



WHAT BEING A MENTOR CAN DO FOR YOU

By Amanda Koehler

You may get back even more than you give.

When entering your career, you were likely encouraged to find a mentor — someone who would help nurture you in your chosen field. But just as you were told that having a mentor is important, so is being a mentor. Seeking out a mentee is just as beneficial to your career and can help you excel. How so? Professionals in various healthcare careers told *ADVANCE* why being a successful mentor is so important.

A FRESH PAIR OF EYES

Telling your mentee about what you've learned thus far in your career — maybe a lesson you figured out the hard way, or a

clinical skill you want to share — is obviously beneficial for him or her. But a mentor can learn from a mentee, too.

“Acting as a mentor is actually an investment in one’s career,” explained Glen McDaniel, MS, MBA, MT, MLS, DLM, a healthcare executive and clinical lab scientist. For example, “a mentor faced with grooming and guiding another employee is often forced to revisit his own relationships with, and view of, the profession,” McDaniel continued. A mentee may ask a mentor questions such as, “Why did you choose this profession?,” “What value does my work bring to society and the public health?” and “What ethical principles guide our daily practice?”

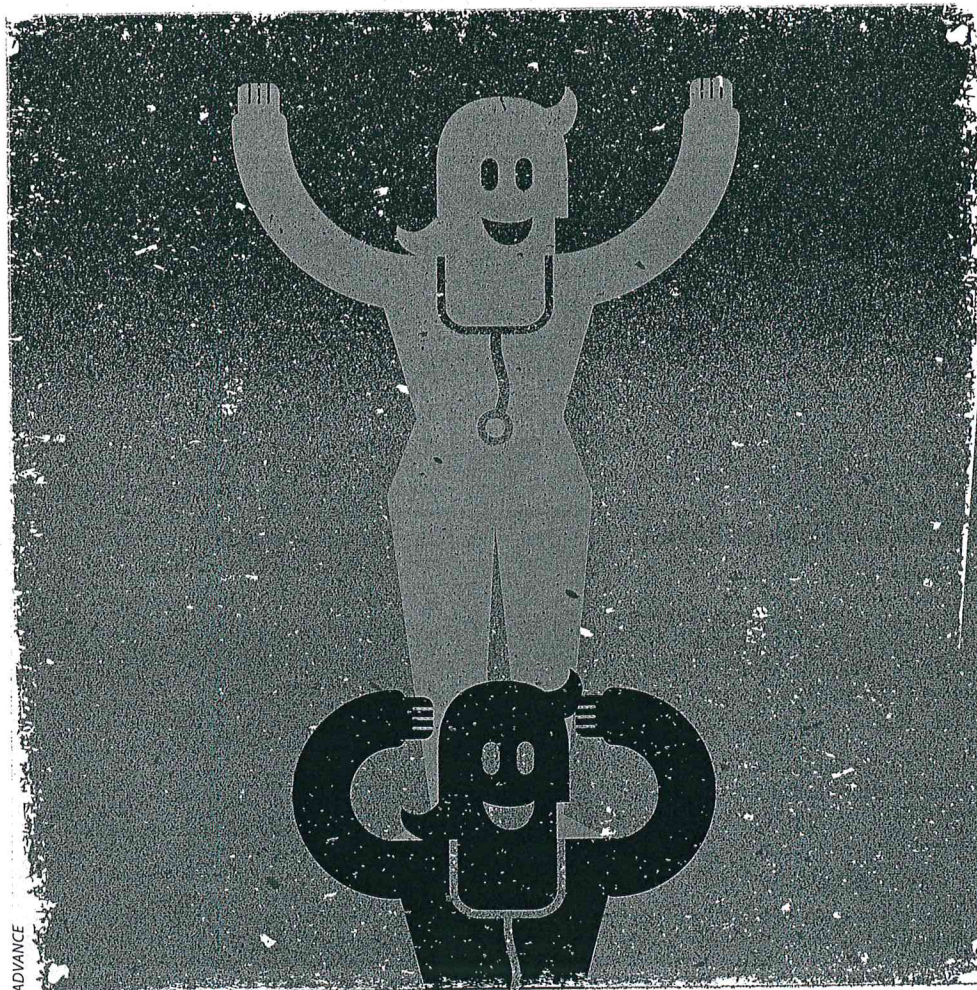
“These tenets are easy to forget over time, especially with stress and burnout,” McDaniel added. “There is nothing like a fresh, inquiring mind to provide introspection, focus and perspective.”

