

How to find and succeed as a mentor

To be successful, every pharmacist must have at least one mentor and serve as a mentor. A mentor provides a positive career role model, professional growth opportunities, advice, career challenges, access to learning resources, encouragement, and feedback on a mentee's career progress.

The term *mentor* comes from Greek mythology. As Odysseus set out for the

Trojan War in Homer's *The Odyssey*, he entrusted his house and the education of his son, Telemachus, to his friend Mentor, a wise elder, and asked him to teach Telemachus "all you know."

Finding an appropriate mentor. Some questions to consider when identifying candidates for mentor include

- Do you currently admire them professionally?
- Are they doing (or have they done) what you would like to do in your career (and life)?
- Are they respected by their colleagues?
- Are they positive, optimistic, and enthusiastic?
- Have they established a professional network?
- Do you feel comfortable with them?
- Do you trust that your conversations will be held in confidence?
- Are you willing to have them be candid with you, encourage you, and challenge you to reach your career potential?
- Are you ready to formally ask someone to be your mentor and assist you in your career? It may be useful to have several mentors. You may benefit from having one who covers the professional development aspect, another with whom you can truly be candid, and a third who provides you with encouragement and support.
- Have you used the ASHP Virtual Mentoring Exchange? This service (www.ashp.org/virtualmentoring/index.cfm) is user-friendly and can lead you to a mentor.

To have a successful relationship with a mentor, you must have a sincere willingness to learn continuously and

grow professionally. This requires taking the time to develop a personal relationship with him or her. Ask about his or her childhood, parents, siblings, reasons for choosing pharmacy as a career, and major life influences. Inquire about his or her pharmacy school, courses or clerkships enjoyed, and favorite faculty member (and the reason why). Mutual trust and respect are fundamental in the mentor–mentee relationship.

Explain, to the best of your ability, what you would like your career and life to be like. Do not be modest: If you do not describe your ideal career, a mentor cannot help you achieve it. Ask your mentor to help you develop a written career plan that includes specific goals, action plans for each goal, measurable milestones, and a timeline. Such a specified plan will help to focus your efforts.

Be willing to share your concerns, fears, and failures; otherwise, your mentor cannot assist you. The goal is to learn from these mistakes and not repeat them. Ask for what you want and need. Remain open-minded to your mentor's advice and suggestions, but make your own decisions.

Stay in frequent contact (in person or via e-mail or telephone) to provide progress status reports and obtain needed plan updates. Preschedule time together at professional meetings, even if you work together. If you do work together, have lunch or dinner so you have some uninterrupted time. Periodically discuss how to make the mentor–mentee relationship more effective.

Being an effective mentor. Every pharmacist must be a mentor or career coach to be truly successful. Your mentees will prove to be allies in the future as they advance in their own careers and gain influence. Being a mentor is thus a reciprocal relationship where you gain



The Success Skills column provides practical advice to help pharmacists become more effective in their professional and personal lives. Installments are contributed by and reflect the views of Sara J. White, M.S., FASHP, Pharmacy Leadership Coach, Mountain View, CA.

as much and maybe more than you give. It is paying back those who have been your mentors by investing in other practitioners. It is tremendously satisfying to see mentees achieve their goals and know that you have contributed to their success. It can be rejuvenating for you to think about the profession from another generation's view point. To be an effective mentor, you must sincerely have the mentee's best interest as your motivation. There has to be a mutually respectful and trusting relationship to be a successful mentor. You are trying to unlock your mentees' potential to maximize their performance by building their awareness, responsibility, and self-esteem.

Give your mentee permission to ask about anything, personal as well as professional. This permission validates his or her self-worth and indicates that questions are welcomed.

Be willing to frequently make time to spend one-on-one and keep in touch. Realize that it takes time for the relationship to develop. Accept mentees as the unique individuals they are. Determine their current position, responsibilities, likes and dislikes, and the accomplishments of which they are most proud.

Resist making decisions for them. Suggest options, alternatives, and things to be considered. Ultimately, the mentee must be able to function without you. A good coach teaches the game basics but does not play the game for the athlete.

Support your mentee by being proactive in connecting him or her to the right people through introductions and access to your professional network. Be available so your mentee can bounce ideas off of you. Be an active listener, paraphrase what you are hearing, and ask thought-provoking and insightful questions that stimulate the mentee to clarify his or her thinking and reflect on who he or she is as a person and a professional. Questions may include

- What is your definition of success?
- What excites you?
- What is the most challenging part of your current position?
- If you could change something about your career, what would it be?
- What do you want your professional legacy to be?
- In what ways do you think you inhibit reaching your potential?

Share your personal philosophy to help the mentee deal with current problems and situations. Share lessons you have learned. Discuss your failures and successes, including what you learned and how you handled failure. Use examples to which the mentee can relate.

Teach your mentee to be observant, learn from past experiences, and be self-reliant. Show him or her how to develop short- and long-term goals, and revisit these periodically so adjustments can be made. Teach the mentee to deal with negative self-talk. Suggest appropriate readings and programs that will enhance his or her career (e.g., personal style profiles). Tell the mentee what is acceptable in the pharmacy world and how things work in pharmacy. Teach your mentee how to publish and do so jointly, if possible. Explain how to "keep up" professionally and become involved in professional organizations and take calculated risks by analyzing the risk:benefit ratio.

Encourage your mentee by affirming his or her strengths to build confidence and enhance self-esteem. Assess your mentee's reference group to determine if negative or draining people are hindering his or her success.

Help polish any "rough edges" with suggestions for possible improvements. Provide feedback in a direct, honest, and timely manner. Offer more feedback and less advice; advice does not offer a learning experience. Offer frequent reminders until your suggestions are incorporated.

Do this slowly over time to avoid overwhelming the mentee. Recognize and reinforce by positive comments any improvements made. Remember that the mentee should feel challenged, not threatened.

Suggest growth opportunities to explore. Encourage your mentee to move out of his or her comfort zone in order to reap professional growth. Instruct the mentee to think outside the realm of pharmacy (personal development areas, community service, volunteer opportunities) when exploring professional opportunities.

Periodically discuss how the mentor-mentee relationship can be improved. Enumerate the benefits that you receive as a mentor and encourage his or her future mentorship. Teach your mentee that his or her knowledge will be needed by future students and practitioners because, as any successful pharmacist knows, no one becomes successful alone.

Suggested readings

- Ensher E, Murphy S. Power mentoring: how successful mentors and protégés get the most out of their relationships. San Francisco: Jossey-Bass; 2005.
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