

Guidelines for an Effective Mentorship

The Making of a Mentor



Inside Front Cover

The Making Of A Mentor

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Introduction

Mentor programs in the dental profession are an integral part of the professional continuum. Mentor relationships provide a structure for gathering opinions, providing guidance and support, obtaining answers to questions and strengthening the professional bonds.

According to a recent American Dental Association survey, over 80% of dental students have expressed a need for mentor programs at the state or local level. And we are ready to answer this call to action. With the support from dedicated dentists we can provide these students – the future of the dental profession – with the guidance and direction they need and want.

This manual will help you with your mentoring responsibilities – it provides ideas, guidelines and helpful hints. However, a mentoring relationship is one which is personal and dynamic – what works for one may not work for another. It's important to keep an open mind and be committed – you are the counselor, the teacher, the one to set the precedent. As long as the relationship is positive, nurturing and based on trust – it will be an extremely worthwhile venture for both you and the mentee.

ADA past-president Dr. Eugene Truono (1990) said it best...

“Mentors represent the passing of the baton. The role of the mentor is complex. It involves teaching, providing a model, serving as a listener and a sounding board, and acting as a cheerleader now and then. Above all, it means being a friend.”

— *Dr. Eugene Truono*
ADA past-president

Mentor Responsibilities

The most important items to remember as you initiate the mentor relationship are:

1. You are the mentor – the one to set the precedent.
2. It's OK not to know all the answers – most of the exchange between you and the mentee will be personal and subjective anyway.
3. Have fun! This experience should not only be enlightening – it should be enjoyable for both you and the mentee.

The First Meeting

Below are some general responsibilities to help you get started:

1. Make the first contact with the mentee, either by phone call (preferably), e-mail, or letter.
2. Schedule your first meeting. Consider a lunch or dinner.
3. Discuss goals and expectations from this mentor relationship.
4. Review activities you can explore together. Consider not only dental society events, but also dental school events such as ones sponsored by the American Student Dental Association (ASDA).
5. Let the mentee know that your door is open to them – you're excited for this experience and want to help them however you can.
6. Schedule a future time to meet – perhaps a dental meeting or a tour of your dental office. Bring along the dental society calendar and discuss meetings the mentee would like to attend or should attend.

After the First Meeting

You and the mentee should dictate how the relationship progresses. It can be as formal or informal as you like. Remember, you are the mentor and should be the one initiating most of the contact. If you don't have scheduled meetings with your mentee and haven't heard from him/her in a while – call and say hi – let the mentee know you care and are thinking about him/her. Included on page seven are some activities you should consider involving your mentee and some other items to consider as your relationship builds include:

1. Mentors should do more than suggest attendance at meetings or events, they should help the mentee understand why it is important for him or her to attend.
2. If you invite the mentee to a dental meeting, spend time with the mentee and facilitate introductions to others.
3. Share your experiences without telling mentees what to do or what not to do. Mentors are mentors, not parents!

Keep in mind that not all matches are “meant to be.” If you should find that your relationship with your student/recent graduate doesn't seem to be working you or the mentee are encouraged to contact the program coordinator and request a different match.

Activities

Below are some ideas to help you initiate and strengthen your relationship with your dental student/recent graduate. If you have an idea that doesn't appear below and has been successful, please share it with the Mentor Program Coordinator so others can use it.

- Invite the mentee to a luncheon or dinner to get acquainted.
- Invite the mentee to your dental office to see you and your staff in action. Perhaps they could spend some time with different staffers. Be sure to set some time aside at the end of the day for questions.
- Invite the mentee to a monthly dental meeting as your guest. Be sure to introduce him/her to other colleagues.
- Invite the mentee to an activity that isn't dental related such as golfing, shopping, theatre or sporting event.
- Sponsor the mentee for your society's annual dental meeting. Review the program with him/her and discuss continuing education classes, social events, etc.
- If your mentee wishes to specialize and you are a general dentist or other specialist, try to schedule a meeting with a colleague in that specialty as a Q&A session.
- Bring your mentee to lunch/dinner before the boards to show support.
- Think about offering your mentee a part-time non-clinical position in your office, if you need an extra hand.
- Commemorate something special in the mentee's life (i.e. birthday, birth of a baby, graduation, etc.).
- Submit photos and information about your outing to the Mentor Program Coordinator so you and your mentee could be published in a dental society newsletter.
- Participate in a dental school activity with the student, such as one sponsored by ASDA.