“I think any time that you can help someone, it is a good idea,” noted Michael Nula, MS, DPT, owner/physical therapist, Elite Physical Therapy Inc., Warwick, Providence, Coventry and East Greenwich, RI. “Participating in a mentor capacity allows you to be a leader, a shining example and an inspiration for others to follow, learn and grow from.”

Being a mentor can help you see your career through your mentee’s eyes as well. “I learn from the mentees, listening to their perceptions and ideas,” said Sandy Keefe, MSN, RN, healthcare manager and associate director of a nurse internship program at Via West Campus, Cupertino, Calif. “Sometimes a fresh pair of eyes can see things that more experienced nurses take for granted.”

In addition, becoming a mentor makes you more valuable to your organization, McDaniel noted. “It is one of those value-added duties that is not necessarily popular or compensated for,” he said. “But you at least get brownie points for taking on that responsibility and ➤

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will probably be rewarded with anything from a good evaluation to a promotion to selection for a plum assignment. It is also an achievement that can add pizzazz to an otherwise drab résumé.”

FINDING YOUR MENTEE

So you’ve decided you want to be a resource for the next generation of healthcare professionals. How do you go about finding a person to mentor? If your department has a formal mentor program or you know that your supervisor is looking for a professional to mentor a new employee, volunteer. But being a mentor can be informal, too. However, “I would suggest that informal mentorship arrangements be formalized to add structure and accountability, as well as to give the mentor the credit and recognition he or she deserves,” McDaniel told *ADVANCE*.

Whether formal or informal, finding time to sit down and talk with your mentee is crucial. A good mentor/mentee relationship is one that both has structure and allows for spontaneous learning experiences. In Nula’s physical therapy practice, newly hired physical therapists and administrative staff members meet with a mentor once a week for 30 to 45 minutes.

“In that time, they go through a variety of items as part of a routine, set regular goals and build upon them each week,” he said. “In addition to having this routine, there is a running agreement that if at any time the mentee has a question or the mentor wants to teach something, that is open and allowed. This further strengthens the relationship, comfort zone and

admiration between the mentor and mentee.”

But you don’t necessarily have to be face-to-face with another professional to be a mentor either. Scharmaine Lawson-Baker, DNP, FNP-BC, FAANP, president and CEO of Advanced Clinical Consultants, New Orleans, noted that having a professional page on Facebook is a way to offer advice and create a dialogue with students and new healthcare professionals.

READY TO MENTOR

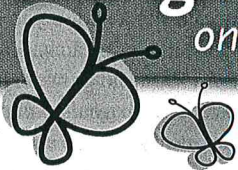
If you’re knowledgeable in your field, pleasant, available and willing to mentor, you’ve got the qualities that could make you a successful mentor, McDaniel notes. Not only can mentoring benefit you, the mentee and your organization, but it can impact your profession as a whole.

“Mentorship is an often-overlooked tool in succession planning. As your profession ages, it is important to pass on skills, knowledge, coping mechanisms and even history to new employees,” he stressed. In addition, McDaniel noted there is evidence that those who have been successfully mentored usually go on to mentor others.

“I believe mentors have a lot to offer if they are willing to take the time and make the commitment to encourage future healthcare professionals,” said Lawson-Baker. “It can be a very rewarding experience.”

Amanda Koehler is a freelance writer.

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