

Starting and Managing a Physician Mentoring Relationship

What Is Mentoring?

The word “mentor” is based on the Greek friend of Odysseus who was entrusted with the education of his son, Telemachus. Webster’s defines a mentor as, “a trusted counselor or guide,” or a “tutor.” We describe a mentoring relationship as one in which a more experienced, wise and knowledgeable person transfers his or her skill and knowledge through advising, sharing experiences, observing the mentee, discussing situations and giving feedback. Peer mentors are persons, typically in the same field or position, who have more experience, expertise, knowledge, skills and abilities, and are willing to share what they have learned with others who are less experienced. Mentoring can be done on either an informal, or a more formal, basis. Individuals can become mentors by virtue of their experience and knowledge, along with their willingness to share their time and talents with another colleague. Mentors of this type are usually not paid for their services directly, but do this work to serve others in their field.

Typical Reasons for Mentoring

<input type="checkbox"/> Planning for next step in career	<input type="checkbox"/> Understanding and using your spirituality in your practice
<input type="checkbox"/> Planning for retirement transition	<input type="checkbox"/> Developing your spirituality
<input type="checkbox"/> Work-life balance	<input type="checkbox"/> Managing change
<input type="checkbox"/> Gaining more meaning in your work	<input type="checkbox"/> Improving skills in giving and receiving feedback
<input type="checkbox"/> Interpersonal and communications skill building	<input type="checkbox"/> Resolving team issues
<input type="checkbox"/> Gaining political savvy	<input type="checkbox"/> Regaining focus, energy in your career
<input type="checkbox"/> Improving management skills	<input type="checkbox"/> Building skills in problem-solving, decision-making, conflict management, confronting
<input type="checkbox"/> Improving relationships with patients and families	<input type="checkbox"/> A “listening ear”
<input type="checkbox"/> Improving relationships with peers	<input type="checkbox"/> Other _____
<input type="checkbox"/> Leadership development	<input type="checkbox"/> _____
<input type="checkbox"/> Dealing with the stress of a medical practice	

When physicians were asked what, in their opinion, are the most significant transitions or life changes they and fellow physicians face that mentoring could help them with, they responded:

- New physicians
- New interns
- New MD executives
- Going back into full time practice
- Deciding when to retire
- Fulfillment/goals
- Realistic expectations
- Personal transitions
- Pre-catastrophic events
- Position changes/redefined roles
- Listening ear and advice
- Not just a meeting – a relationship
- Awareness of authority/impact on others
- Crisis of time management

The Mentor Match

- In seeking a mentor
 - Respected colleague
 - Can talk openly and comfortably
 - Trust to keep confidences
 - Believe to be a good listener
 - Can accept constructive feedback from
 - Believe can offer a valuable perspective
 - Similar experiences or challenges
 - Strengths where you are weaker
- Sources of mentors
 - Participants in St.Vincent Health’s Physician Mentoring Program
 - Colleagues in same group
 - Colleagues in same specialty, different group
 - Both may be solo practitioners, or in a small group
 - Senior physicians on the medical staff
 - Retired physicians
- Sources of mentees
 - New MD orientation
 - FMM groups
 - Residency programs
 - Medical staff interventions/referrals
- Assessing the match

It is recommended that the person desiring to be part of a formal mentoring program, either as a mentor or a mentee, complete an application form that provides information helpful to matching mentors with mentees. In addition, the Hartman Value Profile assessment instrument can provide a basis for matching mentors with mentees, based on the individual work-side or self-side value strengths, weaknesses, and balance.

The Mentor Partnership Contract

In a formal mentor partnership – and even with informal ones – it is important to set expectations that both parties understand and agree to. In formal mentoring programs, such as St.Vincent Health’s (Indiana) program, a mentoring agreement will need to be signed by both parties. Also, due to the commitment involved, it is not recommended that mentors have more than one (or two at most) mentees at any one time.

What are the Barriers to a Successful Mentoring Partnership?

In asking physicians what they feel can get in the way of forging an optimal mentoring relationship, they listed the following barriers:

- Some may not be open
- Finding the time
- Willingness to commit
- If mentor talks more than listens
- Trust is paramount
- Logistics (how, when, where)
- MDs tend to not want help, are very independent
- Good mentor pairings are critical
- Not understanding the need and opportunity
- Lack of follow through on action plans
- Willingness to show vulnerability
- Breaking confidentiality
- Openness to feedback
- Mentor “advising” rather than helping mentee “discover”

Getting Started – Suggested Opening Questions

1. What are your goals for mentoring?
2. What do you hope to accomplish, what results do you want to see?
3. How can I help? What behaviors or characteristics would be most helpful to you?
4. How do you impact others? How do you know?
5. What would you like to change about your behavior or your situation?
6. What are you doing that you would like to stop?
7. What are you not doing that you would like to start?
8. What are you recognized for by others that you would like to continue?
9. What did it take for you to achieve the outcomes or behaviors others approve of?
10. Do you have the same reputation in your personal life as in your professional life?
If not, why not? What are the barriers to congruency?
11. What is your reputation, and how do you know?
12. What have you tried to change, and what did you do to try and accomplish that?
13. Did the steps you took work to make the change? If not, why not?
14. What are your learning goals?
15. What are your leadership goals?
16. What skills and characteristics will it take for you to be successful in what you want to accomplish?
17. Are you open to feedback?
18. What do you do with feedback you receive?
19. Are you willing to create a development plan or action plan to accomplish what you want?
20. How can you best be held accountable for accomplishing your goals?

Recommended Mentoring Timeframes

- In order to have time to get to know each other and work toward the goals of mentoring, it is recommended that the parties agree to meet at least **six to twelve times** over the course of a **four to six-month period**.
- At the end of that period, the partnership should be assessed to determine whether both parties feel the mentoring is working and achieving the desired results.
- If it is not satisfactory, it is important that each party be honest with the other and mutually agree to end the mentoring.
- After the number of sessions or timeframes to which the parties originally agreed to, if both parties want to continue the mentoring partnership it should be re-contracted.

When to End Mentoring

- When either or both parties feel the mentoring has accomplished the goals that were set out, the formal mentoring partnership can be ended. As mentors and mentees often become good friends through the process, informal mentoring and continuing to spend time together can be very appropriate on an ongoing basis.
- How do you know when the mentoring process may not be working?
 1. Mentor or mentee are experiencing a lack of progress
 2. Experience of frustration at non-productive meetings
 3. Mentee repeatedly fails to complete action plans
 4. One or both parties don't look forward to the meetings
 5. Mentor or mentee repeatedly miss or reschedule meetings
- When these symptoms present themselves, it is time for a discussion of the reasons and an honest assessment of whether both parties want the mentoring to continue. Sometimes a discussion of the goals and understanding of the mentoring partnership is helpful in restarting and continuing. Honest dialogue may simply reveal inaccurate assumptions or misunderstandings that can be corrected. If not, and the parties decide not to continue the mentoring, at that time they should bring closure with appreciation for each others' time and effort.

One Final Note

Mentoring is a gift – one from which each person in the partnership can benefit. The key to success can be boiled down to trust, a willingness to listen, and to give and receive honest feedback.

It is important to remember that mentoring is NOT professional coaching, personal counseling or therapy. It is also NOT based on the premise that the mentor is more effective or successful person than the mentee. Both parties have something to offer to the partnership, and in fact mentors often say they learn and grow at least as much as the mentee.

If you have questions or need assistance with physician mentoring program, feel free to call or e-mail:

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