2005 Dental Student Survey Responses

The ADA conducted a survey of dental students in 2005. Students were asked to comment on what they would like to learn about dentistry that they don't believe they will learn in dental school. Of the 2,217 respondents (representing all 56 dental schools), about 1,800 students wrote comments. The majority commented that they wanted to learn more about the business side of running a dental practice, and many were very specific about what they would like to know. Below are just a handful of the responses for your information to help you as you prepare for your initial meeting with your mentee.

- *Paperless charting systems and patient management.*

- *I would like to learn about the business side of buying into a partnership and/or entering an associateship, as well as learn about pros and cons of owning non-dental related equity such as the property and building in which I would be practicing. I would also like to know salaries, fees, and demographics of certain areas where I will consider practicing.*

- *I wish we learned more about the business aspect of dentistry. I am not talking about how to manage hygienists or assistants. I would like to know more about the accounting aspect. How does insurance work? How do you decide on prices? What are some ways to make the most of your money?*

- *I need to learn how a practice is run. I HAVE NO IDEA. I, along with at least half my class, have no connection to dentistry besides our dental school education, which is in no way preparatory for practice management. I need to not die of a heart attack when I find out what actually goes into the daily practice at a real dental office. Our dental clinic offers no options for externship or learning about these things. The prospect of not learning these things in dental school is very disappointing and upsetting.*

- *Setting up a practice, managing a practice, etc. Organizing free community dental clinics. What is organized dentistry doing about access to care issues?*

- *The LARGE variety of work options post graduation. I really don't think we get enough of our options presented in the dental school. It seems like you are either going into general practice or you specialize – what are the other options (i.e., special needs patients, sports dentistry, etc.)?*

- *I think most of our management classes focused on associateships and owning a practice, but I barely learned about community health clinics or public health facilities. I think it would help if schools would talk about all the options there are in dentistry. Whether that is forensics, working in CHCs or state prisons, or whatever else there might be outside of owning your own practice or working with someone as a partner or associate. My practice management was informative, but it was very unmotivating to me because I currently have no desire to do private practice but all they taught was under the pretense that we were all going to go private.*

Top Ten Practice Questions & Answers

To help you prepare for meetings with your mentee, below are some questions which are often raised by dental students/recent graduates. These questions and answers are very general – it's just to give you some background. Your answers may differ greatly; the important thing is to draw from your own personal experiences. It is also important to note that in all these areas you need to be mindful of applicable laws, including antitrust laws, which restrict the sharing of certain information, such as fee data.

10. How do you get patients?

There are a variety of ways to establish or increase your patient base. If you are an associate or an employee, some patients will be from the practice. Managed care networks may refer patients if you become a provider for their plan. Also, many local or state dental societies provide a Patient Referral Service, and you should contact your state or local dental society for information.

Many new dentists use a variety of marketing techniques to attract patients. The ADA Catalog offers several resources for practice marketing, such as *The Power of Internal Marketing: The Key to Dental Practice Success*. For more information, call the ADA Catalog at (800) 947-4746 or visit www.adacatalog.org. Additionally, the ADA Council on Dental Practice offers several marketing resources, to inquire, call (800) 621-8099, ext. 2895 or visit www.ada.org for a listing and order form.

Patients are often referred to dentists by word of mouth, and therefore, visibility in your community – such as support of National Children's Dental Health Month activities in a local school – will help establish your presence in the community as well.

9. What kinds of reimbursement programs do you participate in and how do they work?

Not all dentists accept dental insurance reimbursement, as some are strictly fee-for service practices. For others, there are a variety of insurance reimbursement plans from which to choose: PPO, HMO, direct reimbursement, etc. Deciding on reimbursement methods that work for your practice as well as your patients is a personal decision that may take some investigation on your part.

The ADA Council on Dental Benefit Programs offers a variety of resources free to members to assist dentists in making these decisions. For more information, contact the ADA Council on Dental Benefit Programs at (800) 621-8099, ext. 2746.

