

Mentoring 101: Negotiating the Mentor/Mentee Relationship

Sociologists for Women in Society 2005 Annual Summer Meeting

Career Development Committee

Organizer: Tamara L. Smith, Ph.D. Candidate, SUNY Albany

1. Introduction
 - Workshop agenda/format
2. What is a mentor?
 - A mentor is usually a more experienced person who acts as a role model, teacher, guide and cheerleader.
 - Can be a faculty member at your own institution
 - Many graduate students are assigned to a faculty member at the beginning of their graduate career
 - Long-term relationship; often is more intense because of employee/employer relationship on top of learning experience
 - Can also be a sought out relationship at another institution
 - Short-term relationship; task-specific, voluntary on both sides.
2. Reasons to Have a Mentor Outside of Your Institution
 - Your department lacks someone with similar research interests to you
 - You feel that your mentor does not have your best interests at hand
 - You have a small department, or a non-feminist friendly department
 - You'd like to network better
3. Are you ready to seek out a mentor?
 - Handout: faculty mentoring worksheet
 - Strategic vs. Tactical: Which are you?
 - Know what you want to achieve from this relationship.
4. Finding a mentor
 - Look at people you already know. Be proactive!
 - Ask for referrals. The networks of previous mentors or other faculty may help you.
 - Beware of choosing mentors only for the power they wield. It's sometimes better to spend time with an individual contributor who possesses a great deal of wisdom than a big name who does not have time to truly work on your mentoring relationship.
 - Look for common ground
 - Don't get hung up on the "M" word
 - Take advantage of SWS mentoring programs
 - Handout: SWS Mentoring Program Descriptions/Applications
5. Tips for Taking Charge of Mentoring Relationships
 - Be ready to mentor yourself
 - Take charge of your own mentoring: seek out mentors rather than waiting for them to come to you!
 - Build your own mentoring network

- There is no reason why you can't have more than one mentor!
- Know how to thank a mentor
- Know when to move on

6. Downfalls of Mentor/Mentee Relationships: Common Errors/Myths

- Dropping the ball with your mentor, and how to get back on track
 - Decide what's really going on.
 - If you decide to try again, make a mental commitment and block out times in your schedule for this relationship.
 - Prior to your next meeting, re-evaluate your goals and the approach you'll use during your sessions. Figure out what has worked and what hasn't worked, and change what you need to.
 - In the meeting, apologize and express appreciation to the mentor. Remember, this is more of a stressful situation for you than for your mentor- you're both adults, and this happens a lot.
 - Do not offer over-detailed personal explanations for why you dropped the ball; this is a professional relationship, not a counseling relationship.
 - If appropriate, propose a new goal or process to follow in your partnership. (ex: because of the delay in our relationship, I'd like to change the goal I'm working on from ___to___).
- Ending a Mentor/Mentee Relationship without a Formal Closing: How to Avoid
 - Happens for two reasons: relationship was not satisfactory, or mentee does not know how to formally end successful relationship
 - If your relationship was unsuccessful, the easiest thing is to be honest with your mentor (without being brutal).
 - Prior to ending a relationship, be clear about what you need to accomplish. For example, if you are writing your first grant, ask them if this is an area they feel they can help you with. Often, the mentor will let you know if they're out of their comfort zone. Alternatively, they may not know you have an interest in that area.
 - Tell them that your interests have changed, and you are seeking out someone with experience in ___field.
 - Be sure to not burn this bridge. Thank the person for their time, and do not talk badly about them to others.
 - If your relationship was successful, acknowledge the success of the relationship.
 - Write a personal letter to the mentor detailing how their attention to you helped.
 - Write a formal letter to be put in the mentor's permanent file, notating how they helped you.
 - Take the mentor out to coffee or to lunch to thank them for helping you.
 - Nominate them for mentoring awards
 - Don't spend more than \$25 on a thank-you.
 - Pass on the help and be generous with others
- Not taking a mentor's advice: How to gracefully decline advice

- If you are not taking a mentor's advice, you need to consider why. Do they not understand your perspective? Are they asking you to do more than you can? Have they set a deadline that you can't meet?
- The worst thing that you can do is to not accept advice, and to not acknowledge your REASON for declining.
- If you are not taking advice, be prepared to explain why, and have an alternative plan. If you are not taking advice because you feel that the mentor is asking too much of you, consider asking them for more time to complete task, or advice on how to make the task more manageable.
- Myth: Mentor/mentee relationships need to be close and last a long time
 - The Hand mentor relationship is a good example of this myth: the relationship spans only one conference!
- Myth: A person cannot have more than one mentor at a time
 - It is fine, and advisable, to have more than one mentor. You want to avoid having your name exclusively affiliated with only one person. On the other hand, do not over-extend yourself, and do not have more than one mentor for the same task.
- Myth: It is always best if mentors are older/in later stages of their career than mentees.
 - The reasons for finding mentors are varied. Mentoring issues such as the job market, preparing your teaching portfolio, or needing advice on early-career transitions may just as easily be helped through younger/less experienced faculty or even graduate students.

7. Tips for Mentors

- Prepare and share your own development plan.
- Keep expectations as simple as possible.
- Don't work harder on the mentee's plans than they are working.
- Celebrate small successes.
- Revise plans as needed.
- Remember the power dynamics in this relationship, and the fragility of mentees.
- Do not let a mentee become inappropriately dependent on you.
- Do not play personal counselor to a mentee.

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