



Optimizing the mentee-mentorship relationship

4 April 2024

VERITY/Brigham Course in Rheumatology Clinical Research

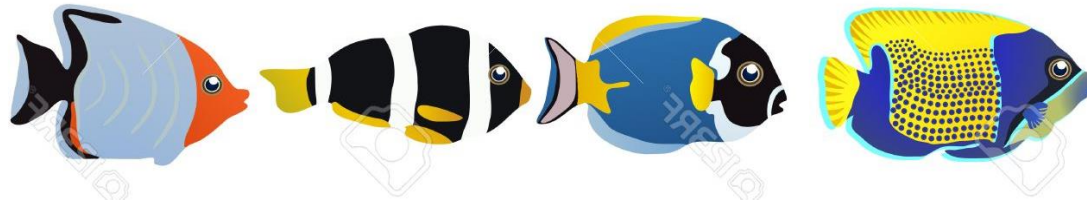
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We all need help!

- **beginners:** learn to swim in an academic sea
 - * *What do I want to do? Who do I want to be?*



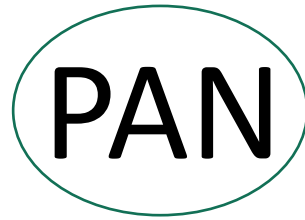
- **early career:** find opportunities, master key skills
- **mid career:** augment productivity, avoid pitfalls
- **senior:** maximize impact, secure legacy



Finding help is your responsibility!

- People LIKE to be asked for advice and help.
- The people whose help you most want are BUSY so *you* need to reach out.
- Cultivation of this network is the work of years – and is an active two-way exchange.

What does my network look like?



PAN

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1. I value their opinion
2. I trust that their advice reflects their best wishes for me

Mentors

*** These people take pleasure in my success!**

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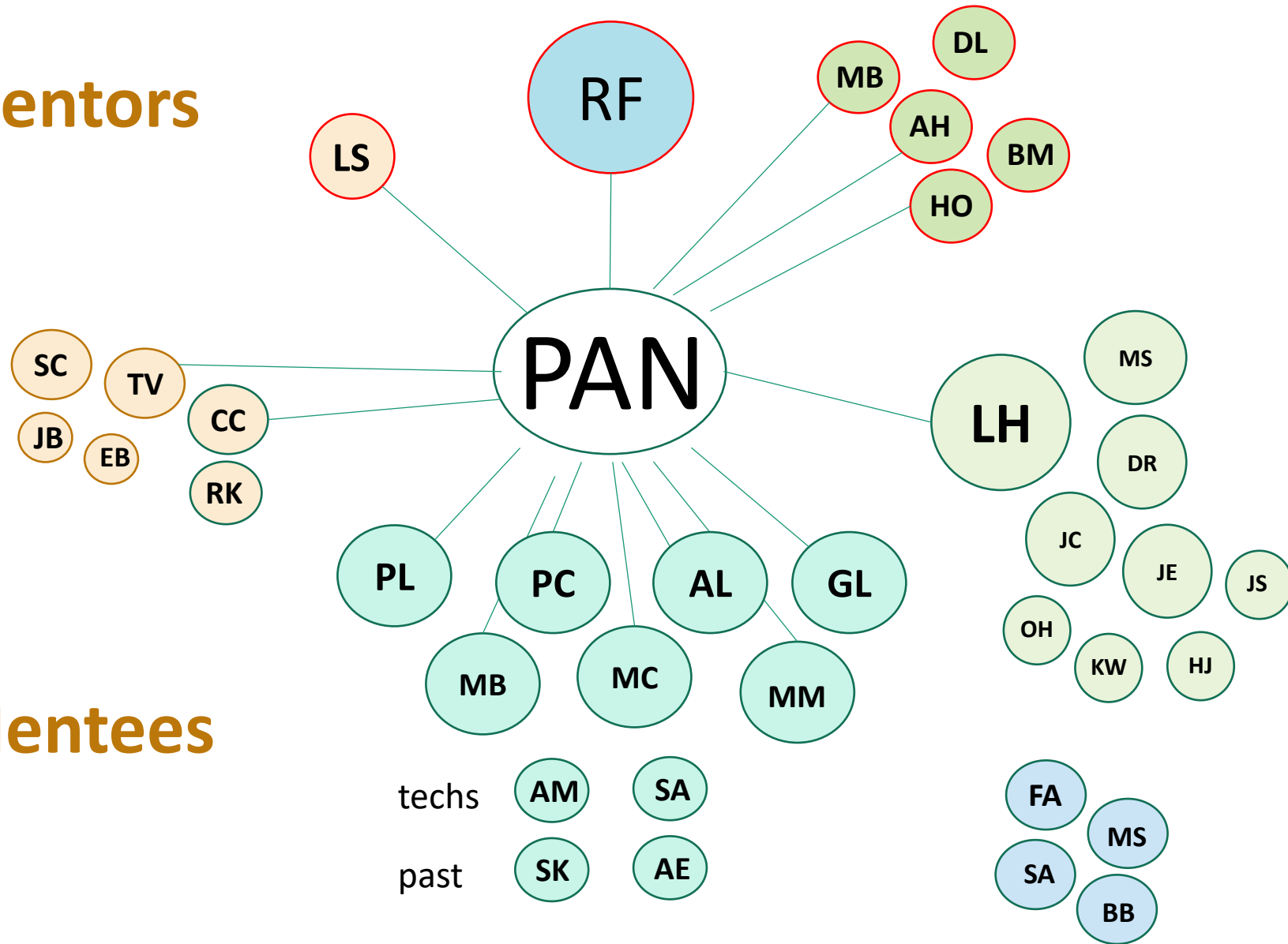
*** When these people succeed, it makes me happy!**

