Sonia Sotomayor, associate justice of the Supreme Court, once said that “there are no bystanders in life … our humanity makes us each a part of something greater than ourselves.” Sotomayor was talking about the importance of respect, and it is a message that all medical and surgical residents should consider.

Resident physicians serve as both teachers and learners in a medical education setting, and that means they share the responsibility of creating an effective and respectful learning environment. An online education module from the AMA provides guidance about why this type of environment is important and what steps residents can take to make this setting a reality in their own workplace.

“Creating an Effective and Respectful Learning Environment” is one of the education modules being offered to all residents at no cost for a limited time during the COVID-19 pandemic. This course is one of more than 30 online courses available to medical and surgical residents at residency institutions that have subscribed to the AMA GME Competency Education Program.

Among the program’s experts are several who contributed to the AMA’s Health Systems Science textbook, which draws insights from faculty at medical schools that are part of the Association’s Accelerating Change in Medical Education consortium.

Modules cover five of the six topics—patient care, practice-based learning and improvement, interpersonal and communication skills, professionalism, and system-based practice—within the Accreditation Council for Graduate Medical Education’s core competency requirements. The sixth requirement, medical knowledge, is one that is typically addressed during clinical education.

Making a choice
It should come as no surprise that the best way to learn is in a respectful environment. Unfortunately, disrespect is an action that can easily be targeted toward students, residents, and physicians. When that happens, the disrespected has a choice: let that environment control them or take control of it themselves. It may sound simple, but this decision has the potential to shape that person’s entire medical career.

The most effective strategy in this situation is to act as a role model for professionalism. What does that look like? For example:

- Bring a patient-centered approach to the job.
- Recognize the need to be a life-long learner.
- Show your desire to be a collaborative physician, including your willingness to accept constructive criticism.

Another key component of being a professional and showing respect is developing a culture of effective two-way feedback, where teachers and learners are both able to actively participate in providing feedback. For teachers, that includes being:

- Humble.
- Respectful.
- Specific.
- Prioritized.
- Balanced.
- Timely.

Visit the AMA GME Competency Education Program for more information on this and other offerings or to request a demo.