

The Value of Mentorship

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Abstract

The recent Young Physicians needs assessment survey identified mentorship as the single greatest need for this demographic, which includes physicians under 40 years of age or in their first 8 years of practice after completion of training. Much has been written in textbooks and other journals about mentorship, and as young physicians are certainly not alone in this need, mentorship has become a key focus of future Academy endeavors. Serving as Chair of the Young Physicians Section over the past year has afforded me the opportunity to interact with a variety of dynamic and engaging leaders in our Academy, and herein I provide a synopsis of what these experiences have taught me as well as provide some of the most important pearls that I have picked up along the way.

Keywords

young physicians, mentorship

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I would like to begin by thanking Dr Krouse and the Editorial Board of *Otolaryngology—Head and Neck Surgery* for their unwavering support of the careers of the young physicians of our Academy. Publishing an issue dedicated solely to highlighting the successes and achievements of this demographic is a wonderful demonstration of the commitment that our organization has made to fostering the careers of young physicians and helping us to address our unique challenges. Additionally, serving this past year as chair of the Young Physicians Section of the American Academy of Otolaryngology—Head and Neck Surgery/Foundation has been one of the most rewarding experiences of my career and has afforded me the chance to build relationships, advocate for the needs of our section, and develop friendships that will surely last a lifetime. The more that I come to know our Academy and its members and leaders, the more excited that I become for our future.

Last year, the Young Physicians Section commissioned a survey to assess the needs of our section to help us develop appropriate educational content over the coming years. Far

and away, the greatest expressed need was for mentorship. I can absolutely attest to the importance of mentors and would certainly not be where I am today without the constant support and unbiased advice of my mentors; as such, I would like to use the remainder of this column to share some of the most important pearls that I have learned over the years from my mentors.

First, mentorship is a 2-way street—you get out of it what you put into it. The most common misconception that I have seen regarding mentorship is that a powerful or influential mentor can “make it all happen for you.” This interpretation could not be further from the truth. The right mentor can certainly open doors, but you still have to walk through the door and produce. In fact, great caution should be taken when asking a mentor to open a certain door, such as arranging an introduction or helping you get onto a key committee. If you are not truly ready for the responsibility that comes afterward, you will not perform well, and this consequence will reflect poorly on both you and your mentor. As such, take your duty as a mentee seriously, because anything that you do will reflect on your mentor.

Second, understand that you will often need different mentors for different aspects of your career. For example, you may want one within the Academy and one in your community. An Academy mentor can help you decide which committee you may be best suited for, while a community or departmental mentor can help you figure out which insurance plans you need to be on and how to navigate the local politics of your medical staff. In terms of finding the right mentor, one technique that has helped me has been to look for people who are where I want to be in 10 to 20 years and to approach them and develop relationships with them. A mentor-mentee relationship does not develop overnight. It takes time and will require a significant up-front investment on both your part and your mentor’s part.

Third, become a mentor yourself. As physicians who are still early in our careers, we tend to spend most of our time looking ahead and trying to determine what our next move should be. We turn to our mentors to seek out their advice,

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but it rarely occurs to us that we, too, can be mentors. However, we can be—to our residents and other docs who are new to our departments, organizations, and communities. And doing so can benefit your career in ways that you may not anticipate. First, being a mentor will help you become a better mentee—it will help you get more out of your relationships with your mentors. Second, you will learn a surprising amount from helping your mentees solve their problems and make their decisions. Oftentimes, a resident or other young physician will come to you for help dealing with a situation that is remarkably similar to your own, and while talking things through with your mentee, you will often come to surprising solutions for your own predicaments.

Last, the 3 most important pearls that I have gleaned from my mentors are as follows:

- Take things slowly, and do not try to accomplish too much too soon. Our careers are long, and it is important to enjoy the ride and not burn out.
- Put your head down and get the work done—never concern yourself with the credit. Focusing on who gets the credit for an accomplishment is the quickest way to undermine any chance at real achievement.
- Do everything that you can to never miss a deadline. Embrace every task and assignment that you are given, and complete it on time. As you show yourself to be a dependable worker, you will be given more and more responsibility.

In conclusion, mentorship is a complicated and dynamic concept. Our relationships with our mentors and mentees can define our careers. It is important to choose the correct mentors and to understand the responsibilities that you take on in each role. Doing so can lead to rewarding friendships that will last a lifetime and a career filled with gratifying achievements.

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Lawrence M. Simon, conception, analysis, drafting, and final approval; accountable for all aspects.

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