



2023 AAHA Mentoring Guidelines

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Conflict of interest statement:

The authors whose names are listed immediately below report the following details of affiliation or involvement in an organization or entity with a financial or nonfinancial interest in the subject matter or materials discussed in this manuscript.

Addie Reinhard is founder and CEO of MentorVet.

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Abbreviations and Acronyms:

- AVMA** American Veterinary Medical Association
- AAVMC** American Association of Veterinary Medical Colleges
- BIPOC** Black, Indigenous, and People of Color
- DEIB** Diversity, equity, inclusion, and belonging
- LGBTQIA+** Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, Queer, Intersex, Asexual, plus
- MCVMA** Multicultural Veterinary Medical Association
- NOMV** Not One More Vet
- QPR** Question, Persuade, and Refer
- SMART** Specific, Measurable, Attainable, Relevant, and Time-Bound

These guidelines were prepared by a task force of experts convened by the American Animal Hospital Association. This document is intended as a guideline only, not an AAHA standard of care. These guidelines and recommendations should not be construed as dictating an exclusive protocol, course of treatment, or procedure. This resource is not a substitute for legal or other appropriate professional advice. AAHA is not responsible for any inaccuracies, omissions, or editorial errors, or for any consequence resulting therefrom, including any injury or damage to persons or property. Evidence-guided support for specific recommendations has been cited whenever possible and appropriate. Other recommendations are based on practical clinical experience and a consensus of expert opinion. Variations in practice may be warranted based on individual needs, resources, and limitations unique to each practice setting.

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AAHA recognizes how vital mentorship is for veterinary professionals and all practice team members, regardless of their current role, stage of training, and/or level of experience. The value of mentoring increases during career transitions such as for new hires, those recently promoted or changing roles, and others implementing new protocols or programs to improve clinical outcomes and connections with veterinary clients. Effective mentoring relationships give veterinary professionals the tools and perspectives to thrive, grow, and persevere in their workplaces and their own professional journeys.

To support increased and more effective mentoring in veterinary workplaces, these guidelines focus on providing practical and action-oriented roadmaps for current and future mentees and mentors.

Section 1 defines mentorship, including several mentoring models and delivery options.

Section 2 explains why the current state of veterinary medicine requires mentoring, now more than ever.

Section 3 explores the benefits of mentoring for both mentors and mentees.

Section 4 outlines the roles, responsibilities, and reasonable expectations for both mentors and mentees.

Section 5 describes key elements for successful mentoring relationships.

Section 6 provides an action plan for creating and implementing positive, effective mentorship programs, including strategies for establishing healthy mentoring relationships.

Section 7 recaps the highlights of the guidelines and offers next steps.

Positive mentoring experiences play a crucial role in the recruitment and retention of individuals to veterinary medicine.

The guidelines also include a glossary of terms and showcase three case studies that allow veterinary team members to consider how these mentorship recommendations might be implemented in real-world scenarios.

While providing insights into various mentoring models and delivery options in Section 1, the bulk of these guidelines focus on the one-on-one mentorship model as this is the most common mentoring strategy used.

Key Points for Consideration

Mentorship done right has the potential to improve the overall mental health and wellbeing of the profession by creating a culture of support.

Positive mentoring relationships that create an inclusive environment can increase diversity and representation.

Positive mentoring experiences play a crucial role in the recruitment and retention of individuals to veterinary medicine.

SECTION 1: What Is Mentorship?

Top 3 Takeaways

1. AAHA's Mentoring Guidelines define mentorship as a relationship in which someone invests personal knowledge, energy, and time to help another person's professional development.
2. Modern mentorship allows for the use of a wide variety of models beyond traditional one-on-one mentorship, as well as several modes of delivery that leverage technology in addition to, or in place of, in-person contact. Each option brings benefits, depending on the unique situation.
3. Mentorship remains vital at all career stages and may be particularly important during career transition periods, such as when veterinary and veterinary technician students transition into veterinary practice.

Currently, there is no widely accepted definition, nor are there generally acknowledged criteria, for mentorship within veterinary medicine. For these guidelines,

mentorship will be defined as “a two-way relationship and type of human development in which one individual invests personal knowledge, energy, and time in order to help another individual grow and develop and improve to become the best and most successful they can be.”¹

What Mentorship Is Not. People sometimes confuse mentorship with coaching, advising, training, or sponsorship. Although mentors often leverage strategies used by coaches and advisors within their mentoring program or process, each of these roles functions differently.² Table 1.1 clarifies these distinctions in the definitions between mentoring and other types of professional development support.

Mentorship Models

Although one-on-one mentorship remains the most commonly used strategy, other models of mentorship and styles of delivery provide options for personalizing what mentoring means to you.

One-on-One Mentorship. Traditionally, people view mentorship as a one-on-one relationship in which one individual supports, guides, and teaches another individual. In this paired-mentorship model, the mentor

typically brings more professional experience to the process. However, growing evidence demonstrates that peer mentorship—those going through similar situations with the same level of experience—also offers an effective mentorship model.¹

Apprenticeship Mentorship. Veterinary practices and practice groups with in-house mentors often focus on teaching specific medical knowledge to mentees. In most cases, such apprenticeships feature a more experienced mentor who places a strong focus on teaching specific technical or surgical skills to mentees, using a hands-on, paired model without additional personal support or career development.¹

Critical Mentorship. Critical mentoring provides a mentorship framework within the broader context of a person’s social identities related to race, ethnicity, class, gender identity, and sexual orientation. Critical mentoring takes into account the identity of the mentee and mentor in mentorship program design, structure, and relationships. Rather than meaning mentors and mentees must share the same social identities, critical mentorship requires awareness and acknowledgement that these social identities impact how a mentee learns,

TABLE 1.1 Modalities of Support

Type	Definition	Example
Mentorship	A relationship in which an individual invests personal knowledge, energy, and time to help another individual develop	Providing guidance on how to navigate a conflict with a client
Advising	Typically focused on advising on an outcome or goal of a specific event or process	Assisting a veterinary student in externship selections
Coaching	Focused on aiding the coached individual in achieving a specific goal or mastery of a task	Coaching an individual to improve leadership skills
Sponsorship	When an individual uses their credibility, reputation, power, influence, and network to help another individual advance in their career	Recommending an individual for a job opportunity
Training	Often used to help a mentee obtain mastery over a process, procedure, or workflow—typically with a definitive end point	Teaching the new hire how to use the practice management software

as well as how they interact with their mentor, the veterinary profession, and society at large. In addition, this mentorship model assesses community needs in program development such as goals for increasing diversity, equity, inclusion, and belonging (DEIB) in the veterinary profession. Finally, critical mentorship engages the mentor and the mentee in processes that foster self-reflection and personal and professional growth.⁵

Multiple Mentorship. A multiple mentorship model features many simultaneous relationships with several mentors—each providing support in differing areas of professional and personal development because often a single mentor cannot meet all of the mentee’s needs.

Team Mentorship. Similar to the multiple mentorship model, though more globally coordinated rather than a la carte, team mentorship uses formal committees in which each mentor provides unique expertise and experiences. This may include those with different roles and seniority such as veterinary technicians and practice managers as well as veterinarians. The team dynamic allows for interaction between the mentors within the group to align their recommendations and advice to the mentee.⁴

Reverse Mentorship. Unlike the traditional mentorship model in which a more experienced individual mentors someone with less experience, reverse mentorship inverts these roles. The mentee in this relationship is the individual with more experience and is mentored by the less experienced colleague. This form of mentoring may result in increases in cross-generational knowledge, and more experienced colleagues may gain new knowledge from their mentees.⁵

Group Mentorship. In group mentorship, one mentor works with many different mentees simultaneously in a group setting.⁶ Group mentorship can allow for many different perspectives leading to a deeper understanding of issues or challenges.

Methods of Mentorship Delivery

Mentorship can be delivered using many different methods. Having multiple delivery methods allows one to tailor the mentorship experience to best fit the needs of the mentee

and mentor. In addition, thanks to technology and other tools, modern mentoring offers additional ways to connect without always meeting in person or by supplementing face-to-face connections with other support methods.

Local Versus Distance. Local mentorship simply means the mentor and mentee live or work with each other or in close geographic proximity. Distance, or virtual, mentorship uses technology to provide opportunities for direct observation of skills, timely feedback, and virtual interaction. Distance mentorship opens access to additional mentors otherwise not available locally. This greatly expands the mentee’s support network and outside perspective and advice.

AAHA’s Mentoring Guidelines define mentorship as a relationship in which someone invests personal knowledge, energy, and time to help another person’s professional development.

Experienced Colleague Versus Peer. Mentorship from an experienced colleague offers expertise and an existing support network within the profession. Peer mentorship allows individuals going through similar career stages the opportunity to empathize about shared challenges. By collaborating on mutual learning, peer mentors assist each other in navigating and understanding new experiences, processes, and protocols.

Formal Versus Informal. Formal mentorship leverages specific, mutually agreed-upon roles, responsibilities, timelines, and guidelines. Workplaces or institutions frequently develop formal mentorship programs to provide structured support for onboarding or career advancement. Informal mentoring relationships provide less structure and more flexibility and allow organic professional relationships to grow. Mentees often initiate these informal relationships with one or more possible mentors.

Long-Term Versus Short-Term. Long-term mentoring relationships allow time to address larger goals and a wider variety of skills or areas of professional development. Short-term mentoring relationships work well for addressing a smaller goal or refining a specific skill. The duration of mentoring relationships can vary in length, from as short as a one-time meeting with a mentor to get resources and support to as long as multiple years of receiving mentorship from one individual.

