



Centre of Research Excellence in Pulmonary Fibrosis

Suggestions to Improve Your Mentoring Experience

Purpose

The purpose of the CREATE Mentoring Program is to offer CREATE Fellows support for the extra needs which might not be dealt with by their supervisory team. This could be career advice, how to deal with a difficult situation at work, (which could even be how to leave your supervisor), or other common barriers which the mentor may have learnt to cope with by experience, such as balancing work and family responsibilities.

Mentorship is not to replace supervision but to supplement it. A mentor can also be helpful in offering exposure to a wider network or, occasionally, to a different approach to doing things. Almost always, a mentor-mentee pairing will bring benefit to both sides as the mentor will learn from the mentee, as well as vice versa.

We have asked your mentor to actively mentor you for a year. After that time, you will be free to continue if it is working for you both.

Our broad suggestion for a good mentoring relationship is to hold a regular conversation with a pre-arranged agenda (which should be suggested by you, the mentee). There could be times when you are struggling with a particular issue and you should feel free to contact your mentor if that is the case.

First Steps as a Mentee

- Work out what it is you want help with. Here are some suggestions:
 - Career planning
 - Seeking a position overseas
 - Juggling family commitments
 - Moving to industry
 - Juggling clinical and research commitments
 - Time management
 - Forming collaborations/extending network
 - Leaving my current supervisor
 - Advice for publishing
 - Help with scientific writing
 - New perspectives on methodology
 - Managing students/staff
 - Inappropriate behaviours at work (bullying or harassment, research fraud)
- Contact your mentor, and mention the broad areas you might like to discuss
- Make an appointment for a meeting or phone call, or arrange to do so by email
- Send some background information about yourself

The First Meeting

The first meeting is an opportunity to informally negotiate an understanding that will guide both parties.

It is helpful if both mentor and mentee come to their first meeting prepared by having put thought into what they want out of the relationship and how they would like it to work.

They will be better able to articulate ideas about why they are considering entering into the relationship, what they expect to gain and contribute, how they want it to work and any concerns they have about mentoring. So, spend time at the beginning of the relationship negotiating and agreeing expectations. A frank discussion at the outset can prevent pitfalls later on. A simple list of agreed Dos and Don'ts can clarify the parameters of the partnership.

It may seem obvious to one person that phone calls at home at 10:00pm are not appropriate, yet to someone else that might be OK. Setting the ground rules, rather than making assumptions is a sensible approach.

Some of the issues to be discussed at the first meeting may be:

- What are our goals for mentoring?
- What roles do we take, what are our expectations of one another? What are our responsibilities?
- How much time are we willing to invest in mentoring?
- What if it doesn't work?

Even with quite specific goals it is possible to remain flexible so that as the relationship unfolds additional or different goals can be agreed upon.

Questions to consider when setting goals may include:

- What outcomes are desired?
- If skills development is the aim, what specific skills are sought?
- Does the mentee have, or want to produce:
 - A professional development plan?
 - Set career goals?
 - Write a career action plan?
 - Or is there some other purpose in mind?

General Guidelines

- Ask your mentor to explain their expectations
- Respect the demands on your mentor's schedule
- Respond to emails promptly and politely
- Give your mentors what they need to be able to help you. When you meet with your mentor, have an agenda. Send materials at least 48 hours in advance
- Take notes
- Confirm what you need to do next
- Ask for clarification if you don't understand

- Google it first, then ask
- Keep track of your deadlines
- Some would say it is a good idea if you actually take their advice!
- Keep them posted with your progress

Some Questions to Start your Conversations

- Can you tell me about your career path? How did you get to where you are?
- What would you do differently?
- What would you do if you were me?
- Could you review my CV and provide a frank assessment of gaps and weaknesses?
- Could you help me develop/review my career plan?
- What types of outcomes/performance indicators should I be aiming for at my career stage?
- What new skills do I need to move ahead?
- How can I work smarter?
- How should I handle this scenario?
- Who else would you recommend I connect/collaborate with? Can you help link me with key contacts/collaborators?
- When should I apply for promotion? Can you help me develop/review my case for promotion?
- Can you suggest some tips for coping with academic knockbacks and rejections?
- What professional associations are you involved with? Which would you suggest I become involved with?
- What has been your most rewarding accomplishment? What mistakes have you made?
- What is the best leadership advice you've received?
- What advice would you give on leading a balanced life?
- And a killer question that mentors love:
- How can I help you?

It's a two-way street, so don't be shy about asking for help. The mentor too has much to gain. Not only will they get satisfaction from helping, but interaction with you gives them an opportunity to keep up to date, build their own network and provide opportunities for collaboration

Remember your mentor isn't there to do the work for you. Your mentor is there for discussion and guidance, and for listening. They'll help sort troubles and give independent advice.

Mentoring Challenges

Time

Creating time is the number one challenge in mentoring. It is easy to be overambitious. On the other hand, people looking at busy schedules may feel as though squeezing in another commitment is almost impossible.

After an initial face-to-face meeting, over-the-phone contact may be a viable alternative to meetings. Working breakfasts or lunches may suit some people and email can be used to stay in touch.

Many mentoring partners aim to talk at least once a month with greater frequency in times of need. In other instances, you may agree to meet on a quarterly or half yearly basis. As well as the interaction with the mentor, it is likely that you, the mentee, will need to schedule some time to work alone on tasks connected to the goals of the partnership.

What If It Doesn't Work?

Although the majority of mentoring partners obtain satisfactory outcomes there are no guarantees that mentoring will produce the desired results. Some people find that they are not compatible. Sometimes, either or both are not getting their needs met.

It is helpful to agree at the beginning that if either partner, for any reason, wants to end the mentoring relationship, they are free to do so without fault-finding, blaming or recrimination. It is often possible to sort problems out without dissolving the mentoring partnership. Usually, the sooner a problem is recognised and discussed the less likely it is to cause irrevocable damage.

The best thing to do is right at the beginning; schedule a specific review meeting to take place after you have had 3-5 meetings, where the agenda is simply to reflect on the relationship. Discuss what is working well and what you would like to change. Commit to continuing or decide to opt out.

You can ask for re-assignment with another mentoring partner, and we will do our best to help. Just because one pairing didn't work out doesn't mean another one won't.

If you have any questions, please contact Bonnie.Laxton-Blinkhorn@sydney.edu.au.