



## Mentoring Tips

“Even though women physicians are achieving parity in terms of numbers, we are still struggling to establish ourselves in positions of power and influence within the US medical establishment. It is absolutely imperative that women in top leadership positions reach out to other women physicians and students, mentoring them so that their leadership skills develop and they feel empowered to voice their opinions and compete for leadership posts.

But as well as learning to work the system, we need to transform the institution of medicine into a more welcoming occupation that allows for greater work-life balance. We don't want to break through the glass ceiling only to find ourselves in a rubber room or isolation chamber.”

-AMWA President, Claudia Morrissey, MD

- 1. Decisions physicians face regarding career and personal choices are often complex. Provide a tip, your own words of wisdom, or a favorite quote (including author) that has helped you or someone you have mentored through one of those times where there has not been a straightforward or easy answer.**

**Charles J. Barone, II, MD:** I stress a balance between personal and professional life and making choices that provide professional growth and job diversity.

**Gary D. Gilliland, PhD, MD:** Be true to yourself. Trust and follow your instincts, even when they are at odds with advice, or the path taken by others. Remember that mentors will often advise you to be like them – while it is a sincere form of praise that they wish for you to be like them – also remember that what worked for your mentor may not work for you. Times and circumstances change and you are your own person. Seek role models that you would wish to emulate, even outside of your mentorship relationship, and ask for advice and guidance from those individuals. At our institution there is a disproportionately low fraction of women who are full professors or department chairs. I advise mentees to seek out those women who have risen to the top academic ranks and to solicit their advice and insights. Choose your mentor carefully – identify a person that has a proven track record of success in mentorship in general, and of women in particular. Pay attention to the “chemistry” – do you like the person, would you enjoy spending time with the person outside of a lab setting, would you enjoy meeting weekly to discuss science, do you feel better about yourself and your work after you have met with your mentor.

**Ralph W. Hale, MD:** Medicine is often a science that requires less than scientific decisions as you address a patient and their problem. It is hard to teach how to make these decisions. The best and only way is to be guided by some one who has been there before. We should never be too vain to ask or too reticent to respond. Helping others is our greatest opportunity and by doing so we multiply our impact.

**Elizabeth P. Kanof, MD:** Your colleagues can become close, reliable friends who you can depend upon – cultivate them!

**Lisa Leffert, MD:** You can do a lot of things, but not necessarily all of them at the same time. In the end of the day there are very few right or wrong choices, just different ones (and usually a finite number of options to choose between).

**David R. Nielsen:** Establish and honor your own personal core values and do not deviate from them. If this becomes a regular part of your decision making, you will avoid the personal choices that you may come to regret later on.

**Isaac Shiff, MD:** I feel strongly that when faced with a decision, one should select what makes the person happy and follow your passion and dream.

**Prathibha Varkey, MD, MPH, MHPE:** Go with your heart! Pick the choice that you are passionate about, that will keep you inspired or that requires your special talent.

**Claire V. Wolfe, MD:** From a (male) psychologist whom I consulted in college (1962) when I had no mentors, was beset with doubt over my career choice and when women were perceived as “taking the place of men” if they went to medical school: “Maybe the man whose place you “take” will have been a horrible, uncaring physician. Do it and don’t look back.”

**2. Mentoring is an important leadership skill. List a leadership trait that you feel has been fostered in you through mentoring and/or describe how your mentor helped you hone leadership ability.**

**Charles J. Barone, II, MD:** “Be here now,” be on time, be fully present and engaged at all meetings and interactions with peers, staff, and family. Put the Blackberry away!

**Gary D. Gilliland, PhD, MD:** I also believe that generosity is among the most important attributes of a good mentor. Be generous with your time; be generous with authorship positions with your mentees – offer them senior and corresponding authorship when they have been the drivers on a project; be generous in giving your mentees credit when presenting their work; be generous in promoting their career after they have left the lab; be generous with lab resources. My experience has been that such generosity is regarded many times over. Lead without seeming to lead – it is important for mentees to develop their own approach to science, and all benefit from the synergy achieved when a mentor and mentee co-develop a project plan – the outcome will be greater than the sum of the parts. And it is erroneous and self-aggrandizing for any mentor to believe that their ideas or approaches will always be the best. We are privileged as mentors to work with the brightest and most able individuals – let them spread their own wings, let them blossom – don’t constrain them with your own biases or range of thought.

