

OHSU School of Medicine TALENT Program
Guidelines on Mentoring

APPROACHING AND STARTING A MENTORING RELATIONSHIP

A. Initial contact

Decide whether email or a phone call is best. Is your question best dealt with by email, or would a quick phone call be better? If you do not know the person, you may want to email first.

1) email (or mail): Recommended if person is unknown or not well-known to you. If you do not get a response, follow up in a week with another email or phone call.

- In subject line of the email, indicate your specific subject (e.g., "mentorship")
- By way of introduction, say why you are calling and how you got the person's name (e.g., recommended by someone).
- Be prepared: be specific & brief in the purpose of your message.
- Ask the person if (s)he is willing to do this, or if you should seek help elsewhere.
- Compose your message first in your word processing program. This will make it easy to proofread, not to send it prematurely, and to save a copy. Then paste the text into the message section of your email.
- Provide your complete contact information and the best times to be reached.
- If you wish to follow up with a meeting, suggest what days and times are good for you.
- Consider attaching a CV (2-page biosketch if that will suffice) or other relevant documents.

2) phone call: If you know the person and are comfortable with her or him, you may wish to make a phone call. In addition, some people don't check emails regularly, and must be called.

Most of the above suggestions for emailing also apply to phone calls. To highlight important points:

- When you first call, ask if this is a good time, and if not, ask when would be a better time to call.
- Introduce yourself and state the purpose of your call concisely.
- Be prepared: have specific questions ready.

- Give the mentor the opportunity to set a time and place to meet.
- Ask the mentor what materials you can provide to help with mentoring (e.g., CV, grant, manuscript).
- Don't call at the last minute. Give the mentor enough time to deal with your situation.

B) Short-term (or "one-shot" situations)

If you are contacting a mentor for a specific piece of advice and are not seeking an ongoing relationship, clarify in advance that you expect that this will be a limited time commitment. A mentor who is busy may be willing to help you with a single situation who would otherwise not have time for an ongoing relationship.

Examples: Critiquing your CV, reading specific aims of a grant, or study section critique

C) Ongoing relationship

For the initial contact and to start the relationship, we recommend clarifying the specific need or question for which you are seeking advice. This helps both the mentor and the mentee determine the possibility of a mutual relationship. The mentee should evaluate as soon as possible whether the person will be a good fit: how hard/easy it was to meet the mentor, the value of the mentor's feedback, and the ease of interaction.

Examples: Setting long-term goals, seeking career advancement opportunities

GUIDELINES FOR MENTORS

If you want to say no: If you are contacted and feel that you are NOT the best person, suggest someone else with expertise. Otherwise recommend that she contact someone in the TALENT program for a recommendation.

Evaluate your skills and time: Evaluate whether you are the right person for the role, in terms of both expertise and time. Also, keep in mind that while you cannot be everything to a mentee, it is likely that you will be able to perform a specific mentoring function.

Be available: Be as flexible as possible about being available to your mentee. Experiment with engaging in "mentoring conversations" one at a time.

Be curious: Practice conscious listening to help the mentee figure out what she wants and empower her in her own career.

Be courteous: Give sufficient notice before changing meetings. Respond to emails and telephone calls promptly.

Be in touch: Try to keep in touch regularly, through emails or TALENT group meetings.

Be honest about the relationship: Clarify your role and what the mentee expects of you. Clarify your own boundaries – psychologically and in your external world. Let your mentee know if you think the relationship needs to change, due to changes in her needs, pressures on your time, etc.

Play a role in career advancement: Talk about your mentee’s accomplishments within the institution, introduce her to others, and recommend her for new opportunities. Empower the mentee to choose roles that require her to demonstrate skills that are requisite for higher-level positions and responsibilities. Review where your mentee is in relation to promotion and tenure (e.g., scholarship, teaching, service)

Help establish goals: What do you and your mentee hope to accomplish?

Give feedback that is specific and honest, and that addresses strengths and positive attributes, as well as areas for improvement.

Get your own personal “coaching staff” in place to support you.

GUIDELINES FOR MENTEES

Have realistic expectations. Realize that a single mentor relationship probably will not satisfy all your needs over the course of your career, and that you need to build your own personal “coaching staff.”

Ask for specific advice, and be receptive to input, even if it is not what you want to hear.

Evaluate feedback and advice. You don’t need to do everything your mentor says. Strategies and behaviors that work for your mentor may not work for you. Act on advice that fits for you.

Evaluate the relationship. Is it difficult to contact the mentor? Does (s)he cancel meetings at the last minute?

Take responsibility for the relationship. If you want to have a mentor, be a mentor to others. Cultivate awareness of what you have to give back in a mentoring relationship. If possible, attend TALENT Program and other mutually interesting functions with your mentor, even if this is a way just to keep in touch.

Keep in touch. Be sure to communicate with your mentor. Give your mentor progress reports by email, try to see her or him at medical school functions, or meet for coffee or lunch.

Be considerate. Be prompt to meetings. If you need to reschedule, give your mentor plenty of advance notice (at least 24 hours). Recognize that your mentor is busy, and respect her or his time.

Establish the nature of the relationship. This needs to be done in conjunction with the mentor. Set specific goals for the relationship – what will you get out of it? How often do you want to meet?

Realize that relationships are dynamic. Your relationship with your mentor may change over time, and be prepared to make changes or end the relationship if necessary.

Take advantage of opportunities to work with senior women and men, and don't discount the value of peers in providing mentoring.

Confidentiality: Your mentorship relationship is a personal one. You need to establish with your mentor the degree to which this advice is kept confidential.

Appreciation: Let your mentor know when (s)he has helped you, and express appreciation for this guidance.

Adapted from, "Effective Mentoring In An Academic Health Sciences Center," Nadine Kaslow, Ph.D., Professor of Psychiatry and Behavioral Sciences, Emory University and From Mt Sinai School of Medicine Women Faculty Group, <http://www.mssm.edu/wfg> accessed 8/2/05

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