For dentists who are considering contractual agreements with third party dental benefit organizations and dental management service organizations, the ADA provides a Contact Analysis Service. An ADA staff attorney will review a contract for an individual dentist at no charge if it is submitted for review through the state dental society. Also available through your state dental society is *What Every Dentist Should Know Before Signing a Dental Provider Contract*. Contact your state dental society or visit the members only section of ADA.org.

8. How did you choose this location to practice?

For many of us, deciding where to practice centered around personal or family concerns, i.e. “I wanted to practice in my hometown,” “My wife’s job is here” or “I wanted to stay close to my family.” Other personal or financial preferences come into play, such as rural vs. urban settings. If you wish to find out the specific economics of a particular area, the ADA Survey Center provides State & County Demographic Reports. The reports are customized to your specific locality, including population, how many dentists practice there, and other geographic and economic factors. To order, call the ADA Catalog at 800-947-4746 or purchase them online at www.adacatalog.org.

7. How many hours do you practice in a week?

The answer to this will vary, and feel free to tell your mentee how many hours per week you spend in your practice. According to the *2004 Survey of Dental Practice*, the average dentist works 32 hours or more per week. It is important to balance your answer with a realistic frame of reference for a dental student. An established dentist with a thriving practice may see over 30 patients in a day. However, a recently graduated dentist may see 10-12 patients in a day.

For more information about dentists’ practice patterns, visit www.adacatalog.org for the latest edition of *The Survey of Dental Practice*.

6. What is the role of your hygienist/assistant?

Aside from the clinical functions and role of the dental hygienists and assistants in an office, you should be able to communicate more specific information such as how much time that they will spend with a patient and what procedures they will be expected to perform.

The ADA Council on Dental Practice offers reference guides to help dentists address staffing issues, including *Smart Hiring: A Guide for the Dental Office* and the *Employee Office Manual: A Guide for the Dental Office*. Also available as part of the ADA’s training series is *Basic Training II: For New Clinical Personnel*. This resource, available as a manual or a CD-ROM, provides your staff with the tools necessary to make a difference in today’s rapidly advancing dental profession. All these titles are available through the ADA Catalog www.adacatalog.org.

5. How do you balance your personal and professional life?

According to the 1995 Survey of Dentists, 81.6% of female dentists and 78.8% of male dentists rated balancing work and family obligations as “very important.” According to *The 2002 Survey of New Dentist Financial Issues* of those dentists who work part-time, 46.2% do so to balance work and family. You should feel comfortable sharing your own personal experience. Recognize that there may be differences between your personal situation and what the mentee is experiencing. About a third of dental students today are women, and male dental students are likely to be in a two-career relationship. Although you cannot make assumptions about any particular person’s situation, it is true that the survey above showed that women spend more time on housework each week than men do (14 hours/week for women vs. four/week for men). In addition, women are much more likely to consider part-time practice during the time of life that their children are small. Men work part-time, too, but tend to do so later in life.

A discussion of the roles that family, friends, church, community organizations, organized dentistry and more play in your life – and how you manage these competing priorities – will be helpful to your mentee as he or she plans for the future.

4. What advice can you give me?

This is a broad question. A good way to approach it is to ask yourself the following questions and decide what you would like to share with a new practitioner.

- Identify five things that you didn't know you would have to deal with, and explain how you handled it.
- Identify what you would do differently if you had your first years out of dental school to do over again. (Don't be afraid to discuss your mistakes. With any luck, you learned from them, and sharing them will be a learning experience for your mentee, too.)
- Point out the successes you've had such as expanding your patient base, financial achievements, marketing successes and/or community service activities that have enriched your practice.
- Did you yourself have a mentor? Did he or she impart a practice philosophy, a "Golden Rule," or a guiding value or axiom that influenced you? What was it and why did it influence you?
- What have you learned from your colleagues along the way? (Don't be afraid to stress the camaraderie of the dental profession and how your involvement in organized dentistry helped you professionally.)

3. I'm worried about repaying my student debt. What kind of income did you make just starting out, and what is your current income?

Not everyone will be comfortable answering this question, and you don't have to. If you feel comfortable, tell. Either way, you may wish to provide average dental income information.