Mentees

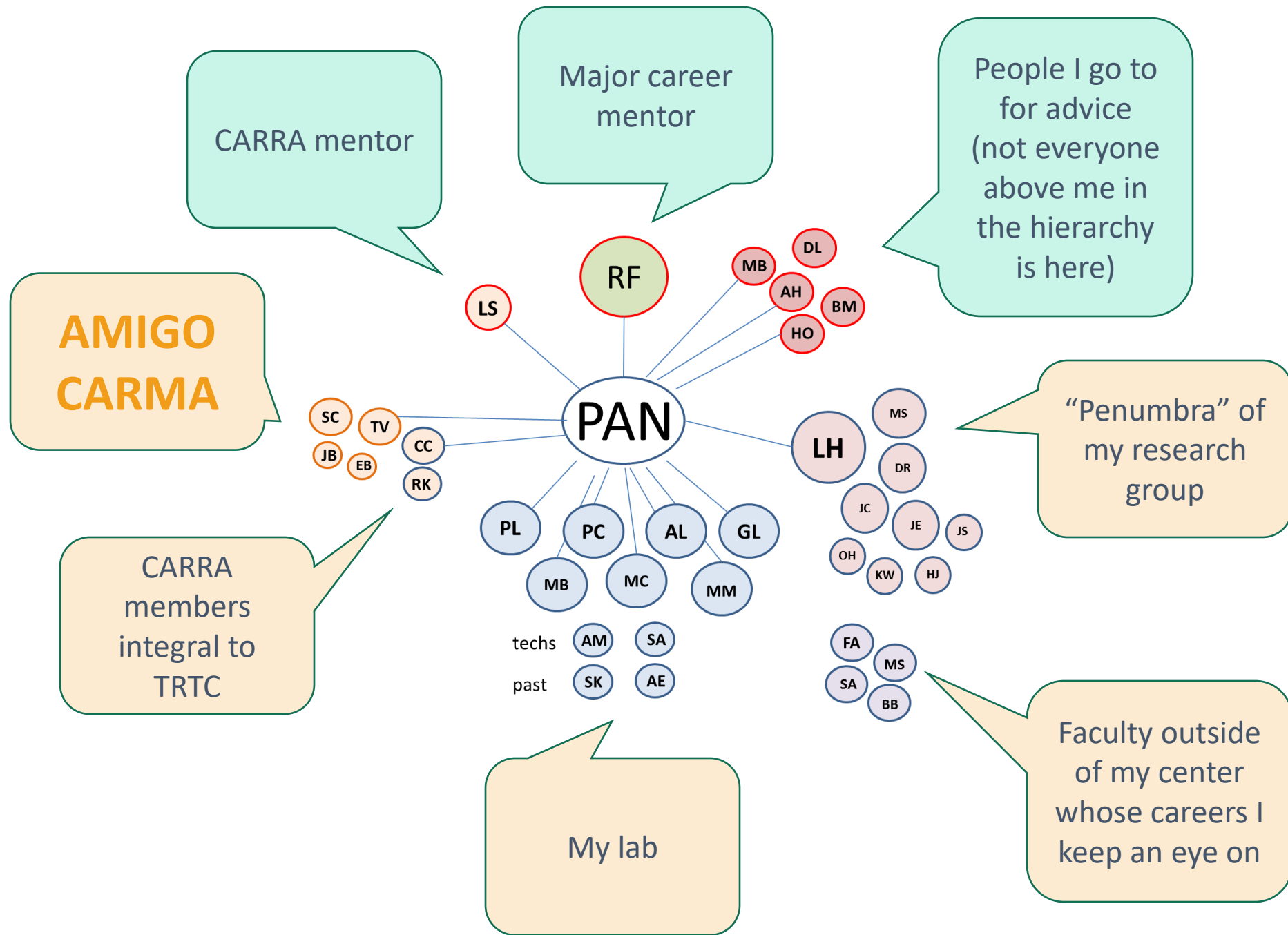
1. I have something useful to teach them
2. I believe they value my help
3. I trust that, in turn, they will value and protect my interests

