



# Mentorship in Radiology and in Life

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*Our chief want in life is somebody who will make us do what we can.*

Ralph Waldo Emerson (1)

Mentorship is everything. To have a great mentor—and, ideally, several great mentors, to help you navigate your professional career in its multiple stages and provide you with wisdom and life lessons learned through the course of their career—is the ultimate gift. No lecture, textbook, internet site, or online application can provide the invaluable experiences, advice, and guidance that a mentor can to ultimately augment your career to a level you did not even think was possible.

Mentorship can take multiple forms and come from unexpected sources. The model is simple: an individual, typically one more senior and experienced, takes a professional trainee in their field under their wing. That individual is secure enough in their position and accomplishments that their primary role is to counsel their mentee, although they may benefit from the relationship. Mentors inspire their mentees and keep them excited about their chosen career, with a goal not limited to advancing the mentee's career but to position them to serve as a mentor in the future, paying forward the wisdom they acquire to a future mentee.

Although mentors can be as diverse as the human population, there are common characteristics that all great mentors share. The best mentors exude humility and understand that the relationship is not about themselves but is focused on advancing the career of the mentee (2). Mentors take the opportunity to learn about their mentee and attempt to optimize advice and experiences to augment a trainee's career. In addition,

mentors remain candid with respect to the advice they offer to their mentees, with the ultimate goal of inspiring improvement and enhancement of a mentee's ambitions (3). They are nonjudgmental with respect to a mentee's successes and failures, providing constructive feedback when asked (4). Finally, the best mentors listen attentively and empathetically to their mentees, in an attempt to provide the best guidance possible for the future success of the mentee (5).

There are certain traits that are necessary in a mentee to allow the mentor-mentee relationship to flourish. A successful mentee often initiates the relationship with the mentor and drives the interactions, whether in person or virtually via online meeting platforms. They also maintain a positive attitude with a sincere willingness to learn from their mentor, understanding that the mentor will impart wisdom that the mentee may otherwise not have access to (6). Outstanding mentees communicate effectively with their mentors, explaining exactly what advice they need and what problems they are encountering with respect to their career (6). Finally, great mentees show respect and gratitude toward their mentor, acknowledging the sacrifice, time, and commitment that their mentor is showing them (3).

Mentorship has been receiving somewhat greater attention in recent years in the medical realm, including from professional radiologic societies and academic radiology departments with training programs (7). There is emerging research that documents the positive benefits of mentorship in other specialties in medicine (8). Although a few such reports exist in the radiology literature, many more are needed (4). Mentorship is also playing a greater role with respect to the promotional pathways in academic medical departments (8). For example, promotions committees for multiple tracks (in North America) are taking the role of mentorship very seriously when evaluating the accomplishments of midlevel biomedical faculty, often requiring evidence of successful mentorship of junior faculty for faculty promotion (8).

As with so many other things, mentorship has been challenging during the COVID-19 global pandemic, with the lack of in-person interactions

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due to social distancing. Initiating mentorship relationships, fostering them, and watching them thrive have been very difficult. However, if there was ever a time for resilience, now is the time, especially with respect to mentorship. Mentees should find creative ways to connect with mentors, such as through online communication platforms, e-mail, or telephone calls. Mentors should also take the initiative to cultivate their mentees and reach out to others in potential need of mentorship. There is no greater rewarding activity in academic medicine.

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