

Tips for Being a Mentee

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Many of us have benefitted from excellent mentors who have given their time, expertise and guidance to help us develop to our fullest potential. Please see earlier MITE tip (link here to July 2018 MITE tip) on characteristics of great mentors, which include enthusiasm for the project and mentee, tailored career guidance, dedicated time, encouraging work-life balance and serving as a role model for mentorship. In this tip, I'd like to focus on strategies to use as a mentee to maximize your gain from your relationship with your mentor.

1. **Be the driver.**¹⁻³ Mentors are busy people who have many competing demands. You'll get the biggest bang for your buck if you take ownership and responsibility for determining what to discuss in the mentorship meeting. Come prepared; identify in advance the ways in which this particular mentor might be able to help you before your meeting.^{1,3} It's also important to evaluate your mentor-mentee relationship intermittently to ensure that it is helping you meet your goals; don't stay in a relationship out of obligation.³ There are tools that can help you evaluate the utility of a particular mentor relationship.⁴
2. **Let yourself struggle a little – but not too much -- before asking for help.**³ You'll learn and develop more if you take risks and try to solve some problems on your own. On the other hand, you won't be productive if you spend too much time stymied by a road block. The balance between reaching out and struggling through is dependent on the particular mentor-mentee relationship; don't be afraid to ask for feedback in your mentorship meeting about this.
3. **Show gratitude for, and be respectful of your mentors time.**² Your mentor is a busy person. If you're hoping to submit an abstract or you need your mentor to write you a recommendation letter, make sure to allow a reasonable amount of time. One week is the minimum to review an abstract; several weeks are necessary for a letter of recommendation. If you're not sure, check-in with your mentor about what a reasonable amount of time might be for the task.
4. **Be enthusiastic and accountable.**³ Having a positive attitude and being accountable goes a long way. Set specific, measureable goals with deadlines, and then meet the deadlines you set! If you didn't meet the deadline, be clear about why not.
5. **Have regular meetings and take notes during these meetings.** Meeting regularly is a key component of mentorship.³ Take notes during your meetings. Some experts recommend keeping a "mentoring journal" where you keep all of your notes in one place.^{3,5}
6. **Be open to feedback and remember feedback is bidirectional.**^{2,3} Be open to feedback and try to see it as opportunities for growth and development. If your mentor edits your writing and there's more red than black, don't take the editing personally. Also, remember that you can give your mentor feedback; UCSF has a template for feedback that is helpful.⁵
7. **Mutually agree on format of communication.**^{3,5} Your mentor might mostly communicate through email and may not use text messages for professional interactions. Have a conversation early in your relationship to understand your mentors preferred method of communication.

1. Straus SE, Chatur F, Taylor M. Issues in the mentor–mentee relationship in academic medicine: A qualitative study. *Academic medicine*. 2009;84(1):135-139.

2. Straus SE, Johnson MO, Marquez C, Feldman MD. Characteristics of successful and failed mentoring relationships: a qualitative study across two academic health centers. *Academic medicine: journal of the Association of American Medical Colleges*. 2013;88(1):82.
3. Moores LK, Holley AB, Collen JF. Working With a Mentor: Effective Strategies During Fellowship and Early Career. *Chest*. 2018;153(4):799-804.
4. Wadhwa V, Nagy P, Chhabra A, Lee CS. How effective are your mentoring relationships? Mentoring quiz for residents. *Current problems in diagnostic radiology*. 2017;46(1):3-5.
5. Faculty Mentoring Toolkit.
https://academicaffairs.ucsf.edu/ccfl/media/UCSF_Faculty_Mentoring_Program_Toolkit.pdf.
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