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Key Communication Skills for Mentees

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INTRODUCTION

Mentorship is an important relationship for young radiologists to foster to fulfill both personal and professional goals. Mentorship is known to provide improved career satisfaction, more research productivity, and promotion within the academic ranks [1]. Although the characteristics of good mentors have been published many times in the literature, there is a paucity of literature on the characteristics of a strong mentee [2]. One crucial factor to ensure success as a mentee and to foster a healthy mentor-mentee relationship is that of communication [3].

1. TAKE INITIATIVE

It is important for mentees to seek mentors wherever they exist. This may be within one's department, institution, or practice. Finding a good fit is important because a strong mentor-mentee relationship relies on mutual interests. Therefore, looking beyond geographical boundaries and practice types may be useful, such as finding mentors at national conferences or even on social media [4]. Once the mentee has identified a potential mentor, it is important for the mentee to take the leap and initiate the dialogue. Mentors are often very busy and may not always be actively looking for mentees, so initiative on the part of the mentee is paramount to establishing the relationship.

2. BE HONEST

Once the initial introduction is made, it is critical for the mentee to communicate openly and honestly about what he or she desires out of the mentor-mentee relationship. Mentors can provide both personal and professional advice, opportunities for growth, or even research opportunities [5]. If the mentee is not honest about what exactly he or she is looking for, this may result in a mentor who cannot help the mentee in ways that were initially anticipated [6]. Therefore, honest communication is key to starting the relationship with the correct cadence.


3. SET REALISTIC GOALS

Goal setting is an important factor in creating successful mentor-mentee relationships and should be communicated at the outset of the relationship [6]. During the initial conversations with the mentor, mentees should outline what goals they are hoping to achieve with this new relationship. For some, this could be achieving work-life integration. For others, this could mean more leadership roles or research productivity. Outlining goals can help the mentor hone in on how best to help the mentee and, if necessary, provide resources or other contacts who may be able to help the mentee reach said goals. Additionally, goals should also follow a realistic timeline that is both satisfactory and attainable by the mentee. These goals and the desired timeline should be laid

out clearly by the mentee at the beginning of the relationship so that both parties are aware of this foundational element.

4. SHOW THE MENTOR RESPECT

Respect is an important factor when it comes to effective communication. Although respect can be perceived in an overt manner via tone of voice and language, there are also numerous subconscious ways mentees can show great respect for their mentor that can enhance the mentor-mentee relationship. For example, being on time to all meetings with the mentor is crucial to showing respect for the mentor's time. Additionally, coming prepared with an agenda (with follow-up on prior projects, future directions, etc) can show respect for the mentor by demonstrating to the mentor how valuable the time is to the mentee [7]. Timely follow-up is also imperative to keep projects on track, which can demonstrate commitment to the mentor. In many cases, mentors act not only as advisors but also as sponsors, giving mentees opportunities that otherwise the mentee would not have been able to obtain [8]. In these cases, respect can be shown as gratitude to the mentor and be given by rising to the occasion and performing at a level that would inspire the mentor to continue offering the mentee new opportunities. If not, the mentee risks losing not just a valuable opportunity but also the mentorship altogether. Finally, the mentee should display deep gratitude to the

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mentor for the time and effort put into the relationship.

5. CHECK IN REGULARLY

Mentors are inherently busy, and many mentors have numerous mentees. Therefore, the mentee is responsible for reaching out to the mentor and scheduling regular check-in meetings to update the mentor on progress. Mentees can also reach out to the mentor's secretary to ensure a scheduled time on the mentor's busy schedule. Regular check-in meetings can foster effective communication by setting aside time for the mentor to focus only on the mentee, the mentee's goals, and opportunities that could help the mentee succeed. Although check-ins can be done via a formal meeting, they can often also take place by e-mail, with a few notes to update the mentor on ongoing projects or skills. The mentee can also reach out to the mentor when

either the mentee or the mentor receives an important award or crosses a milestone to foster the communication between formal meetings. Successful mentor-mentee relationships communicate effectively, and often, but not all, communication has to be in person or in a formal setting.

CONCLUSION

Ultimately, a successful mentor-mentee relationship lies on a foundation of mutual effective communication, respect, and aligned interests, which can result in a long-lasting and rewarding endeavor to both the mentor and the mentee alike. Effective communication by mentees can help mentors understand how they can be most valuable to the mentees and therefore create a relationship that is long-lasting, fruitful, and rewarding to both the mentor and the mentee alike.

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