Section 2. Why Mentoring Is Needed

Top 3 Takeaways

1. Ideally, if all members of the veterinary profession openly discuss shared challenges and support one another, mental health stigma decreases and help-seeking via mentoring and other modalities increases.
2. Through ongoing training in DEIB, mentors better understand the barriers faced by individuals from marginalized groups in the veterinary profession and support continued mentor and mentee growth, including key insights into belonging and cultural humility (see Glossary).
3. Incorporating diverse mindsets leads to market innovations that stem from accessing multiple experiences and perspectives.

Veterinary medicine needs skilled guidance from diverse voices to address many pressing issues our industry currently faces. Since AAHA published the *2008 Mentorship Guidelines*, societal changes, a global pandemic,⁷ social unrest, mental health challenges,⁸ and rising debt load for students⁹ have directly impacted the veterinary profession in multiple ways.

Critical Stressors. In 2022, the most pressing concerns for individuals within the veterinary profession included:

- Stress levels of veterinarians and support staff
- High student debt level, with the debt-to-income ratio far outpacing pay
- High suicide rate among veterinarians and veterinary technicians
- Shortage of veterinarians and qualified support staff¹⁰

Additional Concerns. The profession also struggles with other issues including:

- Lack of inclusion and representation of individuals from marginalized groups
- Burnout rates in the veterinary profession¹⁰
- Lack of opportunities for career advancement and progression
- Gender pay gaps¹¹
- Low pay for support staff that may affect both financial and personal wellness
- Practicing veterinary medicine while navigating large-scale societal issues (COVID-19 pandemic, social unrest)

Educational and Career Preparation Gaps. Some veterinary colleges are placing a growing focus on professional skills, but gaps in curricula could still exist in preparing veterinary professionals with skills and knowledge in business acumen, team utilization and communication, and DEIB. The disruptions to training due to the COVID-19 pandemic may have also created a unique gap in education.

The authors of these guidelines contend that mentorship offers the potential to mend the fabric of the profession. In addition, they recognize that this unique time also features tremendous efforts to improve wellbeing,¹² mental health education and support, DEIB training, investment in clinical communication, and novel training modalities.

Veterinary Mental Health and Wellbeing and the Role of Positive Mentorship

Although there are many challenges within veterinary medicine, there are interventions such as mentorship that can be leveraged to reduce the impact of these challenges on the profession. Mentors should be aware of the mental health challenges facing the profession and how to respond to warning signs of mental distress.

Suicide Risks. Compared with the general population, male veterinarians were 1.6 times more likely and female veterinarians were 2.4 times more likely to die by suicide.¹³ Veterinary technicians also face a higher risk for

dying by suicide. Compared with the general population, male veterinary technicians were 5 times more likely and female veterinary technicians were 2.3 times more likely to die by suicide.¹⁵

Common Stressors. The veterinary profession is inherently stressful, with studies showing higher stress levels for veterinary professionals than the general population and young veterinarians reporting some of the highest stress levels within the profession.^{14,15,16} In addition, the COVID-19 pandemic impacted mental health and wellbeing among veterinary professionals, and serious psychological distress among veterinarians has increased significantly over time.¹⁰ Potential workplace and professional stressors in veterinary medicine include:

- Team conflict
- Ethical dilemmas
- Educational debt
- Inadequate mentorship and support
- Making mistakes
- Client behaviors and interactions
- Lack of qualified support staff

Discrimination. Experiencing discrimination based on age, race and ethnicity, gender identity, and other factors also contributes to stress within the profession, particularly in the transition to practice.¹⁷ Research from the British Veterinary Association revealed that around one-quarter of their members that were surveyed had either personally experienced or witnessed discrimination in the previous year.¹⁸

Burnout. Chronic stress in the workplace impacts mental health and drives burnout. According to the Merck Animal Health Veterinary Wellbeing Study,¹⁰ more than 50% of veterinarians and 75% of veterinary support staff experienced at least moderate symptoms of burnout—a psychological syndrome that emerges because of prolonged and chronic stress on the job.¹⁹ Compared with veterinarians who have worked in practice longer, young veterinarians face a higher risk of burnout and some of the lowest levels of wellbeing in the profession.²⁰

Supporting Mental Health Through Mentorship. Because of the high incidence of mental stress within the veterinary

profession, support from others in the profession through mentorship becomes even more vital. Evidence in human medicine suggests the possibility of either negative or positive impacts of mentoring on the mentee, but in general, the mentorship relationship can result in positive benefits when participants are carefully matched, adequately trained, and focused on candid and open communication.⁴ Mentors within the profession must recognize and respond to warning signs of mental health conditions, and Section 4 will review actionable techniques to provide emotional support to others. In addition, some mental health resources are referenced in the Resources at aaha.org/mentoring. Individuals experiencing mental health crises or suicidal ideation should be encouraged to seek out professional mental health support services.

Breaking Down Stigmas. If all members of the veterinary profession openly discuss these shared challenges and support each other, this may result in decreased mental health stigma and increased help-seeking via mentoring and other modalities. Positive mentorship thus potentially leads to positive impacts on mental health and wellbeing in the profession.

Increasing Representation Through Mentorship: The Intersection of Mentorship and DEIB

The 2020 WakeUp Vetmed campaign, led by the Multicultural Veterinary Medical Association (MCVMA) along with nine other affinity organizations, highlighted issues affecting the Black, Indigenous, and People of Color (BIPOC) communities within veterinary medicine.²¹ Additional awareness and training helps prepare mentors to better understand the barriers faced by BIPOC individuals and other marginalized groups in the profession. Such barriers include:

- Lack of representation
- Less access to mentorship
- Socioeconomic factors
- Lack of training around business partnership and ownership
- Cultural and language barriers
- Diverse abilities and living with disability

Helping others develop opens the potential for creating self-perpetuating cycles of help, as mentored individuals often go on to mentor others.

Individuals may belong to more than one marginalized group and face intersectional barriers that require tailoring mentorship methods and programs to meet their individual needs. For that reason, required DEIB training, including key insights into belonging and cultural humility, supports continued mentor and mentee growth. Mentors must recognize that they may need to grow in their knowledge about their mentee's differing experiences and set their own goals for personal development, particularly with respect to DEIB.

It is important to acknowledge that the needs of one underrepresented group do not represent the needs of all groups. Using inclusive mentoring platforms (see Resources at aaha.org/mentoring for a list), as well as active outreach to affinity organizations such as the MCVMA, Black DVM Network, Latinx Veterinary Medical Association, and PrideVMC can help individual mentors and the profession as a whole to improve the depth and breadth of mentorship. When recruiting mentors and trainees, ensure that inclusivity is part of the process. This will offer a more holistic review of candidates and can provide more diverse perspectives within your organization.

Helping others develop opens the potential for creating self-perpetuating cycles of help, as mentored individuals often go on to mentor others.²² At a time when there is an overall lack of diversity within veterinary medicine, with ~90% of the profession identifying as white,^{23,24} mentorship can play a pivotal role in selection of a career path.

It is also important to understand that learning and mentoring experiences and their associated environments have the potential to affect how an individual perceives their school and/or workplace, as well as the field itself. A study of medical students showed that students who

experienced frequent microaggressions were more likely to consider medical school transfer or withdrawal and were more likely to believe microaggressions were a normal part of medical school culture.²⁵ A mentoring relationship with an inclusive environment can lead to positive associations and may increase diversity and retention in the profession.

The Business Case for Good Mentorship

Veterinarians and support staff seek mentorship during periods of transition, particularly early in their careers. Mentorship can be leveraged as a tool to support individuals within the profession, and it has been found to decrease employee turnover and burnout while simultaneously increasing retention, productivity, and job satisfaction.

Mentorship can reduce burnout for veterinary professionals. A joint study conducted by Rice University's Baker Institute for Public Policy, HumRRO, Northern Illinois University, and San Diego State University concluded that mentorship may help decrease levels of burnout and aid in early intervention in employees at a higher risk for burnout.²⁶ Mentors can model wellbeing behavior and help dissuade unhealthy work habits.²⁶ Decreased burnout and healthier work habits may lead to increased productivity and improved patient care.

Currently, the veterinary profession is experiencing high turnover rates, with attrition among veterinarians and veterinary technicians at 15% and 25%, respectively.²⁷ Mentorship can be helpful in supporting individuals in the profession to decrease turnover rates and improve retention.

Formal mentorship programs have been found to increase productivity and reduce employee turnover.^{28,29} A case study of employees participating in a mentoring program at Randstad, a Dutch human resource consulting firm, estimated that a 49% reduction in employee turnover saved the company ~\$3,000 per program participant per year.²⁹ When comparing the 2020 to 2021 year-over-year profit of Fortune 500 companies, those with mentoring programs were reported to perform 18% better than the average performance, whereas those without mentoring programs performed 43% under the average.³⁰

A 2016 survey conducted by Deloitte found that millennials who planned to stay with their employers for more than 5 years were twice as likely to have a mentor.⁵¹ At Sun Microsystems, retention of both mentors and mentees was ~20% higher compared with that of employees who did not participate in the internal mentoring program.⁵²

Mentored individuals tend to have higher job satisfaction, believe they will advance professionally, and hold a higher level of commitment to their job when compared with those who are in the same roles without mentorship.⁵³ Mentors were promoted six times more often than those who were not part of a mentoring program, and mentees were promoted five times more often.⁵² Similarly, an internal mentoring program at Coca-Cola found that 80% of mentees had been promoted at least once in 5 years.⁵⁴

Mentorship not only helps the individual through their career but also provides clear benefits to the workplace by promoting retention and job satisfaction.