What does my network look like?

Mentors



Mentees



So it's complicated....

Mentors

- Different career domains
- Different expertise
- Varying extent of personal investment in my success
- Some may be surprised to see themselves on the list (or not!)

Mentees

- My role varies widely – from very involved to very indirect
- Some may be surprised to see themselves on the list

...but really it's simple.

Mentees

- find and cultivate (many) people that you esteem and trust, and ask them for guidance

Mentors

- ...the secret of the care of the **mentee** is in caring for the **mentee**
(modified from Dr. Francis Peabody 1927)

Mentors

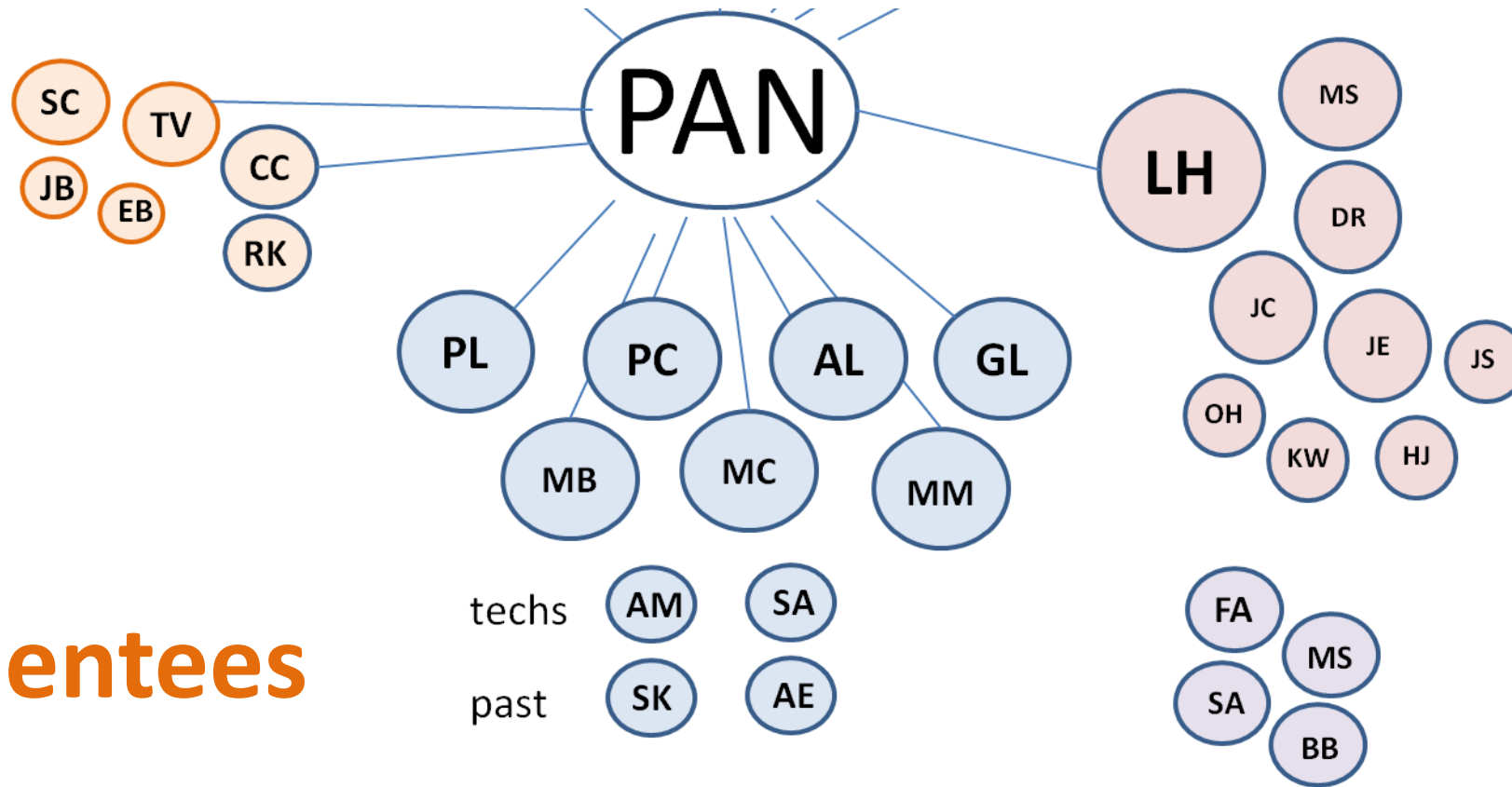
PAN

Mentees

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Mentees have obligations too

- **Mentoring takes effort. How can you pay back?**
 - Gratitude – do not take mentoring for granted
 - Public acknowledgement (mentor has a career too – mention in talks, nominate for talks/awards, etc.)
 - Do good work with/for your mentor, as appropriate
 - Respect your mentor's time – limit what you ask.
 - Keep the faith! Honor the trust of the relationship.



Mentees

*** When these people succeed, it makes me happy!**

I can also count on their help, to a greater or lesser degree

Resources for Early Investigators

- ACR Rheumatology Research Workshop (**RRW**)
- **Meet the Funders** session at ACR Annual Meeting/Convergence
- VERITY: longitudinal mentorship program after course
- AMIGO: mentorship program for pediatric rheumatology
- CARMA: mentorship program for adult rheumatology
- Joint Biology Consortium: mentorship program for early translational investigators
- CATCH: mentorship program for URiM
- United States Bone and Joint Institute (USBJI): grant writing program
- ACR/EULAR exchange program

Successful Mentee-Mentor Dyads



Unsuccessful Mentee-Mentor Dyads



Disclaimers

- Each mentee-mentor dyad dynamic is unique
- This lecture focuses on the “trainee-research supervisor” relationship
 - Other types of mentorship are also important
 - Peer
 - Sponsor
 - Clinical
 - Career
 - Supporting
 - Distant
 - Methods/niche
- Personality traits are hard/sometimes impossible to change
 - States may vary based on the project or other staff involved
