STATEMENTS

The Mentor-Protégé Relationship

Stuart T. Haines, PharmD
School of Pharmacy, University of Maryland

Mentoring is a time-honored method for learning in graduate education and professional development. Mentoring is a symbiotic relationship between a mentor - protégé pair who assist each other to meet mutual career objectives. Close mentor-protégé relationships often play a critical role in the lives of successful individuals in academia and business. Effective mentoring is an intentional activity requiring conscious effort. Mentors teach, sponsor, encourage, counsel, and befriend their protégés. Four distinct periods exist in most mentor - protégé relationships over time. Mentors are typically 15 to 20 years older than the protégé. Females report having more difficulty forming mentoring relationships and the most suitable mentor candidates are usually males. The framework for effective mentoring is grounded in social and invitational learning theories. The successful protégé eventually develops the self-regulating behaviors that enable autonomous performance and mastery. Formal mentoring programs are commonplace but data supporting this practice are scant.

Keywords: mentor, protégé

INTRODUCTION

Mentoring is among the primary means by which adults gain new knowledge and skills. Mentoring has held a time-honored and important role in human learning, particularly in graduate education, professional training, and business. Doctor of Philosophy candidates conduct their research under the guidance of a “major” professor. Recent graduates of pharmacy and medical schools seek residency and fellowship training with experienced, well-respected practitioners. Business leaders often speak of someone who was particularly influential in their professional development.

It is Homer who is credited with introducing the concept of mentoring in his literary epic the Odyssey. Ulysses asks his trusted servant, Mentor, to provide for his son, Telemachus, an education that covered “every facet of life — physical, intellectual, moral, spiritual, social, and administrative development.” In the oft cited work “The Seasons of a Man's Life,” Levinson described the prominence that a close mentoring relationship played in the lives of 40 successful men in the business world. Paul Pierpaoli describes the role of the mentor in pharmacy as “the highest calling within our professional ranks. Nurturing the growth and self-actualization of a health professional who will ultimately contribute to the health and well-being of society-at-large is one of the greatest contributions that any of us can make to humanity.”

As the complexities of the workplace and higher education have increased, there is growing recognition that formal mentoring programs are needed to enable adults to be successful throughout their careers. Surveys of business executives, lawyers, chemists, and university faculty demonstrate a strong correlation between the presence of a mentoring relationship and self-perceived career satisfaction and success. A high percentage of researchers in medicine indicate that a mentor was the single most important influence in the selection of their research career. Women in academic medicine who have a mentor were more productive, as measured by the number of research publications, than women who had no mentor. Finally, individuals who are mentored early in their careers are more likely to mentor others in the later stages of their careers. Thus, mentoring activities are self-perpetuating.

This paper will examine the nature of the mentor-protégé relationship including the theoretical basis that
Table 1. Attributes of Successful Mentor-Protégé Relationships

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Mentor Qualities</th>
<th>Protégé Qualities</th>
<th>Relationship Qualities</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Strong interpersonal skills</td>
<td>Self-perceived growth needs</td>
<td>Voluntary</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Technical competence / expertise</td>
<td>A record of seeking / accepting</td>
<td>Mutual benefits perceived and</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Knowledge of organization and profession</td>
<td>challenging assignments</td>
<td>derived from the relationship</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Status / prestige within the organization and profession</td>
<td>Receptivity to feedback and coaching</td>
<td>No conflicts of interest /</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Willingness to be responsible for someone else’s growth and development</td>
<td>Willingness to assume responsibility for own growth and development</td>
<td>competition between mentor and protégé</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ability to share credit</td>
<td>Ability to perform in more than one skill area</td>
<td>Not confined to merely professional or business interests</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Patience</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

supports mentoring as an effective educational strategy and some practical considerations for formal mentoring programs.

