Mentors and the Environment of Research

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Disclosure

• Nothing to disclose

31 postdoctoral fellows
5 medical student M.D. theses
4 masters M.H.S. theses
4 graduate Ph.D. theses
12 vascular surgery fellows
The Balance of Life

- Youth
- Middle Age
- Old Age

- Time
- Strength
- Money
The environment of research

- University
- Industry
- Private institutions
  - Hospitals
  - Foundations
- Quality of research space
- Colleagues
- Effective work environment
- Job satisfaction and performance
- Branding
- Efficient use of resources
Structure of University Research

- PI's lab
- Section
- Department
- Institution
Resulting Forces

- Family
- Lifestyle
- Section Head
- Other Faculty resources
- Clinical Work / On Call
- Chairman
- Overall Career Planning
- Protected Time
- Administrative Support
- Location
- Academic Potential
- Salary / Benefits
Congratulations!

• You have a
  – First position
  – New position
You want to succeed
But what is success??
Failure

Problems
• Not being true to yourself
  – Know what you want
  – Know what you need
• Accepting a poor position
• Not having advice

Solutions
• Know thyself
  – Spend time thinking, talking
  – Spouse, peers
• Investigate (negotiate) well
• Find mentors
What is a mentor?

- Greek mythology
- Mentor (Μέντωρ) – son of Heracles and Asopis
- Friend of Odysseus
  - When Odysseus left for the Trojan war, he placed Mentor in charge of his son Telemachus
  - Athena disguised herself as Mentor to encourage him and give him practical plans for dealing with personal dilemmas
- Someone who imparts wisdom to and shares knowledge with a less experienced colleague

http://wordsmith.org
Why a Mentor?

- Offer guidance and advice, clarify thinking
- Provide opportunity
- Help you take the right steps, make the right moves
- Advocate for you locally and nationally
Mentors for Research

• How to plan a scientific experiment
• How to actually perform the work of an experiment
• How to work in / set up a laboratory
• How to collaborate
  – Which colleagues to avoid
• Where and when to publish – or write grants
• Writing skills
  – Papers vs. Grants
• Advice regarding aptitude for science
  – Should my career path include scientific investigation?

• How to ask and answer a question
Types of Mentors

The Godfather

Big Brother

Patron

Parent
Godfather

• Powerful
• Connected
• Provides for your needs, at a cost
• Gives clear direction
• Your priorities and goals are the same
Godfather

• Advantages
  – Clear, efficient access to power and connections
  – If you deliver you will likely succeed

• Disadvantages
  – The godfather’s priorities are first
  – It may be tough to become independent
Big Brother

- Helpful person slightly more senior than you
- You are following in his/her footsteps
- A trusted person who you can turn to for advice.
Big Brother

• Advantages
  – Trustworthy, open, honest
  – You do not always have to look good

• Disadvantages
  – May not have the best answers
  – Does not have resources, power
  – May have the same struggles as you
Parent

• Advantages
  – Trustworthy, open, honest
  – The parent is committed to your best interest

• Disadvantages
  – May not have the answers
  – May not have connections, power, resources
  – May be dysfunctional
Patron

• A distant supporter
• You may have projects together, but you do not work for her/him
• Successful, connected
• Willing to help you and receive little in return
Patron

• Advantages
  – You are not wholly dependent
  – The patron has connections and insight

• Disadvantages
  – Limited time
  – Limited loyalty
  – May not engage deeply in your development
• What do you need from a mentor?
  – What is your goal
    • This month
    • This year
    • Long term

• How should you get what you need?
  – Is there a local godfather, sibling, parent, or patron?
  – Are you connected to the right types of mentors?
Some advice

• Know thyself
  – Spend time thinking, talking
    • What kind of position do I want?
    • What kind of institution do I want to be a part of?
    • Who are my ideal colleagues and partners?
  – Spouse and Family
    • How much time can we spend together?
    • What area of the world do we wish to live in?
    • Do we need all the money in the world?
  – Peers - friends, committees, societies, editorial boards
    • What advice do they have for me?
    • How did they avoid problems?

• Investigate the position carefully
  – You are your own best advocate – this is your life !!

• Network, Find mentors
  – Local
  – National / International / Societies
Thank you very much!

If I am not for myself, who will be for me?
If I am not for others, what am I?
And if not now, when?

- Rabbi Hillel (30 BC - 9 AD)