

Benefits and Challenges of Mentoring in CSE and Beyond

Patricia K Baskin

Mentoring in CSE and Beyond: Personal Support in Professional Development—Patty Baskin, Leslie Neistadt, and Barbara Gastel have long been leaders for the CSE Mentorship program. Based on a session from the 2024 CSE Annual Meeting in Portland, they have developed a series of articles on mentorship. The other two articles are available here: <https://doi.org/10.36591/SE-4704-03>; <https://doi.org/10.36591/SE-4704-04>

A Personal Experience

I had been working about 6 months as managing editor of the *Neurology* journals at the American Academy of Neurology when my editor entered my office one afternoon. It's important to understand the stature of this editor—he had been director of medical development at a major medical center and later was appointed the CEO of the health system, working at a national level with government leaders on changing health care. On this day, he sat casually in the chair opposite me and offered some advice. First, he reassured me that I was fulfilling all my responsibilities as expected. Then he made some other observations: “Patty, I'd like you to think more like an executive—to challenge our Associate Editors and Editorial Board, to tell them when policies need to be updated and changed, to be confident and trust your own knowledge, and ‘throw your weight around.’” He urged me to network more with senior staff in the organization, invite them to lunch as equals to learn more about their responsibilities, and even to “misbehave” a bit, for example, cancel routine meetings as needed in order to prioritize my time and energy for what I judged as more important. This time spent by a very distinguished person for a conversation of less than an hour had a lasting influence on my career and affected my approach toward colleagues (whether high-ranking CEOs or CFOs, Editorial Board members, or staff). I realized later that this was a mentoring conversation, and this example shows how

mentoring need not be complicated or take much time and yet produce long-term effects.

Beyond Networking to Mentoring

CSE events are designed to expand our networks. They are where we develop knowledge and skills, increase our leadership abilities to apply when we go back to our home organizations, develop professionally, and become more effective leaders. Networking helps us function more effectively when interacting with colleagues on everyday tasks. We are constantly hearing at CSE meetings how **others** manage and thinking about tips we can take home for managing workflows and teams. When we come together at the meetings, we're also networking from a professional development standpoint; meetings are safe spaces for stepping up to make contacts with others for future referrals and information, along with advancing our own professional growth and our careers.

Development Through Mentoring

There is a real distinction between networking and mentoring. Networking helps us all be more effective in our positions, but mentoring goes beyond networking—it's outwardly directed—and great benefits exist for both the mentor and mentee. Networking helps with tactical advice, whereas mentoring provides guidance and role modeling. While networking, you usually make short connections, focused on specific topics. With mentoring, connections are usually longer lasting and frequently lead to growth for both mentor and mentee.

Mentors are often a resource for colleagues who wish to increase their job skills or develop professionally or just need direction or advice navigating situations in their workplaces or careers. Every situation differs, depending on the individuals involved. Sometimes mentors play the role of a teacher, providing a helping hand to build skills, maximize strengths, and mitigate weaknesses. As coaches, they enable mentees to learn from mistakes and achieve goals. They support mentees in making decisions and act as sounding boards, providing feedback, helping assess their ideas, and conveying confidence.

Benefits to Mentees and Mentors

Mentoring benefits both members of the dyad. Mentees, of course, benefit from the experience of the mentor. However,

Patricia K Baskin (<https://orcid.org/0000-0002-9850-4391>), is Past President, Council of Science Editors, and Deputy Chief, Publications, American Academy of Neurology.

<https://doi.org/10.36591/SE-4704-02>

CONTINUED

mentors can gain immense fulfillment from assisting the professional development of mentees, and mentoring helps mentors reaffirm their self-esteem and reassess their own development goals.

Both mentors and mentees also increase their professional skills: Mentors reflect and often enjoy a new sense of self-awareness, while mentees develop and apply the skills learned from their mentors. Both benefit from discovering fresh ideas, considering alternative ways of looking at projects, and potentially bringing more productivity or better communication to the workplace.

Challenges of Mentoring

Challenges of mentoring include time limitations, incompatible matches, and the perception that formal training is needed to be a mentor. Lack of time, usually from one member of the mentoring dyad, can cause mentorships to fail. In an arranged mentorship, both members need to be open to forming congenial relationships and freely exchanging information. Personality clashes or differences in approach sometimes arise; this has happened a few times in the CSE program, and we have paired the members with other partners. Most mentors who are already “trained” by their experience possess certain characteristics; desired talents of mentors include being trustworthy, supportive, knowledgeable, and mainly possessing good listening and communication skills.

Hybrid Mentorship

New challenges have arisen for hybrid workers; mentoring is critically needed for many doing remote work. With the lack of regular face-to-face conversations at work, people are concerned about being kept “in the loop” with team projects and the ability to build professional relationships, leading to advancement. The COVID-19 pandemic led to refinement of remote tools such as Zoom and Microsoft Teams, which facilitate e-mentoring; these tools can promote greater flexibility in scheduling and help enable geographically diverse pairings. They also can promote equity, as they often eliminate biases easily formed through in-person meetings. Being face-to-face in a square on the screen is usually more democratic and often more comfortable than meeting in an office or a conference room, where there is an obvious power structure.

Opportunities for Mentoring

In your workplace, it's worth remembering that there are often multiple opportunities for mentoring. Mentoring opportunities for helping other employees or subordinates abound, but it is also important to realize that you are in a position to mentor editors, reviewers, authors, and other staff. Leading a staff with a mentoring approach is important for both their and the leader's further development—and to ensure effective back-up and succession.

Reflecting on Your Own Experiences

As you consider whether you would like to take on mentoring a CSE colleague or applying for a mentor, I encourage you to reflect on mentors, formal or informal, who helped you at pivotal points in your life or career. Also, if you have mentored others, consider the benefits you received in exchange. We encourage you to mentor someone new to CSE or someone at an early career stage. If you are in the early career category or just new to CSE, ask and we'll match you with a mentor!

And remember that mentoring doesn't have to be complicated or take much time. It can bring immense satisfaction—and new friendships.

About the CSE Mentorship Program. The mentor/mentee relationship (dyad) is a 1-year commitment (from one CSE annual meeting to the next) that usually involves regular phone calls and may include other activities of interest to the mentor and mentee. If you are interested in acting as a mentor for a CSE colleague, fill out an application for the mentoring program on the CSE website (<https://www.councilscienceeditors.org/mentorship-program-info>). If you would like to HAVE a mentor, you'll also apply on the CSE website. Many CSE members have indicated their enthusiasm about mentoring their colleagues.

The Mentorship Committee. The Committee, which always welcomes new members, oversees the program, matches the dyad pairs after screening applications, and provides basic training materials for the dyad pairs to begin their relationships. These training materials include 3-month guides for both members of the dyad, suggesting optional discussion items for each meeting, with the pairs encouraged to be flexible to make the partnership most effective.