Best Practices for Mentors and Mentees: leading to work-life balance

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Outline

- A few simple multiple-choice questions to ask, “What would a “Good” Mentor do?”
- Best Practices
  - Student Input
  - Faculty Input
- Advice and Conclusions
1. If your mentee’s new discovery contradicts your own work, you should:

a) Discredit it: Rip it to shreds and highlight any weakness, no matter how inconsequential

b) Brute Force of Knowledge: Cite all of the studies that have been done beforehand to confirm why the mentee’s findings are not possible

c) Distraction: Assign the mentee to another project

d) Discuss: Review the work identify how this new finding fits into the larger picture
2. When a new discovery in *Nature* contradicts your findings, your example to your mentees should be:

a) Write a rebuttal to expose the researchers as charlatans

b) Galvanize your colleagues to blacklist the researchers at conferences and other venues

c) Refuse to cite their work and refuse to present at the same conferences and workshops

d) Collaborate

3. When mentoring students, you should:

a) Use a time clock to validate that they are working hard

b) Assign them to a senior student/postdoc and check with them yearly

c) Avoid eye contact

d) Meet with them periodically to discuss their progress and findings
4. When mentees miss timelines, you should:

a) Tell them that their personal life is taking up too much time and recommend divorce, if applicable

b) Break out the shock collar, pushing the button on a VR schedule until they meet their deadlines

c) Give them the silent treatment and/or glare at them until they meet the next deadline

d) Work with them to solve the problem

5. When a mentee makes a mistake, you should:

a) Fire them

b) Retort that they are stupid

c) At your leisure, tell them that they just added two years to their graduate career

d) Find out why the mistake was made to prevent it next time

As a result of our experimentation, we have just lost a dear and valued student….

On the other hand, we have just gained a publication.
6. When a mentee has a brilliant idea, you should:

a) Shred the idea to bits
   • Mentee’s place

b) Shred the idea to bits
   • Mentor’s idea

c) Ignore the idea

d) Show enthusiasm, brainstorm, and develop the mentee’s critical thinking skills

7. When a mentee challenges one of your ideas, you should:

a) Scream at them
   • It diverts attention and makes them submissive

b) Say it was stupid at lab meeting
   • Humiliation in front of people is powerful

c) Use the “Glare” treatment
   • To show who is boss

d) Discuss the ideas and facts
   • To reach an understanding of each other’s position
8. When your mentee contemplates industry as a career because grant funding seems impossible, you should:

a) Tell them they are idiots

b) Lie: tell them funding is not all that bad

c) Avoid the conversation

d) Help them choose a career that is best for them

Presented on October 19, 2012

What kind of Mentor are you?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Number of Answers</th>
<th>Type of Mentor</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>8 or more of “a” or “b” answers</td>
<td>Aggressive, controlling</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4 or more of “c”</td>
<td>Avoidant, Passive aggressive</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4 or more of “d”</td>
<td>A mentor on the right track</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

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What is Mentorship?

According to Wikipedia:

Mentorship is a personal relationship in which a more experienced and knowledgeable person helps guide a less experienced and knowledgeable person. Ongoing relationship of learning, dialog and challenge.

Outline

A few simple multiple-choice questions to ask, “What would a “Good” Mentor do?”

Best Practices

- Student Input
- Faculty Input

Advice and Conclusions
Communication

- Be “Available”
- Be “Open” to the student’s interest
- “Listen,” but also advise

Adjust Responsibilities

- Provide much oversight early in training
- Allow them to be more independent later in training
- Adapt responsibilities as students grow
- Continue to challenge students to foster their growth
Constructive Criticism

- Being **too critical** or **too easy** will not be in the best interest of the mentee
  - Hone in the strengths
  - Improve the weaknesses
- Example of “stress” and the maternal care of rat pups

Expectations and Milestones

- Be clear of expectations and milestones
  - Target easy expectations
    - First data quantification outcomes
    - First manuscript draft
  - Indicate how these first steps parlay into major milestones
    - Master’s thesis, qualifying exams, etc.
- Helps with time management
Treat each mentee as unique and independent

- Ability to hone in and see the strengths and weakness and to appropriately apply the right amount of attention
- Differs for type of mentee
  - Undergraduate
  - Graduate
  - Postdoctoral associate

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Expectations and Milestones

- Help mentees achieve their goals
  - Mentors want their students to succeed

- How to start?
  - Everyone experienced this scenario:
    - Mentor set up a meeting with mentee and asked,
      - “How do you like to be mentored?”
      - “What are your strengths and weaknesses?”

- Meet regularly and reassess strategy

- Yearly progress should be formally documented by the program

Mentor and Mentee are active participants in mentee’s success

- While the mentor has experience,

- ...the mentee needs to take ownership and be proactive about his/her training
  - Come to meetings prepared
  - Help brainstorm solutions
  - Ask yourself what else you can do
Listen

- Listen to what the mentees are saying
  - Hearing ≠ listening

Be a Role Model

- Show by doing
  - Be in the lab, check up on work, review data together
  - Be on time for meetings
  - Show how you reached a solution, conclusion
Include the mentee in problem-solving

- Work out the experimental timeline together
- Bring in collaborators to brainstorm
- Work on difficult manuscript paragraphs together

Don’t solve every problem for the mentee

- It’s a balance
  - Take advantage of opportunities in which mistakes could be tolerated
  - Allows the mentee to trouble-shoot
  - Learn problem-solving skills
Start Identifying Solutions

- Listing problems is easy
- Finding solutions is hard
- Mentor
  - Needs to ask the mentee how the mentor can help
- Mentee
  - needs to brainstorm solutions with the mentor

Mentorship is a Lifelong Commitment

- Mentoring continues beyond achieving milestones
- Continues in postdoc
- Faculty position
- Mentee's success is a mentor's success
Mentorship includes being creative with Solutions

- Marian Cleves Diamond,
  - Professor Emeritus, Univ. California, Berkeley

- As Asst Dean, Dean contacted 20 peer institutions about best practices for undergraduate mentors
- Peer mentors who are more senior provided best expert opinion to junior

From Society for Neuroscience Website, Autobiographical Chptrs, vol 6

When is a mentee ready to advance?

- When a mentee starts arguing with the mentor,
  - the mentee is ready for the MA

- When a mentee starts arguing with the mentor and is right,
  - the mentee is ready for the PhD

Victor Denenberg (1925 – 2008), U. Conn as per Heather Bimonte-Nelson
A few simple multiple-choice questions to ask, “What would a “Good” Mentor do?”

Best Practices
- Student Input
- Faculty Input

Advice and Conclusions

Communication is part of the key

For conflicts:
- Avoid using “why”
- Instead, use “I don’t understand”

Try putting yourself in the other person’s situation
Advice and Conclusions

- Both parties take responsibility for mentee’s growth
  - Mentor needs to identify goals and help mentee meet them:
  - Mentee needs to keep mentor apprised of issues as they arise
  - No excuses for failures--provide solutions

Teamwork

- Mentor and mentee are a team
  - They work together to optimize mentee growth
  - Need to overcome individual differences
    - Working with different personalities will help prepare mentee to successfully interact with a range of individuals
Advice and Conclusions

- Successful mentoring = obsolete mentor
- Successful mentors consider it
  - a privilege to be a lifelong cheerleader and listener throughout the “mentee’s” career

Conclusion

- Questions?