The *2004 Survey of Dental Practice* reports that the average net income for private practice independent dentists (general dentists and specialists) in these stages of their practice as:

- Under 5 years out of dental school is \$129,710
- 5-9 years out of dental school is \$190,140
- 10-14 years out is \$212,860
- 15-19 years out is \$208,930
- 20-24 years out is \$221,040
- 25-29 years out is \$205,440

Make sure that the information you provide is an appropriate and realistic frame of reference for a new dentist. Maybe you grossed \$100,000 within two years of opening a practice, but not everyone will earn that type of income. The *2002 Survey of New Dentist Financial Issues* breaks down income for owner and non-owner dentist by year of graduation. Owner dentists who graduated between 1999 and 2001 earned an average of \$142,461; while non-owner dentists who graduated during those same years earned an average of \$96,060. For more information about dentists' income, contact the ADA Survey Center at (800) 621-8099, ext. 2568 or visit www.adacatalog.org for a comprehensive listing of surveys.

Student debt is an issue the ADA has focused on greatly in recent years. A fact sheet on student debt appears at the end of this section.

2. What is the cost of establishing or acquiring a practice?

This question will also vary, based on factors such as practice valuation, market price, type of practice, location of practice, type of equipment and many others. If you feel comfortable sharing your experience, do so. The *1998 Survey of New Dentists on the Impact of Student Debt* showed that recent graduates who purchased or started their own practices paid an average of \$174,192 to do so; half the dentists spent \$150,000 or less and the highest reported figure was \$850,000.

You may inform your mentee of ADA resources for determining practice price and value, such as *Practice Options for the New Dentist: A How-to Guide*, *Associateships: A Guide for Owners and Prospective Associates*, *Starting Your Dental Practice: A Complete Guide*, and *Valuing a Practice: A Guide for Dentists*. These are available through the ADA Catalog. These resources are developed by the ADA Council on Dental Practice, which offers additional practice cost resources as well.

1. What is your practice setting and why did you choose it?

For some people, their current practice setting is exactly how they had planned it, and for others it developed over a series of career choices that they made when opportunities were presented. According to the *2004 Survey of Dental Graduates*, 72.9% of 2003 dental graduates worked as non-owner dentists, while only 18.4% owned their own practice. Career choices vary for everyone – especially considering the debt load recent graduates have to manage. Even apart from financial constraints, choice change – one dentist planned to take over her father’s dental practice after she finished dental school, but he died before she graduated and her plans changed drastically. Another dentist planned to work as associate for five years until a solo private practice opportunity came his way, and he’s making that career move one year earlier than he had expected. Still another dentist worked in the Federal Dental Services for several years, completed specialty training, worked as an associate for two years, then eventually became part owner of the practice with his partner.

Some questions for you to consider:

- Did you have your own personal business plan?
- What career decisions did you make about your practice that established where you are today?
- Did you plan it this way, or were your decisions driven by life choices or career opportunities?
- Do you continue to have aspirations for a new direction in your practice, and what is the driving force?
- Are you completely satisfied with your current practice setting, and why do you not wish to change it?

ADA.org FAQ

In addition to the Top Ten Practice Questions, below are FAQ as posted on the student page of ADA.org. This information is to help better acquaint you with your audience and their top concerns throughout dental school.

How can I find an area to practice that needs dentists?

The ADA Survey Center demographic reports have information at the state- and county-level including dentists segmented by age, gender, type of practice and specialty. The reports also include information on the general population's age, race, household income, education and occupation. To order, contact the ADA Catalog at 800-947-4746 or visit www.adacatalog.org.

How can I find a practice for sale?

The ADA Classifieds section of ADA.org highlights various resources to help you locate a practice for sale. In addition, your local or state dental society may also have a listing.

How can I find an associateship position?

The ADA Classifieds section of ADA.org highlights various resources to help you locate available associateship positions. In addition, your local or state dental society may also have a listing.

What is a fair associateship contract?

Information on your contractual considerations as a soon-to-be associate are highlighted in the ADA Practice Management Series publication *Associates: A Guide for Owners and Prospective Associates*. This publication can be ordered by calling the ADA Catalog at 800-947-4746 or visit www.adacatalog.org. The ADA InfoPak on Associateships also offers a general overview of associateships visit www.ada.org/goto/student for a link to ADA InfoPaks.

What alternatives to private practice are available to me?