Section 3. Mentorship: A Mutually Beneficial Relationship

Top 3 Takeaways

1. Successful mentoring relationships benefit the mentor as well as the mentee.
2. The benefits of mentorship extend to all members of the veterinary team.
3. Increased career satisfaction, productivity, exposure to diversity, and networking opportunities are some of the mutual benefits afforded by mentoring relationships.

To increase the chances for successful mentoring relationships, businesses and institutions developing and implementing mentorship programs must appropriately select and train participants. In addition, both parties must commit to using strong communication and interpersonal skills. When the desire to communicate openly and work together respectfully is at the forefront of the relationship, mentoring can have robust benefits to both parties.⁴

The veterinary profession should recognize that the benefits of successful mentoring relationships extend beyond veterinarians. These guidelines apply to all members of the veterinary healthcare team, including credentialed technicians, client care liaisons, practice managers, veterinary assistants, and kennel assistants. Embracing the idea that all veterinary team members can learn from each other is essential to mentorship and promotes growth mindsets as well as a healthy and productive work environment.

Benefits to the Mentee

Skill Acquisition. In addition to helping mentees develop clinical skills, mentors also provide valuable insights into effective communication techniques that work with both clients and coworkers. These skills are sometimes referred to as the “art” of veterinary medicine.¹ Such techniques cover common scenarios including:

- Gathering information
- Initiating conversations involving finances
- Explaining the value of medical recommendations to obtain client buy-in and compliance
- Communicating empathy
- Giving and receiving constructive feedback

Similarly, mentorship has been associated with improved self-esteem, self-acceptance, self-efficacy, and proactive behavior.³⁵

Financial Gains. Improved clinical and personal communication skills gained through mentorship can drive an increase in production. Mentors can offer recommendations on financial literacy, employment, and contract negotiation, encompassing everything from navigating sign-on bonuses and noncompete clauses to compensation types such as production only versus production with a base salary.

Emotional Support. As colleagues within the veterinary profession, mentors often share valuable perspectives on common stressors, including work-life balance, imposter syndrome, and career setbacks and difficulties. New graduates feel particularly susceptible to the negative influence of these challenges¹⁷ and may benefit from the wisdom provided by mentors. In fact, studies have shown

a positive relationship between effective mentorship and improved mentee wellbeing.^{56,57,58}

Benefits to the Mentor

Keeping Up with Advancements in Veterinary Medicine.

With rapid advancements in scientific research, many practitioners struggle to stay abreast of current developments, even with continuing education and regular journal reading. Serving as a mentor affords the opportunity to keep up with cutting-edge medical and surgical practices via close interaction with graduates fresh from training programs.⁵⁹ Mentoring also provides intellectual stimulation via refreshed or more thorough understanding of previously learned concepts.¹

Attracting and Retaining High-Quality Employees.

New graduates in all veterinary team roles consider mentorship to be one of the most important factors in their job search. In fact, lack of high-quality mentorship remains one of the most common reasons new graduates leave their first practice.^{39,40} By promoting from within and offering mentoring programs to employees, veterinary practices and businesses can cultivate higher employee engagement and motivation,⁴¹ support their professional growth, and retain them in the workplace.⁴²

Mutual Benefits of Mentorship

Increased Career Satisfaction. One of the fundamental roles of a mentor is to model approaches that help facilitate long-term career success and satisfaction.⁴³ Mentors report that mentoring relationships reinvigorate enthusiasm and career satisfaction, along with providing them with a sense of purpose beyond their career.¹ At the same time, when involved in a mentoring relationship, mentees are more likely to overcome challenges and stressful times in their career more effectively and enjoy increased confidence.⁴¹

Productivity. Research documents an association between higher rates of promotion and mentorship.^{45,44,45} Those in mentoring relationships within academia experience increased publication rates, research support, and grant acquisition.^{41,44,46} Increased productivity for a mentee confers obvious benefits for career advancement, while also reflecting positively on the mentor and advancing the profession.⁴¹

Exposure to Diversity. Mentors with different backgrounds can add valuable insights and perspectives by giving mentees the opportunity to learn different philosophies and mindsets.^{1,4} This approach allows mentors to impart wisdom gained from personal experiences and, when mentors and mentees come from different backgrounds, provides the added benefit of exposure to different cultures and lived experiences. Similarities in attitudes among mentor/mentee pairs was shown to be more predictive of a good mentoring relationship than demographic similarities,⁴⁷ although similarities in race and gender tend to be more valued, especially by people of color and women. Mentees who had a mentor of their own gender or race reported more access to assistance, although matched race or gender mentor/mentee pairs did not have an effect on academic outcomes.⁴⁸

Networking and Professional Growth. Mentorship widens professional circles, offering increased access to career opportunities, leadership, publications, and resources.⁴⁹

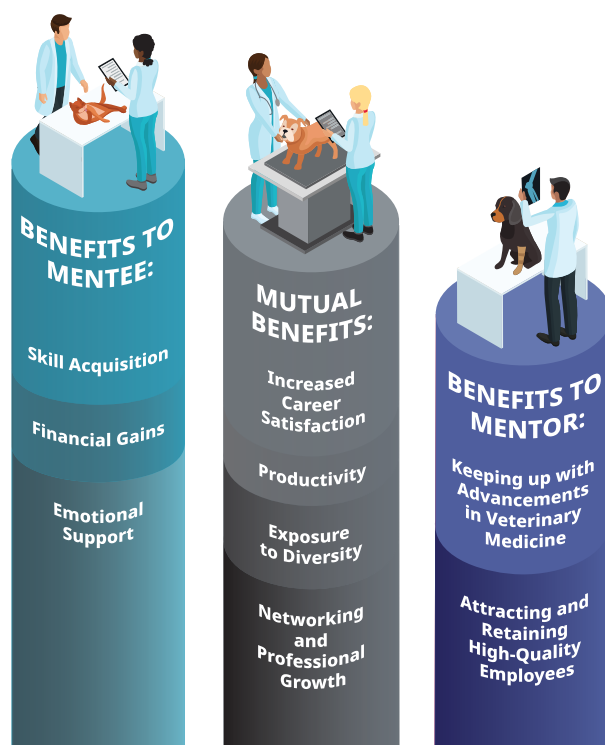


FIGURE 3.1 Benefits of Mentorship

Credit: Fred Meindl, III, SC Design Services, 2022

Many mentoring relationships continue and evolve over the course of a career. As both parties experience professional growth, so do the opportunities for mutually beneficial interactions. As a new graduate becomes more comfortable with routine procedures, they may seek guidance on more complicated procedures. As a staff member begins to establish long-term relationships with clients, the focus may shift to more subtle and nuanced communication skills.

Section 4. Relationship Roles, Responsibilities, and Expectations

Top 3 Takeaways

1. Mentorship relationships thrive when there is trust, respect, and open communication.
2. Mentees demonstrate commitment through proactive, intentional, clear, and regular communication with their mentor about their goals, progress, and successes.
3. Mentors establish a positive mentoring environment by focusing on the goals of the mentee, modeling desired behaviors, and fostering the development of the mentee's critical thinking skills.

Mentorship Roles

Early clarity about each participant's role and purpose supports better mentor/mentee matches and ideally better outcomes for both participants.

Role of the Mentor. A mentor is an individual with sufficient knowledge, skills, and/or resources to provide support and to facilitate growth for their mentee's professional development toward career goals.

Role of the Mentee. The role of the mentee is to seek growth, driving a positive learning relationship with their mentor.

Mutual Responsibilities of Mentors and Mentees

Mentoring relationships also require both parties to fulfill certain responsibilities to ensure successful outcomes.

Foster Trust and Respect. Trust and respect are crucial to a successful mentoring relationship. Together, mentors and mentees define what respect means to them, considering personal and cultural differences. Both the mentor and mentee also expect the other to be available and accountable. Because mentoring relationships require commitments of time and energy, be sure to schedule meetings in advance, protect meeting times, and reschedule if necessary.

Maintain Confidentiality. Confidentiality also nurtures trust within a mentoring relationship. Commit to and reaffirm the highest standards of professional conduct, including full confidentiality of discussions. Always ask for consent if sharing a situation requires revealing sensitive information. Ensure that both parties know that if any information shared indicates the need for outside professional intervention, then confidentiality may be broken, such as in the case of a health or mental health emergency.

Cultivate Open Two-Way Communication and Encourage Radical Candor (see Glossary). Mentoring functions as a collaborative endeavor, so communicate goals, boundaries, and expectations early in the mentoring relationship. If using a structured mentoring program, ensure relevancy and match between the mentee's goals and purpose and focus of the mentoring program.

Acknowledge the value of different cultures, learning styles, communication styles, personality types, and conflict resolution styles. Together, find common ways to communicate while acknowledging and celebrating individual differences in learning and thinking. Radical candor is a form of feedback that is done in a kind, humble, and direct manner and focuses on helping the other person.⁵⁰ Encouraging radical candor can help mentors and mentees communicate effectively.

Celebrate Successes and Cultivate Gratitude. When milestones are achieved in the mentoring relationship (e.g., a mentee successfully completed their first solo dental extraction), acknowledge and celebrate those successes. Mentees can express gratitude for their mentor to demonstrate how their support helped them

to achieve their goal. Mentors can acknowledge the success of the mentee by telling their mentee how well they performed.