The Mentor — Protégé Relationship

Mentoring is often described as a symbiotic relationship between two adults who assist each other to meet mutual career objectives in an organization or professional discipline. Anderson and Shannon defined mentoring as:

* a nurturing process in which a more skilled or more experienced person, serving as a role model, teaches, sponsors, encourages, counsels, and befriends a less skilled or less experienced person for the purpose of promoting the latter's professional and personal development. Mentoring functions are carried out within the context of an ongoing, caring relationship between the mentor and protégé.¹¹

Several key attributes are essential ingredients in a successful mentor-protégé relationship (Table 1). Mentoring is an intentional activity whereby the mentor carries out his/her responsibilities with conscious effort. It is a nurturing relationship wherein the mentor fosters the full maturation of the protégé’s potential capabilities by giving feedback on observed performances. This implies that the mentor recognizes the protégé’s current level of ability and actively engages the protégé in growth producing activities. The mentor determines how best to assist the protégé by considering the total personality of the individual being nurtured. In addition, the mentor acts with the belief that the protégé has the capacity to develop into fuller maturity. As a role model, the mentor serves as an example to the protégé and provides him/her with a sense of what they will become.¹²

Under this definition, the mentor stands ready to fulfill five functions — specifically teaching, sponsoring, encouraging, counseling, and befriending.¹¹ As a teacher, the mentor assists the protégé to acquire the new knowledge, skills, and, importantly, attitudes needed in the specific professional discipline or work environment to succeed. Likewise, the protégé actively seeks to acquire and apply the mentor’s wisdom.

As a sponsor, the mentor uses his/her power and professional status to help the protégé to reach career goals such as obtaining employment, promotion, or appointments. In this capacity, the mentor “vouches for the great ability of the candidate for admission”¹³ and helps the protégé to establish a network of influential colleagues within the organization and professional associations.⁷ Sometimes these activities are done behind the scenes without the protégé’s knowledge.¹⁴ In the role of sponsor, the mentor also seeks to protect the protégé from potential threats in the environment. For example, preventing the protégé from being assigned to more work than can be reasonably accomplished or confronting those who wish the protégé ill.¹¹

The mentor also serves to encourage the protégé by affirming, challenging, and inspiring. The mentor
Table 2. Benefits and Pitfalls of the Mentor-Protégé Relationship

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Benefits</th>
<th>Protégé</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Mentor</td>
<td>Protégé</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Enhanced self-esteem</td>
<td>Ease transition from school into profession</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Revitalized interest in work</td>
<td>Increased awareness of profession and</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Advanced standing in organization or</td>
<td>organization</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>profession</td>
<td>Accelerated assimilation into the</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fulfill own developmental needs</td>
<td>professional and organizational culture</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Increased job satisfaction</td>
<td>Higher earnings</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Enhanced quality of life through close</td>
<td>Increased job satisfaction</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>personal relationships</td>
<td>Increased likelihood of success</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Leave a legacy</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Potential pitfalls</th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Lack of time</td>
<td>Unrealistic expectations about advancement</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Protégé lacks requisite skills to</td>
<td>or promotion</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>meaningfully contribute</td>
<td>Jealousy and gossip</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Protégé does not take coaching or</td>
<td>Mentor takes credit for protégé’s work</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>feedback seriously</td>
<td>Mentor does not keep commitments</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Protégé “plays” mentor against</td>
<td>Mentor becomes possessive of the protégé’s</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>supervisor, boss, or associates</td>
<td>time</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Protégé becomes resentful</td>
<td>Mentor won’t “let go” when protégé is</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>ready for independence</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

affirms by continually acknowledging the protégé’s strengths and successes; challenges by inviting the protégé to participate in growth-producing activities; and inspires the protégé by words and example.\(^\text{11}\) To be effective, the mentor also counsels and befriends the protégé. When a particularly troublesome problem is faced by the protégé, the mentor serves as a counselor by actively listening, probing, clarifying, and advising. As a friend, a mentor demonstrates acceptance, understanding, and trust through words and actions.\(^\text{11}\)

