

## SPECIAL CONTRIBUTION

# Being a Mentor: What's in It for Me?

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### Abstract

The benefits of mentorship for the protégé are well established and include increased career satisfaction, advancement, and income. Mentors can derive satisfaction from personal and professional networks within their institutions and specialties. However, the advantages of being a mentor are underreported in the medical literature. The purpose of this review is to investigate the effect of the mentoring relationship on the mentors and institutions in disciplines that have studied it widely and to draw parallels to academic medicine. Literature in the fields of business, organizational psychology, and kindergarten through high school (K-12) education describe benefits of serving as a mentor to the individual, organization, and discipline. Potential mentors are intensely self-motivated and derive satisfaction from developing junior colleagues and improving their institutions. Business mentors take pride in junior colleagues' achievements and enjoy improved recognition by superiors, favorable perception within the organization, increased job satisfaction, accelerated promotion rates, higher salaries, development of managerial skills, and improved technical expertise. Organizations enjoy worker longevity from both members of the partnership and benefit from the formation of networks. In the K-12 education model, master teachers who train novices are more likely to remain in the classroom or advance to an administrative role. Application of the principles from these disciplines to academic medicine is likely to produce similarly positive outcomes of personal satisfaction, collaboration, and academic and institutional advancement.

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The mentoring relationship has existed since ancient Greek civilization, when Odysseus entrusted Mentor with the welfare of his son, Telemachus, while fighting in the Trojan War.<sup>1</sup> The first documented physician mentorship was the pairing of Sir William Osler, who mentored Harvey Cushing.<sup>2</sup> In modern times, the concept of formal mentoring was reintroduced by Levinson and Darrow in their 1978 landmark book, *The Seasons of a Man's Life*, in which they interviewed men at different stages of their careers to gain insight on their successes.<sup>3</sup> Nearly a decade later, Kram<sup>4</sup> evaluated the importance of mentoring in business with

her seminal book, *Mentoring at Work: Developmental Relationships in Organizational Life*. This launched a body of research in the business literature to evaluate the effects of mentorship on individuals and organizations. The world of academe later followed suit, including academic medicine.

The value of mentorship to aspiring physicians is well established.<sup>5-24</sup> There are defined benefits to those who are choosing careers,<sup>6,11-13,25-28</sup> advancing in research or administration,<sup>16,20,29,30</sup> and looking for sex- or minority-specific guidance.<sup>31-39</sup> Physicians who have had mentorship are more likely to enjoy enhanced career satisfaction, advancement in their chosen area, and even increased income.<sup>10,16,20-22,40,41</sup> With all these potential benefits, seeking a mentor can be a wise choice for anyone who wants a successful career.

Despite the abundance of evidence on the advantages of having a mentor, there is a paucity of literature on the benefits derived by the mentor. Sambunjak et al.<sup>20</sup> performed a systematic review of mentorship programs and point out that the mentoring relationship is subject to the pressures of time and commitment on the part of both protégés and mentors. In a formal needs assessment, Ramani et al.<sup>42</sup> outlined strategies to become an effective mentor and proposed that the mentors take pride in developing the next generation and meeting new colleagues. Others have reported mentors are gen-

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erally “satisfied” with their roles by being able to keep up with advances in research techniques<sup>41</sup> or feeling like they belong to a network to share ideas.<sup>43</sup> Omary<sup>44</sup> points out that documentation of formal mentorship is important in securing federal funding for research. Garmel<sup>12</sup> provides a list of potential benefits to the mentors of medical students.

The purpose of this article is to investigate the personal and professional effect of the mentoring relationship on the mentors and their institutions by reviewing the literature of other disciplines, such as business, K-12 education, and psychology, and drawing parallels that apply to academic medicine.

## WHAT WE KNOW FROM OTHER DISCIPLINES

Levinson and Darrow<sup>3</sup> explored how a man’s life changed from youth to old age based on the presence of mentoring relationships. He viewed these from the perspectives of both mentors and protégés. He was the first to articulate that mentors derive pleasure from passing on information and skills and are exhilarated by the enthusiasm of protégés.<sup>3</sup> This has been validated repeatedly in the ensuing 30 years.<sup>4,45-47</sup> Levinson and Darrow<sup>3</sup> purport the benefits of being a mentor are “weathering the cross from youth to mid-life or beyond” and that the protégé links the mentor to “forces of youthful energy in the world and in himself.”