- This lecture mainly focuses on the Mentee; the Mentor may also have issues!

Mentee Missteps

Tales From the Academic Trenches

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Mentorship takes many forms, from personal and professional counseling to clinical and research guidance. The wisdom and guidance of experienced mentors not only help mentees ascend the academic ladder, but may also prevent burnout.¹ Given the importance of this relationship, it is imperative that mentees put their “best foot forward.” Unfortunately, young physicians are rarely taught what is expected of them as mentees, and mentors vary in discussing “menteeship” with protégés.

Many mentees overlook the fact that they are still learning. Instead, they may feel pressure to appear immediately successful. This desire to please, admixed with paroxysmal bouts of self-doubt, may work against trainees. Rather than appear flawed—or risk displeasing mentors—a mentee may unintentionally “misstep.” These missteps could have devastating consequences, including rejection by a mentor and career implosion.

Mentee missteps are thus paths by which mentees might undermine their careers. We outline six such missteps, using colloquial names to portray extreme examples of what are otherwise common, intermittent

may be cultivated by mentors that “malpractice”—especially those who are possessive or exploitative.²

The Vampire

The Vampire drains the lifeblood of his or her mentor. Vampires are typified by countless emails, text messages, phone calls, and meeting requests. Although these mentees are often intelligent, they are paralyzed by decision making and rely on mentors for validation. Regardless of the mentor’s generosity, the Vampire demands more, eventually forcing the mentor to sever the connection.

The Lone Wolf

The Lone Wolf appears to have no need for a mentor. This type of trainee has often succeeded previously sans assistance and boldly carries forth this behavior. Although Lone Wolves may appear stubborn or confident, internally they fear asking for help lest they appear weak or foolish. This fear becomes their undoing when a preventable but highly embarrassing error occurs due to lack of guidance.