The ADA InfoPak on Careers in Dentistry provides an overview of the various options dentists can consider other than a traditional practice setting.

What can I do to prepare for the clinical licensure exam?

Dental Boards and Licensure Information for the New Graduate highlights different aspects of the licensure process including exam requirements, costs and locations for the exams, as well as a checklist to assist you in preparing for the exam. This publication is available online by visiting www.ada.org/goto/student.

What should I do if I fail the licensing examination?

Dental Boards and Licensure Information for the New Graduate includes information for those students who fail the examination, including information about the appeals process, available remediation programs, testimonials from dentists who have failed and interim options for the dentists waiting to retake the exam. The publication also outlines additional support resources and clinical testing contact information.

How can I manage my student loan repayment?

Financial Planning Issues for Dental Students is a publication which provides background information on important financial issues regarding loans and debt. The publication includes a worksheet to help compute personal finances. In addition, the ADA InfoPak on Managing Finances includes information on financial resources to help secure and repay student loans. Both publications can be viewed by visiting www.ada.org/goto/student.

How do I decide if a particular managed care contract is right for me?

The ADA provides a wide array of resources to help dentists make informed choices in regards to marketplace change and managed care including the Contract Analysis Services. Most of these resources are available online to members.

Where can I get advice on clinical and practice matters?

In addition to the wealth of resources available online through the ADA Library, *JADA*, *ADA News*, and the Practice section, ADA.org also has a Discussion Forum where you can pose clinical and practice for advice and feedback from your member colleagues—whether it be a specialist from rural Montana whose been in practice for four years to a general dentist from Manhattan who has been in practice 22 years.

When does my ASDA/ADA membership expire?

ASDA/ADA membership expires December 31 of the current calendar year.

What are my ADA membership options after I graduate?

Do I qualify for the ADA reduced dues program?

The various categories of ADA membership are outlined on ADA.org at www.ada.org/goto/join. Most recent graduates do qualify for reduced dues as outlined on ADA.org.

How can I obtain an ADA membership application?

Your membership depends upon your status after graduation. Visit www.ada.org/goto/join for applications.

Contact Information:

E-mail the ADA Office of Student Affairs: studentaffairs@ada.org

E-mail the American Student Dental Association: asda@asdanet.org

Recent Graduate Financial Issues

Depending upon when you graduated and/or your circumstance you may or may not be personally affected by the high level of debt most new dentists have to manage after graduation. Since student indebtedness has become such a factor for the new dentist, we have included a financial section so that as a mentor you can have an understanding of the financial implications your mentee might be facing after graduation.

The debt level is astounding and it continues to escalate; and unfortunately, the amount of debt one carries may be directly tied to the flexibility in practice choices. According to the ADA's 1998 *Survey on the Impact of Student Debt*, over 63% of respondents indicated that their level of educational debt had an affect on their practice options. A majority of these stated that they couldn't start or purchase their own practice and had to pursue an associateship.

Since 1998, when the *Survey on the Impact of Student Debt* was last conducted, debt has increased substantially. According to the American Dental Education Association annual *Survey of Dental Student Financial Assistance*, students who graduated in 1996 had educational debt averaging \$75,748, by 2005, graduating seniors had an average student debt load of \$129,639. For the class of 2005, 93.1% took out loans to finance their dental education.

Increases in financial assistance result from the increasing price of dental education. Just between the school years of 2001-02 and 2003-04 overall tuition and fees increased 21.4%. However, the amount of financial assistance is more than tuition and fees as it also covers living expenses and the cost of books, supplies, materials, and instruments.

As a mentor, you need to be sensitive to your mentee's financial position. Although he/she may not yet completely understand their loan implications since repayment doesn't start until after graduation, it could be beneficial to discuss the high cost of a dental education and the responsibility needed to keep student loans in check by borrowing only what is actually needed. It's OK to let them know that the extra \$5,000 now could cost them over \$10,000 later. (The Rule of 72: 72 divided by the interest percentage is the number of years it takes to double the debt.) The ADA's *Financial Planning Issues for Dental Students* is a great resource for students to get a handle on their debt. It's available through their school's Financial Aid Office, via www.ada.org, or by calling the ADA Office of Student Affairs at 800-621-8099, ext. 7470.

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