



# Physician Mentoring: Making an Impact

*"We make a living by what we get, we make a life by what we give."*

– Winston Churchill



Physician mentoring sounds like an easy enough proposition. Who wouldn't jump at the chance to opine and proselytize, in a position of power, to a new employee who is looking to impress his/her boss? Indeed, you can say most anything you want, with a very low risk of rebuttal or confrontation.

Even well-intentioned mentors tend to preach, encouraging their subjects with snippets, wisdom, and praise. "Fly-ins" I call them: Fly in for a quick speech, receive a befuddled nod of confirmation, then fly out. We consider ourselves to be experts, and therefore, all we need to do is share our expertise to qualify for mentoring.

Well, I hate to break the news to you, but expertise is not in and of itself mentoring. Mentoring is a more collaborative approach to impact positive change in others in support of professional, personal, and organizational development. It depends on expertise and experience, but only as a springboard for deeper work and reflection. It implies growth and maturation, not just solutions.

Mentoring can have a lifelong impact for both the "mentoree" and the "mentor," and can lead to a greater level of satisfaction and purpose for both.

So, what are the key characteristics of exceptional mentors? They are...

### Available

- Availability breeds confidence and trust, which encourages an openness that allows for an honest exploration of strengths and weakness, as well as for opportunities to provide adequate praise to buffer relevant concerns.

### Reflective

- The ability to share your personal experiences, including the missteps, creates a disarming environment.
  - This allows the mentor to use insight and experience to help problem-solve effectively, and helps a new

employee gain perspective

### Influential

- A good mentor translates a position of authority into persuasive influence, relying on the ability to change behavior without bullying and to be confident, but not cocky.

### Accepting

- Welcomes new ideas and personalities and identifies opportunities within the practice to take advantage of same.
- Willing to challenge their own ideology in an effort to learn from others.
- Not trying to create a homogenous practice.

### Collaborative

- Works with a new employee to identify strengths and weaknesses and encourages their participation in how to address both.
- Offers opportunities for a new employee to get involved at a leadership level so that employee feels empowered.

### Observant

- Identifies potential problems before they become crises. Intervenes proactively.

New physicians are reluctant to publicly declare their desire for mentoring; it sounds weak. Nonetheless, a practice looking to engage new employees—and retain them for the long term—should assume the need exists, and provide accordingly. You just might be surprised to find that the return is more profound than the investment. ■

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