

A CALL FOR MENTORS

We all have something to teach and something to learn.

BY SARWAT SALIM, MD



Throughout my career journey in academic medicine, I have been privileged to mentor many students, residents, fellows, and colleagues in ophthalmology. I believe that helping someone achieve his or her full potential through mentoring is one of the best gifts professionals can offer. Often directed towards academic growth and advancement, mentor-

ing can also have a positive impact on an individual personally, emotionally, and socially.

Traditionally, the mentorship role in any discipline is reserved for older, experienced individuals who guide younger professionals to help them develop specific skills over time. While I strongly value years of service and experience, I also believe that one can on take this role at any career stage. As long as a person has the passion and is willing to be accessible, the opportunities and rewards are unlimited. Furthermore, I encourage mentees to seek guidance and advice from several mentors with diverse backgrounds and experiences and to learn different perspectives and strategies for achieving their ultimate goals.

DIFFERENT STYLES

Mentorship has many different styles and may occur formally or informally. During residency and fellowship training, the format is structured; professionals share their experience, knowledge, and clinical and surgical skills with trainees. Equally important is informal mentoring where one leads by example. It does not require any additional time or special effort, but the impact is profound. This approach helps mentees develop core values, including a strong work ethic, patience, communication skills, respect, trust, empathy, and leadership.

As I was building my own career, I often wondered why more people did not want to serve as formal mentors or support others. I witnessed and even encountered some individuals who were more obstructionists than facilitators. Was the problem a lack of interest? Lack of time? Lack of awareness? Was it a total disregard for another person's aspirations and dreams? Was it personal or professional envy? Unfortunately, the questions remain without answers.

TWO-WAY BENEFITS

Many physicians have discovered that mentoring is a mutually beneficial process. It is a privilege to shape someone else's



career and to make a difference in his or her life. Mentoring allows mentors to reflect on their own academic journey and provides some perspective on and understanding of how to be of value to others. Mentors can provide guidance based on their own successes and failures to make the transition easier for others. Mentees may challenge mentors' knowledge and creativity, thereby motivating mentors to stay current and active in their field. This partnership also expands a mentor's professional network and interpersonal relationships. Mentees often become mentors' advocates and lifelong friends.

Mentoring reveals that people are different. Because backgrounds, needs, and career goals vary, the approach has to be individualized. Over time, the mentor becomes more open-minded, organized, and patient, and he or she becomes a better listener and a more effective communicator. This evolution develops an inspiring, respected, and well-rounded leader.

In summary, mentoring benefits everyone, because everyone has something to give and everyone has something to gain. I encourage my colleagues to seek opportunities to mentor someone! ■

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