naturally be reflected on the mentor, further adding to the mentor's influence and prestige"^{26,55} Where appropriate, mentors may benefit academically, as co-

authors on papers and grants prepared by their mentees.³¹ But above all, there is the satisfaction of playing a pivotal role in another academician's success. Long after the senior mentor has stopped writing papers, seeing patients, collecting data or teaching in the classroom, the mentor's vision and values will live on in the academic protégé.²⁶ Indeed, if all goes as planned, the career productivity and satisfaction of both parties will be enhanced. And, importantly, the department, the school and the discipline will become stronger.¹¹

The departments' responsibilities

The department chair has the ultimate responsibility for establishing a mentoring program for junior faculty. First, chairs and faculty colleagues should clarify the goals of mentoring in their department. Will the program focus on research productivity (for example, start-up experiments, early publications and grant-writing)? Or will the focus be on some other component of professional development, such as inter-disciplinary collaborations, understanding promotion requirements, socialization and acculturation, laboratory management skills, or development as a teacher?

Rather than identifying the single best mentor to fill every need, one might think about building a personal mosaic of influences, experts and guides.



Department chairs should then assign mentors or, preferably, facilitate a process by which junior faculty identify and approach senior faculty whom they admire, ideally after learning about their career interests and observing their teaching, clinical, scientific and personal styles. Common “match points” for creating mentoring relationships are joint clinical, research or teaching projects or the recruiting process, when departmental faculty are deciding whether a prospective hire will be a “good fit.” Department chairs should communicate in writing to new faculty members and to their mentors, reminding them of their responsibilities to one another. Chairs should also consult regularly with junior faculty, to better understand the demands they face and to gauge their mentoring needs.

Newer, on-line tools are emerging to help junior faculty members find mentors. One example is the innovative *Mentor-Mentee-Matching (M-cubed)* data base, developed by Professor Laurie Shroyer. In *M-cubed*, senior faculty members voluntarily activate a mentor listing in an on-line data base; the listing includes information about the faculty member’s career focus, research interests, publications, grants, along with contact information, and these data are provided to prospective mentees. For an early look at *M-cubed*, visit <https://www2.uchsc.edu/clinicalscience/mentor/2master.htm>.

However the mentoring pairs are created, departments should assign a senior faculty member (for example, a vice-chair for academic affairs) to monitor the process, evaluate outcomes, identify gaps and suggest new pairings when needed. A variety of outcomes may be of interest, including: faculty retention, promotion and tenure; skill acquisition; academic productivity (for example, teaching accomplishments, abstracts, presentations, publications and national activities); unmet mentoring or faculty development needs; or various measures of the career satisfaction of senior and junior faculty members. Berk developed and tested a “mentoring effectiveness scale” that may be used to monitor mentoring relationships in academic medicine.²⁸ In many cases, junior faculty will need assistance in identifying potential mentors outside the department. There should also be an appropriate connection between the department’s mentoring activities and other faculty development activities, such as annual performance reviews, writing of professional plans and comprehensive mid-course reviews.

Departments should consider investing some resources to support mentoring pairs. For example, the UCDHSC School of Education recently provided modest funds to new mentor-mentee pairs to support one or more joint scholarly projects during the mentee's first or second year. Departments should also consider ways to recognize the contributions of their mentors. Departments (and the School of

Medicine) should recognize mentoring as an official part of a senior faculty member's duties, and as a tangible demonstration of a faculty member's commitment to teaching, research and service.

Newer Mentoring Models

Mentoring is time-consuming, and resources are scarce. Many senior faculty report that they are “close to their mentoring capacity.”³¹ Therefore, departments may want to consider newer models that increase the efficiency and reach of mentoring programs. For example, workshops can be organized to present information that all junior faculty members need. Mentoring programs can be developed jointly with other departments, and “mentoring consultation programs” can be created, so that newcomers can request a specific consult for a particular area of interest (for example, course supervision, academic writing, presenting a scientific abstract or time management). Some departments have successfully matched new faculty members with two co-mentors or even a “mentoring committee,” to give newly hired faculty an even broader perspective and a quicker start. A recent survey in an internal medicine department found that co-mentoring routinely provided a better experience for mentees and for the co-mentors and was less demanding than being a sole mentor.³¹

Another model is collaborative, or “group,” mentoring. Collaborative mentoring brings several mentees and senior faculty mentors together in a group setting.^{3,56} While not a substitute for traditional mentoring between a trusted senior advisor and a protégé, group mentoring does offer certain advantages, especially in the first 1-2 years of a faculty member’s appointment. Career-building in academic medicine is time-sensitive; junior faculty cannot always wait for a senior advisor to transfer knowledge over a period of years. Collaborative mentoring provides a visible, quick and efficient means to deliver accurate information about the rules, values and traditions of the school, along with skill-building exercises in a variety of areas, such as career planning, es-

Collaborative mentoring programs enable junior faculty to gain knowledge and confidence. Collaborative mentoring builds collegiality and helps break down barriers between junior and senior faculty.

tablishing laboratories, curriculum vitae and promotion dossier preparation, time management, building colleague and mentoring networks, grant acquisition and scientific writing. Collaborative mentoring programs enable junior faculty to gain knowledge and confi-

dence, from both peers and senior advisors, in a planned, structured setting. In the group setting, trainees “benefit from exposure to a variety of styles and options, the better to see what benefits their own development.”^{1,4} Collaborative mentoring also helps mid-career faculty gain mentoring skills. Perhaps most important, collaborative mentoring builds collegiality and helps break down barriers between junior and senior faculty.

Summing Up

As an institution, "we need to welcome our new faculty differently."⁵⁷

Every department and division in the School of Medicine should develop a strong mentoring program, to welcome, coach and support junior faculty. Strong mentoring programs will help new faculty succeed more quickly. Mentoring programs will also prove good for the department, by helping new faculty develop a sense of loyalty and connectedness to the department. As a consequence, mentoring programs can reduce costly faculty turnover and promote the stability, resiliency, productivity and leadership capacity of the department and the School.^{1,4} According to Carr et al, "mentoring represents the most tangible bridge to continuing the excellence in academic medicine that is so challenged by managed care and budget constraints."¹

Mentoring represents the most tangible bridge to continuing the excellence in academic medicine that is so challenged by managed care and budget constraints.

For junior faculty members, the message is equally compelling: It is essential to find mentors who are willing to guide you as you plan and build your career as a clinician, teacher and scholar. Strong mentoring relationships are positively associated with academic advancement, research productivity and a variety of measures of career satisfaction. Mentors help junior faculty succeed more quickly, in a complex, business-oriented and fast-paced world where self-reliance, bootstrapping and "muddling through" are usually not enough. Daloz put it this way:⁵⁸

"Mentors are guides. They lead us along the journey of our lives. We trust them because they have been there before. They embody our hopes, cast light on the way ahead, interpret arcane signs, warn us of lurking dangers and point out unexpected delights along the way."

To return to the title of this article: Behind every great star ... is a mentor.

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