Don't #1: "The Overcommmitter"



- Conflict averse
- Says “yes” to anyone and everything regardless of relevance, benefit, or workload
- Mentor is often surprised to learn secondhand about numerous “side projects” with clinicians/other faculty while his/her project stagnates
 - Mentor may be confused about his/her role on the mentorship team

Don't #1: "The Overcommitter"

- Toxicities

- Unfinished tasks
- Reputation as inefficient/overextended
- Disillusionment/burnout

- Long-term

- Finished projects have no common thread, more non-original than original publications
- Spread too thin to develop expertise in one area
- May claim multiple Mentors when none see the Overcommitter as truly their Mentee

Do #1: “The Maybe Mentee”

- “Maybe” should be your first response!
- Attempt to align yourself with a main research supervisor
 - Develop a 1:1 relationship where the Mentor provides guidance on all/most projects or signs off on “side projects”
 - No ambiguity about who Mentee-Mentor on either end
 - Consider mentorship contract to solidify the relationship
- Caution in committing to non-original projects
 - Reviews
 - Case reports/Case series

Don't #2: "The Ghost"



- Out of sight, out of mind; goal is to avoid confrontation and bad news
 - Afraid to bother a busy Mentor by scheduling a meeting or sending a clarifying email
- Hopes Mentor does not notice mistakes or lack of productivity
- May prioritize clinical care over research
 - Shows up late most meetings due to conference, clinic, rounds, or classes
 - Simple tasks are completed just prior to the next meeting
- Many meetings discuss the same issues/tasks over and over ("Groundhog Day")

- Brief periods of productivity provide hope, followed by months of stagnation
 - Clinical, life factors, and school nearly always push research aside
- Often were procrastinators in school; graduated because tests were "hard deadlines" and rounds in the hospital cannot be rescheduled
- May not actually like research/project but feels compelled to do it
- Overcommitters may become Ghosts once enough projects are collected

Don't #2: "The Ghost"

- Toxicities

- Stagnation
- Mistrust
- Contempt
- Reputation for being late

- Long-term

- Missed deadlines for projects
- Lack of publications
- Projects that linger for months or years
- Accusations of laziness and lack of desire

Do #2: “The Living Mentee”

- No brainers
 - Make an agenda for each meeting
 - Bring a notebook and take notes at meetings!
 - Read (and respond) to your emails!
 - Do what you say you will do on time!
 - Show up to meetings and on time! Do not text an hour before the meeting to cancel
 - Send a summary and action items list at the end of each meeting
 - What you intend to do and the timeline for completion

Do #2: “The Living Mentee”

- Mistakes are bound to happen- own up and learn from them
 - Admit when you did not follow through and work to not make it a habit
- Make research a priority if this is the career you truly want
 - Clinical and life emergencies happen but should be the exception, not the rule
 - Skip a conference or rearrange clinic/rounds if that is the only time your Mentor can meet
 - Coursework should help, not hinder, your research
- Self-motivation and organization are essential to long-term, consistent success
- The Mentor is very busy, but regular meetings and (appropriate) emails can help both of you forge ahead- Mentors want to put in this type of work
- **Manage the mentor**
 - Mentors love seeing that a project is progressing through the Mentee’s leadership
 - Summarize meetings and send action items: show that you care and are engaged
- Admit to yourself if research is not for you- early recognition is better for all involved

Don't #3: "The Doormat"

- Does most of the work, but gets almost none of the glory
- Glorified/unpaid research assistant/technician
- Scutwork for the mentor with little personal incentive
 - "First-author" on a review not aligned with your research
 - Recruiting in clinic, mailing materials, phone calls and study visits for a trial that is not yours
 - Clinician collecting blood samples for basic scientists
 - Slides for presentations
 - Literature reviews for projects that aren't yours
 - Lab assays for a project you are not otherwise involved in
 - Medical record reviews for a project already ongoing by another fellow
 - Writing a manuscript for the first-author who cannot speak English
 - Writing IRBs for projects that are not yours



Don't #3: "The Doormat"

- Toxicities
 - Disdain
 - Languish
 - Servitude
 - Contempt from the mentee
- Long-term
 - Few or no first-author original research
 - Lack of opportunity to develop expertise
 - Often does not remain in research

Do #3: “The Realistic Mentee”

- Doormats may suffer from Mentor malpractice
- Do not pick a Mentor just because they are “cool”, productive, well respected, or you were told to work with them
 - Examine your Mentor’s past Mentees:
 - Were they first-author on original papers?
 - Did they receive grants, particularly K awards?
 - Are they in academia as an investigator? Did they join the faculty?
 - Are they still performing scutwork?
- Examine your own Mentee-Mentor relationship
 - Clearly delineate your own original research project
 - The Mentor may think the Doormat is satisfied
 - Do not let a relationship without potential for career advancement linger
- Scutwork is a rite of passage in research but should not be the focus of your status as a trainee

