

## FELLOWS-IN-TRAINING & EARLY CAREER PAGE

# Mentorship During Fellowship



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*“A good mentor not only makes you a better cardiologist but a better human being.”*

These were the words from my mentor, Dr. Samir Kapadia, when I first approached him about embarking on research projects during my internship year. Although this appeared to be routine advice at first, I have come to realize the importance and the gravity of these words as I have progressed through my training in cardiovascular medicine. The word “mentor” was inspired by the character of Mentor in Homer’s *Odyssey*, where Mentor was the counselor of Odysseus and became the trusted guardian and instructor of his son, Telemachus (1).

Although good mentorship is a prerequisite for success in any medical specialty, it is particularly important within the discipline of cardiology. Mentorship during fellowship is fundamental to the intellectual and professional growth of the mentee in this specialty. This may be because sound training is needed to master the large numbers and varied types of procedures that are integral to the practice of cardiovascular medicine. In addition, the large diversity of the specialty often can confuse and overwhelm young trainees. Furthermore, mentees often look for astute guidance regarding career pathway from their mentors, based on an assessment of their skills and aptitude, so that the mentees experience a high level of professional satisfaction in their early career years.

### HOW TO CHOOSE A MENTOR

In an era of economic pressures, time constraints, and limited resources, every trainee would like to maximize the benefit during the training years by choosing the “right mentor.” However, few comprehend how to go about choosing this right mentor. One reason why it may be so difficult to choose the right mentor is the dynamic nature of the mentor-mentee relationship that is dependent on personalities, aptitude, and

attitude of both parties. The right mentor for 1 person may not be suitable for someone else. Hence, it may be important for a trainee to work with multiple people before he or she decides on the right mentor. It is also critical for trainees to realize that the mentor role need not be limited to just 1 person. Several mentors may work with him or her in different capacities.

In my experience, there are 5 types of mentors that can be instrumental for a mentee:

1. **Educator:** This mentor is responsible for advancing the education of the mentee. This may include medical knowledge, technical proficiencies, and procedural skills. Most successful educators prefer to use interactive ways, wherein the pupil plays an active part during the learning process.
2. **Challenger:** This mentor is responsible to “push” his or her mentees to heighten their sense of urgency and keep them moving forward. The Challenger’s role is to push the mentees to contribute hard work, to focus on the details that matter, to achieve key milestones, and to surpass his or her competition. The Challengers generally serve as great research mentors as they often urge their mentees to think in an innovative or unique fashion and may help them pursue research ideas.
3. **Moderator:** This mentor scrutinizes and keeps his or her mentees “in check.” In one’s professional career, it is important to have someone who can critically examine all actions and all steps and tell you when you are wrong or pursuing an incorrect path. These are very specific types of mentors—with well-defined personality traits—who can serve to steer mentees in the right direction. It is his or her responsibility to confront assumptions and ask tough questions that ultimately prevent a mentee from making costly or irremediable errors.
4. **Career Planner:** This mentor makes critical assessments of the mentee’s aptitude and skillset to help plan the career pathway that would be best suited for the mentee. This type of mentor is often instrumental in providing guidance about

such decisions as academics versus private practice, interventional versus general cardiology versus electrophysiology, or basic research versus a clinical path.

5. *Connector*: In the real world, it often matters who you know. The Connector willingly opens up his or her network to help his or her mentee pursue the appropriate path. Whether it is staking his or her credibility on helping to find a first employer or making that connection to a critical hire, the Connector is 1 of the most valuable mentoring assets that a trainee can have.

As it turns out, a truly great mentor often embodies more than 1 of these mentorship characteristics. It is important to understand that mentees may often find more than 1 mentorship attribute in a single mentor—a mentor who knows when to push, when to caution, when to teach, and when to inspire. It is also possible for mentees to find these individual attributes in different mentors, in which case they should define the role and the impact of each mentor on their professional career at the very beginning to avoid mismanaged expectations. Because each trainee has his or her own unique combination of personality attributes, in the end, it is essential to find the right mentor-mentee combination—at the right time—that matters most.

### THE MENTOR-MENTEE DYNAMIC

A mentor-mentee relationship is defined as a “dynamic reciprocal relationship environment between an advanced career incumbent (mentor) and a beginner (protégé), aimed at promoting the development of both” (2). In choosing a mentor, I have found it is important to remember that this is a dynamic, multifaceted relationship. The relationship can best be described as a symbiotic relationship, wherein both parties have responsibilities and stand to gain if the relationship functions optimally. The mentee obviously gains in terms of professional and career advancement along with learning superior clinical judgment. The mentor gains camaraderie and companionship, as well as a sense of pride in helping shape a mentee’s career. Often, mentors may learn from their mentees new perspectives that they did not have.

An important facet of the mentor-mentee relationship is that this moves through a cycle of maturity, like any other relationship. Over the course of my training, my mentor has used a way to train me that has not only

been effective but very friendly and collegial. This easy-going environment fosters learning and ensures optimal performance. Every mentee, including myself, desires a mentor that maintains an “open-door policy” to address concerns and questions that arise during the course of training. Broadly speaking, the relationship with my mentor has progressed according to the following A-B-C-D-E-F steps.

1. Accompany: The mentor makes a commitment in a friendly, caring way.
2. Broach: The mentor prepares the mentee before he or she is ready to enter current practices.
3. Catalyze: The mentor pushes the learner into change, provoking a different way of thinking—a change in identity or a way of thinking.
4. Demonstrate: The mentor leads by example.
5. EMBED: This involves repetition and ensuring that the mentee has indeed learned the skill or activity from the mentor.
6. Fruition: It is generally used to create awareness of what was learned by the mentee and letting the mentee function independently.

As our relationship matured through these steps, my goals, desires, and aspirations continued to evolve, which required our relationship to adapt or sometimes change altogether. I believe it is imperative for both mentors and mentees to reflect upon this relationship from time to time, to evaluate if the expectations are being met on both sides. It is often hard to judge or rate the success of a mentor-mentee relationship, but this must be earnestly attempted to ensure satisfaction and enrichment.

In a field like cardiology, it is not possible to become a great cardiologist without a great mentor. One can imagine that mentorship requires great commitment, sacrifice, and a belief in the benefit of this investment. Although the rewards for the mentee are often direct and easily perceptible, the rewards reaped by mentors can be gradual or delayed, as it takes years of commitment that may lead to successful careers of their mentees. Despite that, it is incumbent upon the current generation of mentors to help train the fellows-in-training to create responsible and competent mentors for the future.

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