There are several potential benefits and pitfalls to a mentor-protégé relationship (Table 2). Mentors often express feelings of greater self-esteem and worth. Through mutual effort, the mentor’s work becomes more rewarding and meaningful. Mentors frequently enjoy advanced standing within the profession or organization, particularly if the protégé makes significant contributions. Further, mentors can create a legacy after they leave the profession or organization through their protégé(s). For the protégé, the mentor can ease the transition into the profession and the organization by increasing awareness of its culture and structure. Pierpaoli\(^\text{7}\) suggests that one of the desired consequences of mentoring young health professionals is to assist them to embrace an appropriate attitudinal profile, including a sense of responsibility and a desire to help others. These attitudes are acquired through the protégé’s direct observations of the mentor's professional and personal interactions with others. It is the mentor who introduces the protégé to the prevailing culture of the profession, its standards of practice and system of beliefs, which in turn enable the protégé to enjoy early career success, greater opportunities, and higher wages.

While the mentor-protégé relationship can be mutually rewarding, it can be potentially destructive.\(^\text{15}\) Campbell points out that the mentor has great power to shape and mold a new person.\(^\text{16}\) The potential risk, of course, is that this power can be used for the mentor’s own selfish purposes rather than meeting the protégé needs. In addition, mentoring relationships can limit the potential of the participants. Mentors may inadvertently stifle the maturation of the protégé by discouraging autonomous work; the protégé may not develop self-monitoring skills and grow dependent on the mentor. Given the limited access that women and minorities often have to work with the most influential and effective mentors, another potentially destructive aspect of a mentoring system is the creation of an “old boys network.”

Four distinct periods in the mentor-protégé relationship have been described (Table 3).\(^\text{14,17}\) During the first few weeks of the relationship, a period called the initiation phase, the mentor and protégé begin challenging work together.\(^\text{17}\) During this phase, the protégé provides technical assistance to the mentor and demonstrates a strong desire to be coached. In a reciprocating manner, the mentor recognizes the protégé's respect for his/her work and encourages opportunities for interaction.
Table 3. Stages of Mentor-Protégé Relationship

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Stage</th>
<th>Characteristics</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Initiation</strong> (weeks)</td>
<td>Mutual interests identified</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Task-centered relationship</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Invitation(s) extended</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Cultivation</strong> (years)</td>
<td>Frequent and meaningful interactions</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Strong professional AND personal relationship</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Transformative learning occurs</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Highly productive</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Mutual growth</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Separation</strong> (months)</td>
<td>Conflict</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Professional AND personal relationship disrupted</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Possible feelings of resentment, abandonment, or hostility</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Transformation</strong> (years)</td>
<td>Independence</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Peer-like relationship</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Feelings of mutual gratitude and appreciation</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

centered on work-related tasks. In the second period, called the cultivation phase, the mentor-protégé relationship widens to encompass its maximum psycho-social functions over a period of two to five years. Through frequent and meaningful interaction, both individuals derive numerous professional and personal benefits from the relationship. Deep intimate and emotional bonds are formed in this phase. Eventually the protégé no longer requires the mentor's guidance and seeks to work more autonomously. During this stage, the separation phase, feelings of resentment or hostility may erupt. The mentor may feel abandoned or the protégé may feel stifled. While some mentor-protégé relationships end during the separation phase, many shift into a peer-like friendship. The transformation phase is characterized by a mutual sense of gratitude and appreciation. It is during this period that the mentor recognizes that the protégé no longer needs the parent-like protection and nurturing that once characterized the relationship.

The typical mentor is 15 to 20 years older than the protégé. While some experienced mentors are able to mentor more than one individual at a time, given the intensity of the relationship, most mentor-protégé pairs are exclusive during the cultivation phase of the relationship. Over the course of a career, individuals may have multiple mentors and protégés. Males typically form a mentoring relationship with another male. Females relate that they often have difficulty forming mentoring relationships and frequently find that the most suitable mentor candidates — those individuals who are successful and powerful in the organization — are males. While cross gender mentor-protégé relationships are possible, the male mentor and female protégé relationship is fraught with difficulties. Frequently, colleagues have misperceptions regarding the nature of male-female mentoring relationships, believing that such pairings must involve some sexual interest. Even the earnest invitations of a potential male mentor can be perceived as a sexual overture by a potential female protégé.