Don't #4: "The Vampire"

- Drains the lifeblood from his/her Mentor
- Paralyzed by decision making
- Over-intrusive/Catastrophizing:
 - **Meeting requests**
 - Emails
 - Texts
 - Phone calls
- Unreasonable expectations for edits of abstracts/papers/grants
 - Underdeveloped drafts with edits expected the next day
 - Applies for numerous conferences/grants, without giving the Mentor advanced notice
 - May also Vampire support staff (research assistants/technicians, programmers, etc.)
 - May not respect or understand the research hierarchy



Don't #4: "The Vampire"

- Toxicities

- Contempt
- Anger
- Ghosting from Mentor

- Long-term

- Mentors may gradually/abruptly sever the relationship
- Lack of productivity
- Never develops independence

Do #4: “The Respectful Mentee”

- Respect your Mentor’s time and expertise
 - Appropriate emails (concise, bullet points, clear questions)
 - Set reasonable timelines from meeting to meeting
 - Text/calls are usually inappropriate (unless that is the Mentor’s style)
 - Provide enough time for thoughtful edits of drafts (e.g., 2 weeks)
 - Discuss appropriateness of conferences, papers, and grants well before they are due (e.g., several months)
 - Do not expect your Mentor to do your work
- Work to develop confidence in making decisions and leading a project
 - The goal of being a trainee is to eventually gain independence
- Respect and learn from research staff

Don't #5: "The Lone Wolf"



- Appears confident but internally fears appearing incompetent
 - Appears to have no need for a Mentor; afraid to ask for help
 - Desperately wants to succeed as quickly as possible
 - May succumb to cutting corners or “fudging” results
- Acts superior to colleagues/does not work well in a team
 - May overstep authority with research staff or collaborators
- May portray research as the “easy life”
 - Somehow able to take vacations, not work on weekends, and leave at 4pm everyday

Don't #5: "The Lone Wolf"

- Toxicities

- Preventable but embarrassing errors
- Potential for fraudulent data collection/analysis/interpretation
- Tense relationships with research staff/colleagues

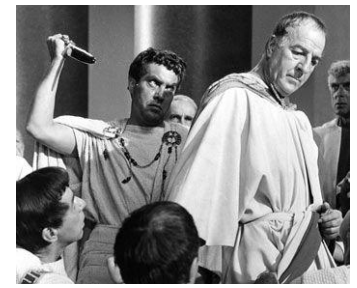
- Long-term

- May never have learned the basics
- Overpromises to collaborators or in grants
- Lack of replication of results
- Potential for retractions

Do #5: "The Wolfpack Mentee"

- Be humble!
 - You are not born knowing how to perform research
 - Ask for help; don't reinvent the wheel
- Research is a team sport
 - Physicians doing research usually know less than all research staff at first
 - Learn from everyone on the team
- Nothing is more important than research integrity and protection of subjects!!!





Don't #6: "The Backstabber"

- Initially accepts challenges, works hard, performs well, and produces
- Resents criticism and remembers every negative utterance
 - Disdains "Track Changes" because every draft is perfect
 - Does not understand the need to present Specific Aims to others
- May denigrate the Mentor behind his/her back ("splitting")
- Often abuses study staff or co-investigators behind the scenes
 - Delves out scutwork directly to research assistants, programmers, or co-fellows
- Every failure is someone else's fault; points fingers
- Prone to fraudulent research practices (cherrypicking results) to avoid appearing to fail

Don't #6: "The Backstabber"

- Toxicities

- Contempt from study staff
- Poor teamwork
- Unexpected drama
- Unable to process normal criticism/rejections/null findings

- Long-term

- Eventually burns bridges with staff and Mentor despite being productive
- Cherrypicks data so that no paper is null
- Lack of replication

Do #6: “The Lifelong Learner”

- Your Mentor has decades more experience than you; learn from him/her
- You are not expected to get things perfect the first time
- Respect everyone’s time, position, and point of view
- Criticism, rejection, and null findings are inevitable in research
- Crave constructive criticism to hone your craft

- If a first draft has no track changes, the editor was not reading it!
 - **Red flag for poor Mentorship**: Lack of any edits, only general platitudes
- Embrace and be realistic about the research process
 - Criticism throughout: study conception, writing grant, developing/enacting research measures, analyzing results, writing manuscript, co-authors, peer review

Thank you!

