

## FINDING A MENTOR

Statement up front about how pluses and minuses to every lab: what we say is from older student perspective and what we've learned, not always a negative about the lab we are in

Teaser Survey:

1. What year are you? 1-2 year 3-4 year, 5+ year
2. Top qualities you should consider in finding your mentor as a grad student
3. Top qualities you should consider in finding your mentor as a postdoc
4. Things your current mentor does well
5. Things your current mentor doesn't do well
6. How have your thoughts about what you want in a mentor changed since your joined the lab?
7. How important is it to talk to several people about identifying a mentor? Mentor him/herself, others in lab?

"I guess the atmosphere that I've tried to create here is that I'm a friend first and a boss second, and probably an entertainer third."

"Remember when people used to say boss, when they were describing something that was really cool like, those shoulder pads are really boss man... Look at that perm, that perm is so boss. It's what made me want to become a boss. And I looked so good in a perm and shoulder pads. But now, boss is just slang for jerk in charge."

-Michael Scott, The Office

Outline of session (not sure how to organize...)

1. Qualities to consider when choosing a mentor as a grad student
2. What you need from your mentor while a student and how to get it
3. Qualities to consider when choosing a mentor as a postdoc

Here are some qualities to cultivate in yourself as you seek to be mentored:

- **Foresight:** Start early to think about your future.
- **Pro-activity:** Don't expect to be taken care of. You could easily be overlooked in the competitive world of science.
- **Probing:** Ask tough questions. Find out about the experiences of others with this potential mentor.
- **Respect:** Be polite. Make and keep appointments. Stay focused. Don't overstay your welcome.
- **Gratitude:** Everyone likes to be thanked.
- **Reciprocation:** Repay your mentor indirectly by helping others.
- **Humility:** Be willing to accept critical feedback so that you are open to learning new ways of thinking about and doing science.

Traits of a good mentor

- **Accessibility:** An open door and an approachable attitude.
- **Empathy:** Personal insight into what the trainee is experiencing.
- **Open mindedness:** Respect for each trainee's individuality and for working styles

and career goals that may be different from those of the mentor.

- **Consistency:** Acting on your stated principles on a regular basis.
- **Patience:** Awareness that people make mistakes and that each person matures at his or her own rate.
- **Honesty:** Ability to communicate the hard truths about the trainee's chances of success.
- **Savviness:** Attention to the pragmatic aspects of career development.
- **Trust:** As a mentor you are privy to considerable information about your trainee, including accomplishments, failures, and possibly even personal information. Information should be treated as confidential so your trainees feel they can trust you and share their ideas and problems with you.

Resources:

*HHMI: Making the Right Moves: A Practical Guide to Scientific Management for Postdocs and New Faculty*

Consider what level of the following you are already proficient in and where you need training

- **Intellectual issues:** comprehension and learning to ask questions
- **Technical issues:** experimental design, precision, and accuracy
- **Personal growth issues:** developing confidence, creativity, and independence
- **Interpersonal issues:** dealing with students of diverse experiences and backgrounds, motivation, honesty between mentor and student, scientific integrity, and discrimination

### **Things to think about in a mentor:**

Funding

Research project (ability to develop independence/take with you)

How are projects developed/shared within lab

Direct contact

Number of others in the lab

Previous record of success

Preparation for career

Ability to travel to conferences

Ability to pursue scientific activities outside of research

Hands on vs hands off

Personality (do you get along with them?)

How does your individual personality affect this?

How casual should your relationship be?

Obtaining a mentor outside of your PI or lab

Have a way to follow progress: weekly meetings or reports, filling in a paper outline

How are papers/grants/perspectives written in lab?

Gender/culture/language issues with mentor? (and lab members)

Risks/benefits of young vs older mentor

Require specific times in lab? When do others in lab work?

Funding to go to conferences/courses

How are lab meetings run?

Availability/schedule flexibility

Other responsibilities (chair)

Average time to graduate

Lab atmosphere/lab outings? Faculty/students organize

Lab organization (databases, etc)

Interaction between people in the lab