### Business

**Motivation to Become a Mentor.** In the business model, executives who had been mentored are more likely to take on a protégé. They recognize how much mentorship had benefited them and are anxious to mentor junior associates of the next generation.<sup>45</sup> Allen<sup>48</sup> notes that women executives are acutely aware of the general lack of availability for mentors for other women, especially those in senior roles. These women appear to be quite willing to mentor junior colleagues. Some executives are spurred to become mentors if it gives them discreet opportunities for higher-level interactions on the job.<sup>49</sup> Mentors report the desire to leave a legacy akin to a sense of immortality, by grooming younger adults to propagate their ideals after their own careers have ended.<sup>46</sup> Besides personal experience of having been a protégé, those most likely to become mentors have a strong internal drive to succeed. Upon further exploration, the motivation appears to be self-focused for these mentors. They perceive an increased ability to learn, have a keen sense of self-gratification for the professional development of others, and have a strong desire to advance their organizations.<sup>45</sup>

**Benefits to Becoming a Mentor.** Proximal benefits of mentoring junior business colleagues are related directly to the quality of the relationship and include personal satisfaction, organizational recognition, renewed sense of purpose, and improved job satisfaction, which is attributed to seeing their role through new eyes. Business mentors enjoy increased salary by performing the added responsibilities and can count on a loyal base of support from their junior colleague protégés. Job performance evaluations typically reflect

higher scores, and they are more likely to be noticed by others, especially their superiors.<sup>46,47</sup> There is a demonstrated increase in the number and rapidity of promotions for executives who serve as mentors, possibly because mentors are viewed within the organization as “good citizens.” Additionally, mentors are less likely to “burn out” or reach a plateau when compared to cohorts who are not mentors.<sup>50,51</sup>

### **The Importance of Protégé Selection to the Satisfaction of Mentors.**

When given a choice, mentors would rather select a protégé whom they feel is open to advisement and has a track record of putting forth significant effort on the job.<sup>52</sup> Potential protégés who are perceived to have outstanding potential are more pleasing to mentor than those who have the greatest need of intervention. Mentors are more satisfied when they feel they contribute directly to the success of their protégés, especially when others in the organization acknowledge the mentorship relationship as indispensable.<sup>53</sup> Mentors gravitate toward protégés whom they feel are similar to themselves. While this is an important motivator for initiating the mentoring relationship, Allen and Eby<sup>54</sup> point out that, in the long run, complementarity is more important in producing satisfaction.

### **Long-term Benefits to the Mentor and the Organization.**

Long-term benefits to the mentor in business organizations include better work attitudes, higher income, accelerated promotion rate, and stronger perception of career success by themselves and others. Mentors gain additional technical expertise from their young counterparts and have the opportunity to develop managerial skills.<sup>47</sup> Brown et al.<sup>55</sup> and Penner et al.<sup>56</sup> report in the psychosocial literature that mentors enjoy improved mental health as a result of helping people and a healthier immune system. Organizations that foster mentoring programs are likely to enjoy improved retention of both the senior level mentors and the junior level protégés. Because of the partnerships that are inherent in the relationships, greater networking takes place and yields higher levels of productivity.

**Drawbacks to Mentorship.** Despite the widespread benefits to the mentors, protégés, and their organizations, some drawbacks to mentorship do exist. The most obvious is the amount of time spent on developing another person’s career, which can drain the mentor of energy and productivity.<sup>46,48</sup> Coworkers may resent the positive partnership, and mentors may receive negative fallout for appearing to favor their protégés. The mentors may feel a sense of personal failure if their protégés do not meet their expectations. Their coworkers’ opinions of them may dwindle as a result of poor protégé performance.<sup>46,48</sup> At times, the entire relationship can be detrimental. A well-meaning mentor may hold back a protégé who has surpassed the mentor’s ability to help. Conversely, an outstanding protégé may threaten the mentor by exceeding his or her performance capabilities.<sup>4</sup> There is significant variation in mentoring relationships. Even within a given pair, the relationship is likely to change over time.

Informal mentoring may be casual and occur in an episodic fashion throughout every workday.<sup>46</sup>

**Summary of Business Mentoring.** Despite some possible drawbacks in the business mentorship model, individuals and organizations recognize that the overwhelming successes outweigh the drawbacks. The concept of mentorship in this field is well established and studied.

**Elementary and Secondary Education**

**Motivation to Become a Mentor.** Formal mentorship is built in as a requirement for potential teachers to obtain a certification credential to teach in the K-12 arena and is commonly known as “student-teaching.” These teacher development programs, usually referred to as “master teacher,” produce better new teachers. In addition to helping the novice, these programs provide a sense of purpose for the experienced teachers and prevent them from getting bored and possibly leaving the classroom. For others, the master teacher mentorship program serves as a stepping stone to administrative educational leadership.<sup>57</sup>

**Benefits to Becoming a Mentor.** Since this discipline based its program on the business model described, it is not surprising to learn that there are many similarities. These include improved career advancement, development of career networks, and personal satisfaction. Since the protégé assists the mentor in completing tasks that are no longer stimulating, such as developing lesson plans and grading papers, there is ample time to allow the mentor to explore new areas of interest. Mentors earn respect for their protégés’ accomplishments. To be recognized as a successful mentor, the partnership must occur visibly in the workplace.<sup>57</sup> Being identified as a “star maker” is a sure way to attract the best and brightest future protégés.

