

## Mentors yield big benefits

Whether or not you have years of practice and experience, there likely have been times over your professional career when you needed advice, someone to bounce an idea off, a friendly, encouraging voice.

A mentor, whether you're new to dentistry or mid-career, can fill that crucial need. And for those in full or late-career, serving as a mentor to younger dentists yields benefits to you both.

"You cannot possibly be all-knowing in every dental and business subject matter," [Donna Cassidy](#) declared in an article for *Modern Dentistry*. The answers, she said, are in a loyal support network and "a great mentor." With growing pressures in a dental practice – bills to pay, employees to hire and guide, skills to upgrade, economic strains – practitioners can't be expected to excel at every issue that crops up daily.

A mentor may have entered your life in tangential moments or more directly, say a teacher or faculty member from dental school. Either way, a mentor helps provide steadfast encouragement and confidence that in turn give you assurance and a sense of competence as you grow professionally.

And, according to Dr. Lois Zachary, author of several books on the value of mentoring, mentors are particularly valuable for women who work in fields dominated by men. Those mentors need not be women, she said, but should be "the right person to fit your needs, regardless of gender."

How do you approach someone to be a mentor?

"The trick is in developing that crucial relationship with someone you admire greatly," said Ms. Cassidy, who co-founded Research Triangle Dental in North Carolina. "Think about who you have admired lately: who has demonstrated the morals and values that you follow most closely, who shows leadership and development that you aspire to create? When someone comes to mind for you, gather your courage and ask them to mentor you. Most professionals will enjoy having an opportunity to give back to others and will be delighted to bring you under their wing of business advice."

Before approaching a potential mentor, Forbes, Inc. contributor Lisa Quast advised:

- **Clarify for yourself what kind of advice you're looking for** (advice on a workable social media campaign, guidance on buying a practice, switching specialties). Knowing your goals will help you find the right mentor:
- **Consider seeking mentors outside of your field.** Sometimes fresh eyes on a problem can provide true insight;
- **Ask to set up a meeting.** It's best to find a comfortable, neutral location where you can both speak in confidence;
- **Be clear and committed.** Be sure your mentor knows you are appreciative of their time and open to their advice.

Seasoned dentists have years of experience and advice to share, but they too can benefit by serving as a mentor.

"Mentoring shouldn't just be the result of a formal program; leaders should always be looking to grow," said Dr. Zachary. "Learning is the purpose, process, and product of mentoring."

A worthy mentor will want to share their knowledge freely, giving you a window into how their day-to-day experiences have turned out and what their choices have meant long-term. You have the invaluable opportunity to see and talk to someone in the shoes you want to walk in. It's an opportunity you'll want to maximize.

### CDS MENTOR PROGRAM

The Chicago Dental Society Mentor Program is a cooperative project in conjunction with the UIC College of Dentistry and the UIC College of Dentistry Alumni Association, Midwestern University Dental School and numerous professional dental organizations, including the Lincoln Dental Society and the Hispanic Dental Association. [Learn how you can participate](#) as a dental student or mentoring dentist.

The views expressed in this column are those of the writer and not necessarily the opinions of the Chicago Dental Society. CDS presents Front Desk, a column addressing problems dentists and staff members experience in the office. Front Desk is prepared by Stephanie Sisk, a freelance journalist. Suggestions? [Email suggestions](#) for topics to be covered to the Chicago Dental Society.  
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