Be Open and Receptive to Feedback. Remain open to positive and constructive feedback. Discuss early in the relationship how each of you prefers to receive feedback. Does your mentee prefer feedback in the moment or after processing the situation? Does your mentor prefer to discuss each piece of feedback as it comes up or to finish all their thoughts then discuss them en masse? Communication and processing styles may vary.

Ask for permission before providing feedback. This gives the recipient the opportunity to decide if they feel open and receptive to receiving feedback before it is given.

Effective feedback uses specific concrete examples, arrives in a timely manner, gets delivered in a constructive objective manner, and includes a plan for improving performance.^{51,52} In the video Giving Effective Feedback: Beyond “Great Job,” Dr. Esther Choo outlines the steps for providing effective feedback.⁵¹ In addition, consider using a feedback model such as the Pendleton Model to deliver feedback (see Table 4.1). Another effective feedback mechanism that can be used is telling your mentee what you thought went well and what you think they could do to make it go even better next time.

Develop a Mentoring Action Plan. The mentor and mentee should come to a mutual agreement on the structure of the mentorship relationship including developing goals,

determining frequency of meetings, and establishing timelines. Section 6 will discuss in depth how to create a mentoring action plan.

Periodically Evaluate the Mentoring Relationship. As the mentoring relationship progresses over time, the needs of the mentor and mentee likely shift as well, so periodically consider whether to continue, modify, or terminate the mentoring relationship. For example, perhaps it is time to change the frequency of meetings and/or update goals for the mentee’s current career stage and needs. Routine evaluations also give you the opportunity to recognize and discuss any limitations of the mentoring relationship.

It is fine to decide what is and—perhaps more importantly—what is not working. Together, consider even adding additional mentors for specific plans and goals because there is no one-size-fits-all solution. Mentees often choose different mentors for different aspects of life, such as one focused on career growth and another for DEIB needs.

Expand Your DEIB Knowledge. Normalize honest and open conversations that acknowledge differences in lived experiences and access to resources. Realize that both the mentor and the mentee enter mentoring relationships and work environments as individuals with intersecting personal and professional lives that may influence how they see the world and interact in it.

Together, acknowledge the importance of DEIB on mentorship relationships. Homophily, defined as the

TABLE 4.1 Feedback Delivery: Pendleton Model⁵³

Step	Sample Question
1. Ask if they would like some feedback	“Would you mind if I give you some feedback?”
2. Ask them what went well	“What do you think went well?”
3. Acknowledge their successes then also point out other things you saw them do well	“What I thought you did well was...”
4. Ask them what they would do differently	“Is there anything you would do differently?”
5. Acknowledge their ideas then add to those ideas	“What I might have tried differently was...”

tendency to seek out those similar to oneself, often leaves women and individuals from underrepresented and marginalized communities with limited access to mentors within their desired professional fields.⁵⁴ Although most of us do not intend to alienate specific groups, acknowledging differences in identities and backgrounds helps minimize the impact of a lack of self-awareness of privilege and power on the other party.

Commit to seeking out resources and DEIB training to help expand the mentor and mentee's knowledge in DEIB and related issues before entering the mentoring relationship. Consider attending training together or discussing relevant resources. Ensure that DEIB training includes an implicit bias focus and aim to obtain this training before entering the mentoring relationship. An understanding of both microaggressions and macroaggressions and their relationship to implicit bias is also important. These DEIB terms and other common terms are defined in the glossary.

Research and understand the specific barriers and challenges faced by individuals from underrepresented and marginalized communities, particularly as they pertain to the veterinary profession. Also understand the impact of privilege and power dynamics in mentoring and access to veterinary medicine as a profession. Those with privilege do not face the same barriers as those without privilege when it comes to accessing the veterinary field and positions of authority within the field. Those that hold privilege and authority have power. How the dynamics of that power are used in relation to those without it can negatively or positively affect access for individuals from marginalized groups.

Responsibilities of the Mentee

Some responsibilities fall squarely on the mentee's shoulders. Commit to them before seeking a mentor on your own or getting involved in an existing mentorship program.

Ask. Make sure any potential mentors understand you seek a mentoring relationship. Before asking someone to be your mentor, think about which aspects of your life you want to address and how you believe the mentor can

help. Get to know the potential mentor before asking for mentorship. If a potential mentor declines your request, try not to take it personally and seek another mentor that might support you in your career.

Be Proactive and Intentional. Take ownership of the relationship, effectively communicating your priorities, goals, and expected outcomes. Proactiveness includes taking the lead on scheduling meetings; sending out discussion topics, questions, and agenda items ahead of time; and coming into meetings prepared. Being proactive and prepared does not mean you know everything, so strive to feel comfortable asking for help when needed.

As the mentoring relationship progresses over time, the needs of the mentor and mentee likely shift as well, so periodically consider whether to continue, modify, or terminate the mentoring relationship.

Communicate Openly and Clearly. Share your preferred communication methods—such as email, text messages, or social media platforms—and your learning style with your mentor. However, make adjustments if your mentor cannot accommodate your preferred communication method. Communicate with your mentor regularly on an agreed-upon schedule, which will likely differ based on the stage of development and needs of the mentor and the mentee at different times. For example, perhaps you connect monthly at first and then quarterly later. Sometimes, you may only need to report achievements of core goals. Remember, you need not abide by all advice provided by the mentor. It is your responsibility, however, to communicate which advice you followed and the outcomes.

Define Your Goals. Set clear objectives and let your mentor know your particular goals and needs. Discuss a reasonable timeline for meeting goals, as well as any potential barriers to achieving them.

Discuss Concerns. Be forthright about any concerns about your goals, future, and the mentoring relationship itself—especially if it is your first foray into mentoring or if you experienced mentoring glitches in the past. Understand, though, that mentoring relationships come with limitations. No mentor is all-knowing. No mentoring system or plan works for everyone.

Responsibilities of the Mentor

Upon agreeing to mentor others, mentors themselves must accept these key responsibilities and leadership requirements.

Create an Environment Conducive to Positive Mentoring.

Mentoring focuses on professional growth of the mentee. However, the mentor sets the tone of the relationship. A negative mentoring experience has the potential to increase stress and the likelihood of staff turnover. Likewise, positive mentoring experiences play a crucial role in the recruitment and retention of individuals in veterinary medicine.

Be present for your mentee(s), actively listening to their needs, affirming their experiences to ensure the environment remains inclusive, and recognizing the potential for power imbalances in the mentoring relationship. Communicate your awareness of power imbalances early in the mentoring relationship to support trust and respect.

Successful mentors express genuine interest and curiosity about their mentees and ask rather than tell them to cultivate a mentee's problem-solving skills.⁵⁵ Guide your mentee(s) in establishing short- and long-term goals that follow the Specific, Measurable, Achievable, Relevant, and Time-Bound (SMART) format.⁵⁶ Foster confidence about your mentee's goals by being excited yourself, celebrating their successes, supporting their skill development, and encouraging them through failures.⁵⁷

Consider Power Dynamics. Discuss your awareness of power imbalances early in the mentoring relationship and how you plan to avoid intended or unintended use of power and influence. Mentees may be wary of

speaking candidly about their difficulties to a mentor who is their boss or supervisor. Even mentors not in supervisory positions are likely to bring greater influence in the veterinary field than their mentees. Also, consider demographic differences between you and your mentee as well as how those differences affect the workplace and the veterinary industry as a whole. Advice that may work for a mentor with a privileged identity may not work the same for someone from a marginalized group.

Cultivate Both Collaboration and Independence. Rather than remaining focused on sharing your own stories and examples, remember that each mentee needs to achieve their potential, forge their own path, and achieve their own goals. Focus on what is best for the mentee's wellness and their professional growth by providing constructive insight without attempting to control the outcome.

You can cultivate your mentee's independence and critical thinking in these ways:

- Ask questions, then pause, giving the mentee time to reflect and consider possible next steps.
- Provide constructive insight while the mentee considers the pros and cons of each decision.
- Be patient and accept that your mentee may not follow your advice.

Allow the mentee to make mistakes and learn from them while striving to provide a safety net to protect their future and prevent mistakes from negatively altering their career.

Support Self-Directed Learning. Initially, recommend trusted resources and others in your network to support your mentee's success. Over time, though, focus on your mentee becoming progressively more independent, including finding their own resources based on what they learn from other useful and relevant resources you provided earlier.

Model Desired Behaviors. People learn more from watching how mentors behave, so intentionally demonstrate desired behaviors, while encouraging them to maintain their individuality. Rather than simply telling your mentee about

important professional qualities and actions, show them through how you navigate your own work:

- Demonstrate humility and camaraderie.
- Rely on the skills of your team and trust them to do their part.
- Reach out to your network and team when in need.
- Admit to making mistakes.
- When at work, be present, reliable, and timely.

Balance your work and personal time, taking personal, vacation, and sick time as well as actually stepping away when away from work.

Support Your Mentee’s Mental Health and Wellbeing.

Familiarize yourself with the warning signs of mental health conditions. Essentially, any behavior that seems unusual or out of the ordinary for your mentee might be a sign of a mental health condition. See Table 4.2 for a more complete list of symptoms of mental health conditions.