**Ralph W. Hale, MD:** My mentor taught me to listen first and only then decide upon a plan before acting.

**Elizabeth P. Kanof, MD:** I was more fortunate than most to have both parents as physician mentors.

**Lisa Leffert, MD:** The art of listening.

**David R. Nielsen, MF:** Few traits are more powerful than trust. I have been mentored in the past by senior physicians whose trust in me exceeded what I probably deserved at the time, but awakened in me a desire to live up to that trust. As a result, I have learned to show trust in those whom I have the honor of mentoring. Learning to trust and be patient with those whom we mentor is essential for building strong leaders.

**Isaac Schiff, MD:** I learned how stressed women in particular can be when they have to balance work home issues.

**Prathibha Varkey, MD, MPH, MHPE:** It keeps me inspired to bring out the best in people, and has fostered my motivation skills.

**Claire V. Wolfe, MD:** My most memorable mentors were three women teachers, one in 8<sup>th</sup> grade and two in high school, and my parents (who never went to college) who never doubted that I could/should/would do anything I wanted. I suspect their confidence, support and encouragement bolstered my own confidence in my ideas and leadership efforts.

- 3. Thinking about your experience as a mentor or mentee, describe what has contributed to the success of the relationship (interest in same specialty, location, similar work styles, being able to email, desire for similar personal lives, differences-helping to see another perspective, etc).**

**Charles J. Barone, II, MD:** Scheduling regular times to meet and a sincere interest on the part of the mentor.

**Gary D. Gilliland, PhD, MD:** Perhaps ironically in a scientific workplace driven by discovery, hypothesis generation and hypothesis testing, I have found that the most important component of a successful mentor/mentee relationship is showing the mentee that you care about them. Pay attention to their personal life, remember the struggle that we all face with the insecurity (can I really do this?) and the uncertainty of initiating a career in science and medicine. Do what you can to help with life outside of the lab, if only through providing moral support and a kind and understanding ear. Science is not done in a vacuum – it is integrated into increasingly complex lifestyles, and one needs to be understanding and supportive. And don't expect your mentee to be like you! They will find their own path and exploit their own strengths. Help them to identify those strengths, and support their development. And try to ensure that people leave feeling good about themselves and their work after you have met. This is not to say that constructive criticism is not important – but ensure that the criticism focuses on the work and not on the person.

**Ralph W. Hale, MD:** Being a mentor requires one to be there and to be willing to spend the time to offer and give support as well as constructive criticisms. But in all cases, listen to what is being asked and offer what is needed. You cannot be a mentor if you cannot listen and often times you may feel rejected but to give up is unacceptable.

**Elizabeth P. Kanof, MD:** Participating in organized medicine with both male and female colleagues has been a stimulating and enriching experience in my life.

**Lisa Leffert, MD:** Clear expectations of what the relationship is meant to provide (this seems to matter more than same specialty, gender, etc).

**David R. Nielsen, MD:** A willingness to really listen has served me well in developing successful and professional relationships. There is a big difference between “listening to respond” and “listening to learn”. Most senior people tend to think they know it all and listen to respond or teach. When leaders listen to learn and stay really curious, relationship is strong and their abilities as a mentor and leader are dramatically improved.

**Isaac Schiff, MD:** I listen and thus have learned an incredible amount. It opened my eyes to concepts I never thought about.

**Prathibha Varkey, MD, MPH, MHPE:** One of the things my mentees appreciate about me is my ability to keep them focused on their goals. My 24-7 availability through email, has also been appreciated by most mentees!

**Claire V. Wolfe, MD:** I have always been an enthusiastic cheerleader for women in medicine. And I continue to do career days for women in high school and provide shadowing for college students. I believe medicine is the most flexible, satisfying career a woman can choose: the option of working directly with patients – or not; the option of working full-time or not. And residencies and practices have only become more available and malleable since my early days in medicine.