**Differences Between Business and K-12 Education.**

One major difference between the educational and business models is that more K-12 educational projects are done in tandem than are described in the business literature, where the mentor typically guides the protégé

in a project.<sup>58</sup> Academic mentoring has a unique twist in that the protégé is being trained specifically to succeed at another institution. This significantly differs from the business model, in which a core purpose of the mentoring relationship focuses on the success of the sponsoring organization.<sup>58</sup> It is likely that the education model could lead to increased networking and provide the mentor with a loyal base of support within a given specialty or promote multidisciplinary collaboration at a given institution.

**APPLYING WHAT WE LEARNED FROM OTHER DISCIPLINES TO ACADEMIC MEDICINE**

The benefits of mentoring enjoyed by other fields should apply easily to mentors in medicine as well (Table 1). In the context of an academic career, the infrastructure already exists to provide mentoring to junior trainees ranging from medical students to faculty. It is likely that mentors are already enjoying many of the personal benefits of their relationships with protégés. In fact, people who choose a career in medicine may actually be more apt to be caring individuals who have the inner drive to help people. Serving in the mentorship role is congruent with this motivation and could produce intense satisfaction and a renewed sense of purpose.

While the quintessential mentor-protégé pair of Osler and Cushing is not likely to be replicated today, the tenets upon which the relationship was based are alive and well. Respect and shared enthusiasm for medicine enabled each to be personally and professionally fulfilled. With similar passion and motivation, each left a unique mark on the future of medicine. Osler laid the foundation for bedside teaching, while Cushing embodied the same fervor in teaching surgical practice. In Cushing’s eulogy of Osler he stated, “no one can realize the extent to which the man influenced my own life.”<sup>59</sup> Just as Sir William Osler shaped the career of Henry Cushing, modern medical mentors take pride in developing the next generation of doctors, and their influence on the burgeoning careers can give them a sense of immortality and a legacy of their ideals.<sup>46</sup>

Table 1  
Mentorship Benefits

For the Mentor	For the Institution and Specialty
Belong to a network Develop base of support via loyalty of protégés Higher salary and rate of promotion Immortality/legacy Improved technical expertise Less likely to burn out or plateau Personal satisfaction Pride in developing the next generation Recognition by superiors Renewed sense of purpose Stronger perception of career success	Development of networks Enhanced productivity External recognition Improved morale Improved skill of junior members Improved technological capability Institutional efficiency National collaborations Recruitment advantage Retention of senior members
In addition to the benefits of mentorship to protégés, a formal mentorship program has distinct advantages for the mentors and their institutions and specialties.	

Just as in the business model, senior physicians may be motivated to develop the careers of their junior colleagues as a duty to propagate the benefits of mentorship they enjoyed throughout their training. Selection of an appropriate protégé may resemble the strategy employed in the business model, where enthusiasm and industriousness are desirable traits. While a potential mentor may feel more comfortable with someone who possesses similar traits, the most productive business pairings are composed of people whose skills complemented each other. In both disciplines, the incidence of burnout is noted to be less for workers who served as mentors.

The career of the mentor can be advanced by improved visibility in the workplace when the protégé's accomplishments are recognized. By working as a team, the mentor can attain improved academic productivity by having an associate with unique, complementary skills to help complete projects that might lead to scholarly recognition.

In addition to the personal fulfillment, mentors frequently include protégés in their research or clinical activities. An enthusiastic protégé can relieve some of the burdens of completing tasks associated with these endeavors. Just as in the education and business models, the partnership enables academic mentors to explore ideas for research or to participate in new projects. As noted in the business literature, younger protégés are often more skilled at emerging technology and can integrate this with the mentor's experiential knowledge.

At the completion of their training programs, many protégés leave their institutions to progress to the next level or embark on their full-time careers. This mirrors the K-12 educational model. However, in academic medicine, it is likely that the mentoring relationship will continue after the protégé has moved on to another institution. The mentor can count on a loyal base of support from protégés in these distant institutions, which sets the stage to form research consortia or educational collaboratives that extend nationally or beyond.

When developing mentorship programs, it is important to recognize the drawbacks noted by other disciplines and prevent these from occurring. A strong support system among the mentors and recognition by the institution of the efforts of the mentor will engender a positive environment. Mentors should be encouraged to involve other colleagues to assist protégés when their own expertise is exhausted. Finally, mentors should expect that their protégés will soon master their unique skill set, and the original mentorship relationship will evolve into one more typical of true collegial peers.

## CONCLUSIONS

The value of receiving mentorship to advance one's career in medicine is well documented. However, the benefits to the mentor have not been evaluated explicitly. An analysis of benefits to mentors in other fields, such as business and K-12 education, leads to the prediction that mentorship in the medical arena can pro-

duce positive outcomes. Mentors in academic medicine can expect to derive personal satisfaction, improved scholarly productivity, and widespread networks of loyal supporters who share similar interests and values.

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