TABLE 4.2 Warning Signs of Mental Health Conditions⁵⁸

Excessive fear, anxiety, or worry
Feelings of depression or extreme sadness
Confusion, issues learning, and/or difficulty concentrating
Extreme changes in mood
Intense or prolonged anger or irritability
Avoidance of friends, loved ones, and social activities
Changes in sleeping or eating habits
Exhaustion
Delusions or hallucinations
Overuse of substances (e.g., alcohol or drugs)
Physical issues without an obvious cause (e.g., unexplained headaches or stomach aches)
Suicidal thoughts
Unable to carry out daily activities or cope with problems and stress

Consider additional training in suicide prevention and emotional support so that you feel prepared to respond in the event your mentee struggles with mental health. Question, Persuade, and Refer (QPR) training (see Resources at aaha.org/mentoring for more information) is a good place to start to learn more about the warning signs of mental health conditions and how to make a mental health referral. Some emotional support strategies include these suggestions:

- If you notice your mentee is not acting like themselves, tell them what you have noticed, and ask them how they are doing.
- Do not force your mentee to open up. If they do not want to share how they are feeling, tell them you are there for them if they would like to talk.
- Actively listen to your mentee’s concerns.
- Do not try to fix the problem by immediately offering solutions or advice; instead, ask them how you can support them.
- Encourage your mentee to seek help from a mental health professional.
- Model healthy self-care habits to set a good example for your mentee.

Section 5. Ingredients for a Successful Mentoring Relationship

Top 3 Takeaways

1. Early on, define critical boundaries around time, trust, communication, and respect to increase the likelihood of a successful mentoring relationship.
2. Establish personal and physical safety for both participants to create a safe environment for mutual collaboration and maximum mentorship.
3. Discuss expectations of the mentorship and establish a timeline for when the relationship will end or may end early under certain circumstances.

The Components of Mentorship

The components of successful mentorship go beyond the participants themselves and require making critical decisions and coming to vital agreements from the beginning. The risks of mismatched expectations between mentors and mentees can lead to damaging consequences.

By actively defining boundaries, expectations, and goals, you reduce assumptions and increase the likelihood of successful or satisfying outcomes for everyone. Summarized in Table 5.1, these boundaries take many forms.

Both mentees and mentors must clarify these requirements for mutual benefit to their ongoing perception of current and future outcomes. Create a clear plan for re-evaluating the relationship on a specific timeline, upon completion of goals, or in an expedited way if the mentorship relationship falters in some way, such as goals not being met or irreconcilable difficulties arising.

Conflict Management

In any mentorship relationship, there may be circumstances in which the mentee will seek counsel on a conflict or failure either in the workplace or within their personal life. In addition, conflict may arise between the mentor and the mentee during the course of the relationship. It is important that both parties collaborate and maintain open, nonjudgmental communication to determine how to best approach conflict management to yield best outcomes.

Conflict management techniques to consider when experiencing a conflict within a mentor/mentee relationship or supporting someone navigating a conflict include:

- **Adapt and get through the moment.** When a conflict first arises in the heat of the moment, one individual may not be ready to discuss the issue. For example, do you need space to process what is happening or how you are feeling? Communicate those needs openly.
- **Determine the core problem.** Before beginning to navigate the conflict, first define what the core problem is. Why did this conflict arise?
- **Develop a plan of action.** Develop a strategy for navigating this conflict. Consider what you might say and how you will approach this issue.
- **Set aside a time to discuss the issue.** A phone call, in-person meeting, or video call helps you avoid miscommunication and better discern tone, body language, and emotion.
- **Practice active and reflective listening.** Listen to hear first, not to elicit a response. Seek to

understand both sides of the conflict and establish a clear understanding of what is needed. Statements such as “What I am hearing, what I am feeling...” can clarify any discrepancies and ensure the best outcome.

- **Foster open and transparent communication.** Be honest and transparent in your communication. One formula for what to say in these moments: “I think this. What do you think? Now let’s make a decision.”
- **Take a timeout if needed.** In some cases, mutual agreement to end heated or difficult conversations allows time for processing information and emotions before resuming conflict resolution later.
- **Reflect and support.** How did it go? What could go even better next time? Remember that navigating conflict is stressful for many people, so it is important to take care of yourself after a conflict arises. If you are assisting a mentee to navigate conflict, help them to debrief and express support during the process.

Safety: Personal and Physical

Successful mentorship requires both personal and physical safety. Trust creates a foundation for developing psychological safety, defined by a belief that one is safe to take interpersonal risks or otherwise be interpersonally vulnerable.⁵⁹ It takes time to build a trusting relationship with someone new, so focus on creating a safe space for mentees to feel vulnerable and express honest sentiments. Also, establish regular wellness check-ins to identify any lapses or issues early. Although mentorship is not a substitute for therapy, mentors can encourage mentees to seek professional assistance when necessary. Vulnerability demonstrated by the mentor through sharing personal lived experiences, previous errors, and solutions provides a judgment-free zone and ensures psychological safety.

To prepare for such possibilities, mentors can complete training—such as QPR training—and/or identify resources and support groups to ensure that both parties remain safe from harm and feel prepared for various circumstances. This includes times when safety considerations override confidentiality. See aaha.org/ mentoring for additional resources.

TABLE 5.1 Elements of a Successful Mentorship

Element	Considerations	Examples
Time	<p>Frequency</p> <p>Scheduling</p> <p>Accountability</p>	<p>Weekly, monthly, or quarterly.</p> <p>Duration of meeting (quick consult vs check-in). Schedule to protect meeting times and reschedule if necessary. Decide on mutually agreed-upon times/days.</p> <p>Determine how to inform each other of schedule changes and in what time frame changes need to be made (day before, etc.).</p>
Trust	<p>Respect</p> <p>Discretion/Confidentiality</p> <p>Safe Space</p> <p>Model the Behavior</p>	<p>Consideration of cultural and personal differences.</p> <p>Ask for consent if specific information is shared, and establish parameters on exclusions (safety, health emergency).</p> <p>Create an environment where vulnerability is accepted and that includes a judgment-free zone. Prioritize physical, psychological, and emotional safety.</p> <p>Demonstrate humility, admission of errors, creating a positive work culture, and modeling healthy self-care practices.</p>
Communication	<p>Transparency</p> <p>Openness and Nonjudgment</p> <p>Mode</p> <p>Personality/Learning Styles</p> <p>Conflict Resolution</p>	<p>Explain how and why systems are developed.</p> <p>Be open to new ideas, sentiments, feedback, and criticisms. Avoid judgment and assume positive intent.</p> <p>Identify personal preference to determine the success of interpretation (e.g., discerning tone from a text message). Define the best mode of communication (email, text, phone call, or video chat).</p> <p>Consider the diversity of individuals (introspective vs extrospective). See DISC Assessment at aaha.org/mentoring under Resources.</p> <p>Define the core problem, use reflective listening, collaboratively find a solution or adaptation to move forward.</p>
Respect for All Identities and Barriers	<p>Pronouns</p> <p>Name Preference</p> <p>DEIB Influences</p>	<p>Ensure that pronouns are defined and used properly in all communication.</p> <p>Doctor vs first name, correct pronunciation and spelling of name.</p> <p>Appreciate diversity, value inclusion, and support feelings of belonging. Seek ongoing training with a focus on implicit bias, impact of privilege, barriers, and limitations due to things like financial realities, life stage demands, roles as caretakers, and/or cultural differences and expectations.</p>

Make physical safety for both parties absolutely paramount. For example, sometimes warning signs arise that directly affect the mentorship relationship and/or workplace, including revealing risks of physical harm or harm to others. If one party feels their own physical safety is at risk, they should end the mentoring relationship immediately.

Mentorship Expectations and Rules for Cessation

Just as clearly defined expectations play a critical role in successful mentoring relationships, it is imperative to establish proactive protocols for ending a mentorship experience. A predetermined end date or re-evaluation date should be set for the mentoring relationship, so there is the opportunity to end the relationship if desired. Information on how to end a mentoring relationship can be found in Section 6.

Mentorship involves two parties willing to commit to the relationship, define boundaries to ensure success, and seek continued learning for growth and development. As long as there are clear expectations of both mentor and mentee, these relationships can evolve and transcend through the ebb and flow of career and personal growth and obstacles.

Section 6. Action Plan

Top 3 Takeaways

1. Before entering a mentoring relationship, reflect on your strengths, areas for improvement, desires, and needs for the relationship. Consider your own and the prospective mentor/mentee's professional experience and social identities and their impact on the mentoring relationship.
2. Diversify your search methods when looking for a mentor/mentee, being sure to consider existing programs and personal and professional connections. Learn about your prospective mentor/mentee ahead of time to determine if it is a match.
3. Whether initiating a mentoring relationship or ending one, communicate early and express yourself.

Mentoring Action Plan

Mentoring relationships differ based on mentor and mentee needs and goals. Whether an individual chooses to search for a mentor or mentee or two individuals who work closely together decide to enter a mentoring relationship, ensure each party begins the process intentionally to create a strong foundation for positive relational and developmental outcomes. In other words, do not simply claim someone as your mentor/mentee without their consent.

Understand Yourself First

Know What You Are Looking for. Whether you are the mentor or mentee, assess your individual strengths and areas for improvement and engage in self-reflection to evaluate what you need in the mentoring relationship and from each other. Use the checklist in Table 6.1 to get started with questions to consider in self-assessment, including readiness to fulfill the roles and responsibilities covered in Section 4 of these guidelines.

Determine what you absolutely want in a mentor/mentee, mentorship model, or delivery method. For example, do you need a mentor to help you become more proficient in surgery, or do you need a mentor to support you during a career transition?

Also, consider what combination of skills, experience, or identities feels important in a mentor or mentee.