Mentoring relationships vary in their scope of influence. Some authors contend that the mentor-protégé relationship should be limited to the educational and/or career interests of the two parties. Others feel that the true spirit of mentoring is to be concerned about the welfare of the protégé in a holistic manner. The mentor and protégé are inclined to share experiences outside the conventional academic or professional setting. Such a relationship is exemplified by William Osler, famed Johns Hopkins physician, and his protégé Harvey Cushing, who became a legendary clinician and medical educator himself. During his years as an intern and junior faculty member, Cushing lived next door to the Oslers on West Franklin Street in Baltimore and was given keys to the Oslers' home. The Oslers played a critical role in Cushing's marriage. Further, it was Cushing who attempted to save Osler's son's life after he was fatally wounded in battle during World War II. Indeed, the mentor-protégé relationship has been likened to a “substitute parent for an adult child.”

The interpersonal characteristics that attract mentors and protégés together are unclear. The mentor-protégé relationship has been compared to falling in love. Some authors suggest that mentors seek protégés who
have similar personalities and behavioral style. Persons with similar personality traits may work more easily together, particularly in circumstances requiring a prediction of behavior without full information. Perhaps mentors primarily extend a mentoring invitation based on the protégé’s perceived abilities, history of hard work, or a recent accomplishment. Kelly found that young men who perform an important, visible, but risky task within an organization were three times more likely to have a mentoring relationship than those who did not.17 Indeed, of those who had a strong mentoring relationship, 72% indicated that performing an important and visible task played a significant role in the initiation of the mentoring relationship. Some authors suggest that mentors select as protégés those individuals with personality characteristics that offset the mentor's self-perceived weaknesses. However, these contentions are not supported by empiric data. In a study examining the background characteristics and personality profiling of 50 adult pairs, Alleman and Newman found that mentor-protégé pairs were no more alike or dissimilar than control pairs.24 While protégés were more likely to describe their mentor using adjectives they use to describe themselves, the difference in perceived similarities between mentor-protégé pairs and the match controls was small, accounting for only 8.5% of the variance. Not surprisingly, protégés were more likely to describe their mentor using superlatives, indicating that protégés often idealize their mentors and identify with them.

Effective mentoring relationships are made by choice and based on mutual respect.1 The novice likely seeks assistance from individuals perceived as successful within the organization or professional discipline and who send welcoming overtures. Many successful and powerful individuals are not willing or able to serve as mentors to others. These individuals likely avoid or have limited contact with novices or perhaps signal that they are unwilling to share resources or experiences. On the other hand, individuals who are kind and helpful but not perceived as successful are likely to become close friends or colleagues rather than mentors.

THEORETICAL ASPECTS

The basis for mentoring as an effective means toward higher levels of cognitive development is grounded in the social learning theories championed by Lev Vygotsky.25 Vygotsky's research revealed that children and adults primarily learn from their social interactions with the people around them. According to Vygotsky, learning only occurs with the assistance of a skilled and nurturing mediator.26 Effective instruction requires the teacher to lead the student into the zone of proximal development, a concept describing the difference between the learner's actual level of development and potential level of development with guidance. As the learner proceeds through the zone of proximal development, the more knowledgeable person initially provides direct supervision and guidance but, more importantly, assists the learner to develop self-regulating behaviors. These self-regulating behaviors enable the learner to gradually perform without assistance and eventually to automate and fossilize the newly learned capacity.

Effective mentoring is also grounded in the principles of invitational learning.27 The precepts of invitational learning state that all students are valuable and responsible persons who have untapped potential and it is the teacher's responsibility to personally and professionally invite development. Furthermore, invitational learning sees teaching as a cooperative activity. Mentoring requires a more experienced individual to invite a novice to participate in the business, research, or clinical activities of the organization. This invitation is to participate at a level that is above and beyond the assigned duties or requirements. The mentor makes a conscious effort to send inviting messages to the protégé that he/she is valued and able. The mentor and protégé recognize that their mutual activities are meaningful and worthwhile.