- **Professional Experience.** For some mentees, entering a mentoring relationship with an individual with many more years of experience in the veterinary profession provides meaningful leadership insights. Others choose mentorship from an individual who specializes in a certain area of veterinary practice, works in a particular type of role, or offers unique professional experiences and perspectives, such as those offered by second-career veterinary professionals or those with nontraditional career paths. Some mentees may even choose to enter a mentoring relationship with a peer, someone going through similar challenges.
- **Lived Experience.** Sharing racial, ethnic, class, gender, sexuality, and/or disability identities sometimes provides useful or necessary context

TABLE 6.1 Action Steps for the Mentoring Relationship

Engage in Self-Reflection and Determine Readiness
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• What are my strengths and areas for improvement?• What kind of mentoring relationship do I want and need? (See Section 1 for models and delivery methods.)• Do I have any “deal breakers” when it comes to choosing a mentor/mentee, mentorship model, or delivery method?• What skills, experience, or identities are important that my mentor/mentee offers?• Where do I have more learning to do before I can offer mentorship to someone whose lived experience or social identities are different from mine? How can I obtain that learning without burdening the mentee?• What questions will assist me in assessing my mentor’s readiness to help me navigate issues I may encounter related to my lived experience or social identities?• Am I ready for the role, responsibilities, and expectations required of a mentor/mentee? (See Section 4 for details.)
Research Mentorship Programs and Potential Mentors
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Research existing programs.• Consider existing relationships and networks.• Learn about your potential mentor/mentee by doing research to find out more about them or meeting with them for an introduction.
Initiate or Decline a Mentoring Relationship
Initiating:
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Ask in person, write an email, or invite them to chat over coffee. Share your interests and needs, keeping in mind potential time demands on you both. Ask the mentor/mentee about their interest in entering a mentoring relationship with you.• Be prepared for rejection and do not take it personally.
Accepting or declining:
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Assess why you are being asked.• Be honest about your interest, capacity, or time and share feedback about your decision, if necessary.• Be mindful of the potential negative impact of a poor mentoring relationship or power dynamics.
Initiate a Mentoring Relationship by Mutual Agreement
Before your first meeting:
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Be prepared. Send an agenda of discussion topics in advance.• Begin to consider goals for the mentoring relationship.• Consider and agree on the conversation setting.
During your first meeting:
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Refer to Table 6.2 for potential questions to ask during your first meeting.• Discuss roles and responsibilities.• Collaborate to choose the type of mentoring relationship that best fits your situation.• Get acquainted. Build trust and psychological safety by openly sharing and discussing experiences, values, worldviews, and issues.

(Continued on next page)

TABLE 6.1 Action Steps for the Mentoring Relationship, Continued

- Develop mutual expectations and boundaries. Discuss accountability of both parties at the beginning of the relationship. Discuss communication needs, preferred methods (phone, email, text, etc.), and confidentiality.
- Discuss ethics, including conflict of interest issues, and agree upon ethical boundaries.
- Discuss a vision plan, covering your overall purpose and long-term goals for the relationship.
- Discuss how to acknowledge and celebrate progress and accomplishments.
- Create a time frame for the relationship that works for both parties. Clarify a mutually agreeable end point or time for reassessment of the relationship.
- Determine a schedule for meeting together at regular intervals to discuss progress on goals and evaluate the mentorship relationship. Consider the time demands of each individual. If most meetings happen virtually, also schedule occasional face-to-face meetings, if desired and possible.

Before follow-up meetings:

- Collaborate to choose the type of mentoring relationship that best fits your situation.
- Plan for your discussions, with the mentee taking the lead in planning. Meeting topics include issues of concern, areas of accomplishments, progression toward goals, and new challenges. You may also plan to discuss specific cases or situations that have cropped up since the last meeting.

During follow-up meetings:

- Establish, clarify, and write down goals to achieve the vision.
- Define and prioritize areas of greatest needs, with the mentee taking the lead rather than relying upon the mentor to define needs for them.
- Use SMART goals for the mentor and mentee, making sure to personalize goals to fit the needs of the mentee.⁵⁶
- Examine the mentee's concerns and fears when establishing goals (Refer to Table 6.4).
- Be accountable. Follow up on points of discussion, share resources, and make personal/professional connections. Be mindful of overpromising, which can set back the mentee's goals or damage trust.
- Create a process whereby a mentee can ask for immediate help as needed. This might include a back-up mentor or providing a list of resources to your mentee.
- Establish a protocol to help the mentee develop new skill sets and proficiency in areas of interest.
- Discuss expected outcomes and how those will be monitored or measured. Set up relevant mileposts/landmarks for goals and an evaluation process (including the time, place, and procedure) to evaluate the mentee's progress toward goals.
- Discuss how both parties will offer new ideas and feedback to each other. Use a separate mentor-mentee evaluation form. Do not confuse it with a performance review.
- Discuss how to resolve conflict. Conflict naturally occurs because of differences in background or differences in approaches. Conflict may arise when the agreement is not specific or written down. Resolution of conflict should occur in private to maintain the self-esteem of both the mentor and mentee.
- Celebrate progress and accomplishments regularly.
- Refer to Table 6.3 for questions to keep the conversation going.

Evaluating the Relationship

- Check in frequently with your mentor/mentee to determine whether mentee goals are being met.
- Schedule a time to re-evaluate and assess how the relationship is going.
- If necessary, revisit expectations, boundaries, accountability, and goals.
- Take notes and document interactions, topics, recommendations, and progress.

Ending the Relationship

- Summarize what goals have been accomplished.
- Thank the other party for whatever you feel has been gained.

TABLE 6.2 Open-Ended Questions to Ask at First Mentoring Meeting

Questions to Ask of Each Other
What are you looking for in this mentoring relationship?
What do you hope to gain?
What can I do to support the way that you work or think?
How do you like to communicate and how would you like to be communicated with?
What do I need to know about you that will help make this mentoring relationship successful for you?
How long should we engage in this mentoring relationship? How will we know the mentoring relationship has come to an end?
From Mentor to Mentee
Why is this important to you?
What kind of support are you looking for specifically?
How do you learn best?
How do you like to be celebrated and acknowledged?
How can I help you create mileposts for your goals and timelines for when to meet them?
How else can I be of support to you?
From Mentee to Mentor
How can you best support me in reaching my goals?
How will you help me stay on track and assess whether I am achieving my goals?
What resources do you have available that could be of use to me?
Who can you connect me with that may help me in achieving my goals?
How have you helped someone with a similar issue?

for the mentor and mentee. However, due to the systemic issues within the veterinary profession that hamper adequate diversity in these demographic areas, finding someone with a match in identities and experiences may not be easy. In these instances, consider a mentor/mentee with dissimilar identities who shares perspectives and values. Although shared *surface-level diversity* (observable characteristics such as race, nationality, or perceived gender) may signal potential affiliation and connection, shared *deep-level diversity* (unobservable attitudes, worldviews, or problem-solving approaches) has been found to be a better predictor of mentee satisfaction.⁶⁰

Think Through Issues of Oppression and Privilege.

When considering mentorship of a mentee with a socially oppressed identity, mentors whose identities come from socially privileged backgrounds must share their worldviews and values with potential mentees. Doing so demonstrates cultural humility and awareness of knowledge gaps to foster trust and create psychological safety. When considering a mentor with a socially privileged identity, mentees with socially oppressed identities must ask questions that allow for exploration of shared attitudes, values, and the emotional intelligence of their potential mentors. If the prospective mentor agrees to it, mentees can request discussion of relevant topics related to social identity, such as systemic racism, discrimination, proactive pronoun use, and so on. They may also encourage the mentor to obtain particular training or take certain assessments such as the Harvard Implicit Association Test.⁶¹

Finding a Mentor or Mentee

Use these standard methods for finding your mentoring options.

Research Existing Programs. Although many more programs focus on supporting veterinarians, programs that include veterinary support staff continue to grow. Start with researching existing programs (find a list of programs under the Resources section at aaha.org/mentoring).

Consider Existing Relationships and Networks. Existing relationships and networks offer a convenient and relational way to start a search. Whether you recently

entered the veterinary workforce or already work in a practice, asking colleagues and peers about their mentorship experiences or connections within the profession widens the opportunities and increases the number of potential mentors/mentees available to you.

Find a Mentor Within Your Workplace. It can be helpful to have both a mentor outside of your workplace and a mentor within the workplace. If you are seeking a job and searching for a good mentor within a practice, be sure to ask questions during the interview process regarding what mentoring structures are in place in the workplace. If you are currently working in a workplace that does not have a structured mentorship program, ask if you can create a more formal structure for mentorship and set up a formal mentoring relationship with someone in the workplace.

Learn About Your Potential Mentor/Mentee. A quick internet search provides early insight into your prospective mentor/mentee’s experience, skills, values, and interests. Consider looking for associated personal or work-related websites; personal, professional, and academic biographies; and resumes. In addition, meeting your prospective

TABLE 6.3 Open-Ended Questions to Keep the Conversation Moving Forward

Examples of Open-Ended Questions
What did you do well in that situation?
What is it about ___ that is important to you?
Can you say more about that?
How might ___ change your perspective, decision, action?
What would happen if...?
What would be the impact of ___ on you, others, etc.?
Have you considered ___?
What more is there to learn from ___ for you?

mentor/mentee before committing to the relationship helps determine if the match feels right and beneficial.

Initiate a Mentoring Relationship

The Ask. When you find a mentor or mentee who seems like a good match for your needs, the process of establishing a mentorship starts with simply asking. Ask in person to set up some time to meet to discuss a potential mentoring relationship or inquire via email. Share your interests and needs, keeping in mind potential time demands on you both. Ask the mentor/mentee about their interest in entering a mentoring relationship with you.

Reframe potential rejection by understanding it is not personal. To find the best mentoring fit, be prepared to look for multiple options. People decline for many reasons, including time constraints, energy and emotional capacity, interest in the process (or not), and readiness.

Saying No. If you find yourself in the position of declining a mentorship request, consider the following.

As a mentor:

- Be honest about your interest, capacity, or time.
- Do not say yes if you have any qualms. Instead, be mindful of the potential negative impact of a poor mentoring relationship on the mentee.
- Share honest feedback about why this relationship may not work.

As a mentee:

- Assess why you are being asked to be their mentee: Does this mentor have your best interests in mind? What is the benefit to them?
- Be mindful of power dynamics and their impact on you. For example, you may feel uncomfortable with your boss or workplace manager making the request and assuming a yes. It is important to maintain professionalism and respect when you decline such an offer, noting your inability or unwillingness to engage in the relationship at this time. Depending on your relationship, sharing honest feedback regarding your denial is an option, but remember that setting compassionate and firm boundaries for yourself is important.

TABLE 6.4 Identifying and Addressing the Mentee’s Professional Concerns and Fears

Typical Questions, Concerns, or Fears (Use as a Basis for Discussion of Goals)
Effective time management at work
How often are appointments scheduled?
What if I am too slow seeing appointments, obtaining a history, or performing a diagnostic or medical treatment?
How much time do I have to perform surgeries?
How can I provide timely and efficient treatments for patients while ensuring thorough, quality care?
What do I do if I need more time to perform a task?
How can I be more efficient with my paperwork?
Client relations issues
How do I deal with difficult client interactions, such as clients in a fee dispute, clients who refuse my recommendations, or clients who leave me a bad review?
What if my looks, age, or title/position play a role in client questions about education, experience, or competence?
What if a client makes a biased or derogatory comment about me or a colleague? How do I take a professional and principled approach to that when communicating with clients?
What can I do to support a client who cannot afford my recommendations?
How do I best communicate with clients to encourage compliance?
How can I most thoughtfully communicate serious medical concerns with clients?
How can I support clients in an affective emotional state, for example, if their pet has a serious medical issue or chronic illness?
What if my recommendation for palliative care or euthanasia is not accepted by the client and I believe the patient is suffering?
What do I do if I believe a patient’s wellbeing is at risk from neglect or abuse?
Personal issues
How can I manage debt or a low salary?
How can I balance work and family?
What can I do if I do not have enough time for my family?
What do I do if I need an accommodation and it is refused?
How do I notice, prevent, and manage burnout or challenging ethical situations?
What do I do if a hospital policy goes against my personal values or ethics?

(Continued on next page)

TABLE 6.4 Identifying and Addressing the Mentee’s Professional Concerns and Fears, Continued

Team or hospital issues
How do I develop trust and rapport with my colleagues and clients?
What if I disagree with hospital policy, and how can I make my concerns heard?
How do I learn to get along with the practice team?
How do I address a difficult relationship with a long-standing team member?
What if I am not getting along with the practice owner or manager?
What if I have an ethical concern about a colleague’s behavior toward a patient?
What if I experience bullying or isolation/exclusion by a colleague or someone in a position above mine?
What can I do if I hear a colleague make a disrespectful remark about another colleague, or I am asked to engage in gossip?
How can I best support a colleague who is struggling with their mental health or negative team dynamics?
How can I best advocate for myself, my community, colleagues, clients and patients, and for improvements in process, pay, or policy?
How can I leverage my social privilege or position to support colleagues whose concerns or ideas are not being heard or whose needs are not being met?
What are some actions I can take to positively influence workplace culture?
Proficiency issues
How do I manage doubt and stress as a practitioner?
How can I increase my confidence in my skills and knowledge?
Will I be by myself? If so, when?
Will someone be available by phone when I am by myself?
How will I learn to perform new surgical procedures or treatments?
What if something bad happens during anesthesia?
What do I do if I make a medical or surgical error?
How do I handle the unexpected loss of a patient?
How do I admit I do not know something without feeling like a failure or like I am not good enough?
I am interested in eventually owning my own veterinary hospital. What do I need to know?

Preparing for Before, During, and After Mentoring Conversations

Refer to Table 6.1 for an in-depth checklist on how to prepare for your first official mentorship meeting and Table 6.2 for open-ended questions relevant to the first meeting. However, these guidelines for meeting preparation apply to all future mentoring meetings too.

Be Prepared. Think about the meeting beforehand and plan ahead what to discuss. Consider sending an agenda in advance and share any relevant updates from your last conversation.

Consider the Proper Setting and Location. What is important to both parties? Different people feel varying levels of comfort about where mentorship conversations take place. Whereas some mentors/mentees prefer to meet in a formal setting, such as an office or a virtual meeting, others opt for casual, public settings, such as a coffee shop.

Be Present. Communicate how you enter the conversation and what your emotional bandwidth or availability is. Consider establishing short phrases, a shared shorthand, for conveying your mental and emotional status. For example, use traffic light colors or 1–10 scales to score and communicate your status at the beginning of each meeting. Then, offer your undivided attention, listen to understand rather than react to the individual's experiences, and leave space for the conversation to flow organically so that both parties, especially the mentee, can speak.

Be Accountable. Follow up on points of discussion, share resources, and make personal/professional connections. Be mindful of overpromising—do not offer resources, connections, or actions without proper follow-through because this causes setbacks to the mentee's goals and can damage trust.

Show Gratitude. Always thank each other for the time, energy, and commitment.

Assess How the Relationship Is Going

In addition to safety and other concerns covered in Section 5, it is important to evaluate if mentorship relationships still provide value.

Assess Effectiveness and Goals. Check in frequently with your mentor/mentee to determine whether mentee goals are being met.

Clarify Agreements. If necessary, revisit expectations, boundaries, accountability, and goals originally set for the mentorship relationship communication and progress.

Consider Key Markers. Detach from personal and emotional contexts and determine markers for the mentee's professional or developmental progress. Is the relationship meeting professional quality-of-life metrics? In other words, is the mentee not only meeting their goals but also thriving professionally and developmentally because of the mentorship relationship?

Keep Track. Take notes and document interactions, topics, recommendations, and progress in the event of disputes.

How to End a Mentoring Relationship

Set up clear and amicable cessation points to include when:

- Mentee's goals set forth in the mentoring relationship have been achieved
- Mentee's needs or career goals change
- Either person's life situation limits time and energy for the mentoring relationship

It is especially crucial to create a timeline for your mentoring relationship that has a clear date at which point you are able to either end or continue the relationship if both parties agree. That way, if either party feels a collaborative partnership no longer exists or never formed, you will be able to end the mentorship relationship more easily.

If you need to end the relationship before the predetermined end date, particularly if there are conflicts arising in the mentoring relationship, refer to the conflict management framework in Section 5 to assist you in your discussion.

Without forethought on how to end the relationship, risks for potential damage are high—ranging from hurt feelings to more serious consequences such as loss of interest in the field or leaving the profession altogether.

Best practices include being direct and positive about coming to the end of a mentorship relationship, using strategies such as the following:

- Frame decisions to move on as “I” statements, focusing on one’s own feelings (e.g., “I feel concerned about...” or “I feel frustrated...”)
- Summarize what goals have been accomplished
- Thank the other party for whatever you feel has been gained
- Respect boundaries and the other party’s wish to end the relationship
- Disengage with the other party and express gratitude
- Lastly, as the veterinary profession is large yet small at the same time, do not burn bridges. Although this connection ran its current course, it may add value to future endeavors.

Good mentorship programs require intentional dedication of resources, skills, and time as well as frequent evaluation and innovation.

Create and Evaluate a Mentoring Program in Your Workplace

Do Not Reinvent the Wheel. Learn from existing mentorship programs and constructs and consider outsourcing skills development. Evaluate why you want to offer mentorship at work. Good mentorship programs require intentional dedication of resources, skills, and time as well as frequent evaluation and innovation. What is your organization’s and your employees’ capacity to mentor? How will you support implementation and measure success and benefits to staff?

Make the Time. Build in scheduled mentorship time to ensure the time is protected and that it occurs. Consider scheduling time for mentorship similar to how rounds are scheduled. Or make mentorship time a priority by advocating for continuing education credit for mentorship in your state.

Section 7. Summary and Next Steps

Mentoring offers hope for creating a healthier, more diverse, and more inclusive veterinary community with greater opportunities for growth and advancement for team members in all roles, not only veterinarians.

Top 6 things to remember about mentorship:

Mentorship exists when one person aids the development of another using their personal knowledge, energy, and time. Mentoring relationships remain important, especially at career transitions, and take a variety of forms to meet the needs of the individuals involved.

Veterinary medicine faces many challenges, and mentorship addresses some of these challenges by supporting mental health and wellbeing, increasing representation of underrepresented groups (BIPOC, LGBTQIA+, etc.), and providing financial benefits to veterinary workplaces.

Effective mentorship benefits everyone—mentees, mentors, individual practices, and the veterinary profession. These benefits include, but are not limited to, increased self-confidence, creating a broader network, increased career satisfaction, building support networks, increased productivity, improved retention, and more.

Mentoring relationships require trust, respect, and open communication between participants. Mentees should be proactive and goal oriented. Mentors should focus on creating a positive environment and an effective mentorship experience.

Successful mentoring relationships define boundaries, set clear expectations, and establish psychological and physical safety.

Key steps to effective mentoring relationships include thoughtful mentor/mentee selection, access to mentors/mentees, evaluation and continued re-evaluation, and troubleshooting when the relationship is not working.