PRACTICAL CONSIDERATIONS

Many businesses and educational institutions believe that mentoring is important to foster the development of its employees or students and enhance career satisfaction. How can organizations capitalize on mentoring to meet institutional goals? Many have attempted to implement formalized mentoring programs.12 In such programs, all newcomers are systematically assigned to experienced members of the organization with the hope that effective mentoring relationships will develop.28 These types of formal advising or mentoring programs are commonplace in health professional and graduate education.29,30 Unfortunately, such programs have met with mixed success.31,32 To develop a successful and effective mentoring program, a few fundamental features likely must be present.28 First, potential mentors who participate in a formal mentoring program should possess a strong desire to participate. Individuals who are “forced” by company or university policy to serve as mentors are unlikely to send the inviting messages that are vital for an effective mentor-protégé bond to initially develop. In addition, the mentor-protégé pair must share a common area of interest, the mentor and protégé...
Table 4. How to be an Effective Mentor

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Provide Support</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Listen</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Create a structure</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Express positive expectations</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Serve as an advocate</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Share yourself</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Make special gestures to foster the relationship</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Provide Challenge</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Assign challenging tasks</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Engage in discussion</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Explore dichotomies</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Construct hypotheses</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Set high standards</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Provide Vision</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Model exemplary behavior</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Develop new language and new ways of thinking</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nurture the protégé’s self-awareness</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

must spend sufficient time together, and the mentor must possess a sufficient level of expertise to guide the protégé. Valadez and Duran analyzed the effectiveness of 22 mentorship teams at the University of North Carolina. Each mentorship team consisted of at least 1 faculty member, 1 graduate student, and 1 undergraduate student who worked collectively on one or more research projects. The findings revealed that mentoring was most effective when the mentor and protégé engaged in work, in this case research projects, of mutual interest and common purpose. Mentorship teams that worked separately on distinct research initiatives were less effective and found less satisfaction in their interactions. The level of faculty participation in the research project also correlated with the protégé’s perceptions of effective mentoring. The greater the amount of time the mentor and protégé spent interacting with one another, the greater the sense of satisfaction and accomplishment. Further, consistency and regularity of interaction with the mentor contributed to a perception of success.

What implications do these findings have for health education and professional development programs? First, if it is the intent of the institution for students, residents, or junior faculty to develop effective mentoring relationships, arbitrarily assigning students to faculty members is unlikely to succeed. Many faculty members may not be inclined to serve as mentors or may not have sufficient time to devote to mentoring activities. Therefore, faculty participation in a formal mentoring program should be voluntary. Likewise, students, residents, and employees should be free to seek mentors who share their professional interests. Newcomers to an organization or institution will likely need general advice during their first few months. Such advice can be provided by a “generalist,” someone who is sufficiently familiar with the culture of the organization and can introduce the newcomer to potential mentors. After a period of acclimation, the novice should be encouraged or, in some cases, required to formally select a mentor.

Despite the potential pitfalls, formal mentoring programs can meet their intended goals. Organizations that establish formal mentoring programs send a message to those within the organization that mentor-protégé relationships are encouraged and valued. “Formal” declaration of a mentor-protégé pair encourages mentors to take their responsibilities seriously and reduces the opportunities for mentors to “use” the protégé purely for their own gain. Lastly, formal mentoring programs can open doors for women and minorities, groups that historically have been excluded and frequently have difficulty finding effective mentoring partners.

**CONCLUSION**

Mentoring is an important and effective adult learning strategy. Qualitative research and case studies of successful individuals in business, professional, and higher education settings indicate that mentoring has a profound influence on professional development. As a role model, the mentor teaches the protégé the knowledge, skills, and attitudes necessary to be successful. To be most effective, the mentor must approach this task in
a systematic manner and consider the many factors that influence the protégé’s development. The effective mentor recognizes the protégé’s potential and extends an invitation to engage in hands-on learning experiences of mutual interest. The mentor provides support, challenges, and vision (Table 4). Eventually, the successful protégé develops the self-regulating behaviors that enable autonomous performance and mastery.

REFERENCES