Next Steps

These guidelines provide a starting point as you consider creating or re-evaluating a mentoring relationship or program. Seek and use many other existing resources to improve your individual mentoring relationships and the entire profession in the process. More in-depth mentorship training programs exist along with training in specific areas such as DEIB, implicit bias, mental health and wellbeing, and others. The Mentoring Guidelines task force strongly encourages all readers to leverage the list of resources at aaha.org/mentoring to learn more.

Effective mentoring and ongoing growth require evaluation of mentorship relationships and/or programs. Regular evaluation and level-setting provides critical insights, not only at the beginning of a relationship but also throughout the process. Evaluation and feedback ensure everyone's needs are met and the relationship and/or program continues to offer benefits to all those involved.

Effective mentorship is essential to ongoing improvement for veterinary professionals, the veterinary profession itself, and the dynamic communities we serve. As you look to implement these guidelines, whether as a mentor or a mentee (or both!), remember that learning and continued growth drive effective relationships and successful veterinary professionals. ■

Glossary

Advising—To recommend or suggest a course of action. Typically focused on an outcome or goal of a specific event or process.

Belonging—A feeling of being happy or comfortable as part of a particular group and having a good relationship with the other members of the group because they welcome you and accept you.⁶²

Coaching—Aiding the coached individual on achieving a specific goal or mastery of a task.

Critical mentorship—Mentoring that fully considers race, ethnicity, gender, class, and sexuality when building the infrastructure for programs. Includes programmatic structure, recruiting of mentors, training of mentors, support of mentoring relationships, mentoring activities, and finally, targeted outcomes.

Cultural humility—Defined as “a process of reflection and lifelong inquiry, involves self-awareness of personal and cultural biases as well as awareness and sensitivity to significant cultural issues of others.”⁶³

Discrimination—The unjust or prejudicial treatment of different categories of people, especially on the grounds of race, age, or sex.⁶⁴

Diversity—The practice of involving people from a range of different dimensions including, for example, social backgrounds, ethnic backgrounds, gender identities, and sexual orientations.⁶⁵

Equity (Racial)—The goal of racial equity is to no longer be able to predict advantage or disadvantage by race, achieved not by treating everyone equally but by treating everyone equitably, or justly according to their differing circumstances.⁶⁶

Imposter syndrome—A phenomenon experienced by “high achievers who are unable to internalize and accept their success. They often attribute their accomplishments to luck rather than to ability, and fear that others will eventually unmask them as a fraud.”⁶⁷

Implicit bias—A form of bias that occurs automatically and unintentionally, which nevertheless affects judgments, decisions, and behaviors.

Inclusion—Behaviors and social norms that ensure people feel welcome.

Macroaggressions—Forms of discrimination that rise above the interpersonal level to the systemic or institutional level and affect entire groups of people instead of an individual.⁶⁸

Microaggressions—According to Dr. Derald Wing Sue, these are “the everyday slights, indignities, put downs and insults that people of color, women, LGBTQIA+ populations or those who are marginalized experience in their day-to-day interactions with people.”⁶⁹

Power dynamics—The ways in which power works in a setting; for example, certain individuals may have formal power, due to title and position, and/or informal power, due to their influence over others.⁷⁰

Privilege—Certain social advantages, benefits, or degrees of prestige and respect that an individual has by virtue of belonging to certain social identity groups.⁷¹

Psychological safety—Defined by a belief that one is safe to take interpersonal risks or otherwise be interpersonally vulnerable.⁵⁹

Racism—Prejudice, discrimination, or antagonism directed against a person or people on the basis of their membership in a particular racial or ethnic group, typically one that is marginalized.⁷²

Radical candor—A direct form of feedback that is done in a kind, humble, and direct manner that focuses on helping the other person.⁵⁰

Stereotype threat—The fear or risk of confirming, as a self-characteristic, a negative stereotype about one’s group.⁷³

Work-life balance—The level of involvement between the multiple roles in a person’s life, particularly as they pertain to employment and family or leisure activities.⁷⁴

Case Studies

CASE STUDY 1

As a new veterinary graduate, you recently started working at Smith Veterinary Hospital—a five-doctor, small animal veterinary hospital. Before graduation, you completed a 3-week externship at this clinic and really enjoyed your experience. Dr. Smith, the practice owner who brings more than 30 years of veterinary experience, promised great mentorship in your transition to practice. However, after a few months in practice, you realize how busy Dr. Smith is, which keeps him from providing the mentorship you expected.

After only 5 months in practice, you already feel the early symptoms of burnout—exhaustion, cynicism, and lack of accomplishment—because you work long hours, experience conflicts with team members, and frequently face challenging ethical dilemmas such as when clients cannot afford your recommended treatment plans.

When you ask Dr. Smith questions about these situations, he often seems rushed, and his answers do not help you navigate these situations better. On top of all that, although you feel somewhat confident in your medical skills, you feel less confidence in surgery. When you mention in passing that you need additional surgical mentorship, Dr. Smith asks you to come in on your day off to observe surgeries. Finally, you often experience discrimination from clients based on your age, race, and gender. As a young Black woman, you feel uncomfortable discussing these experiences with Dr. Smith because you believe he will not understand or relate.

At this point, you start to question your career choice because this was not what you expected veterinary medicine to be like. So, you decide to take action. It is time to seek help—from both individuals within your current practice and external resources.

Case Study 1 Questions

When you set aside time to chat with Dr. Smith about the mentorship relationship, what important components will you include in feedback to your mentor?

Sample answer:

- You decide to start with a positive statement. This allows Dr. Smith to feel more open and less defensive about your feedback. See Pendleton Model for providing feedback in Table 4.1. Then, list your needs and wants and discuss your biggest pain points such as time management, interpersonal relationships, surgical skills, and/or work-life balance. Next, list a few specific goals for the mentoring relationship and ask what additional resources might be available to you, including outside mentorship or mentorship from others within the clinic. Perhaps Dr. Smith is not the best mentor for you, and you could seek formalized mentorship with one of the other veterinarians in the practice.

If you think you really need a more formalized mentorship structure, what might this structure look like for you in your current role?

Sample answer:

- Discuss establishing a verbal or written agreement with your mentor that clarifies roles and responsibilities and documents a few goals for the mentoring relationship. Also, consider scheduling future formal check-in times that give you an opportunity to discuss your progress toward pre-determined goals for the relationship and your professional progress. Setting an end date to re-evaluate the relationship can also be helpful.

If you decide you do not get the support you need from Dr. Smith, who else might provide additional mentorship and where can you find other mentors?

Sample answer:

- Dr. Smith may not be able to provide help in all the

components listed above. You could seek mentors from others within the practice (e.g., veterinarians or technicians) or seek external mentorship (e.g., external mentorship programs, affinity organizations, VMAs, networking events at conferences, or LinkedIn).

What kind of boundaries should you put on the mentorship relationship?

Sample answer:

- Dr. Smith asked you to come in on your day off to observe surgeries. Not willing to do that, especially because you already feel symptoms of burnout? It is acceptable to state your boundary clearly with Dr. Smith about not coming to observe surgeries on your day off.

CASE STUDY 2

You took on the practice ownership challenge more than 20 years ago. Your practice could support four doctors, but you only keep three on staff currently. Why? Trouble recruiting and retaining veterinarians as well as technicians and support staff. The last three new graduate veterinarians you hired worked for you for around 2 years each and then left. You also experience low retention with technicians and support staff, where they rarely stay beyond 3 years. Several assistants say they want to pursue training as a technician, but none ever follow through or complete a program. Multiple employees report burnout as contributing to their leaving the practice or the profession as a whole. No other specific issues come up from current or former employees. Right now, you run no formal mentorship programs or protocols in your practice, but you feel establishing mentorship in your practice could improve these issues.

Case Study 2 Questions

What is the current state of mental health and wellbeing within the profession and what factors might contribute to these early career graduate's challenges?

Sample answer:

- Stress levels are higher for early career veterinarians than the rest of the profession. In addition, burnout rates and wellbeing appear worse among early career veterinarians. Many factors contribute to early career challenges, including student debt, ethical dilemmas, conflict, and lack of support.

What actions could you take to support the mental health and wellbeing of your team members?

Sample answers:

- Create a formalized mentorship program.
- Model and encourage healthy work-life balance strategies.
- Respect boundaries of team members.
- Establish psychological safety, especially for marginalized groups.
- Offer QPR training.
- Offer wellbeing and mental health resources to your staff.
- Set boundaries with clients and model the real-world maintenance of those boundaries.

How can you solicit feedback from your current and former team members? How can power dynamics affect this feedback?

Sample answers:

- Consider anonymous surveys to collect input.
- Always complete exit interviews with the understanding you will not pressure employees to stay.
- Create a culture in which feedback is valued and welcomed in all aspects of practice.
- Focus on being more approachable.

You decide to create a formal mentorship program to try to improve team wellbeing. What might the structure of this program look like and where might you seek resources to help you build out your mentorship program?

Sample answers:

- Leverage existing mentorship programs for external support and consider outsourcing if you are too busy to create a structured program.
- For internal support, consider creating a paired mentor structure in which you pair a new hire with someone more experienced in the practice.
- Build scheduled mentorship time into the schedule to ensure the time is protected and that it occurs.
- Give tools and resources to the mentors and mentees to make the relationship successful (see Resources at aaha.org/mentoring).

What practices and policies can you implement in your mentorship program to ensure it is equitable and inclusive for people with marginalized identities?

Sample answers:

- Learn about and implement critical mentorship and DEIB training for yourself and employees.
- Understand that your advice may not work for people with different identities or styles.
- Demonstrate cultural humility.
- Seek outside advice from a consultant on these issues.

What can you do if your mentee needs help or advice for something with which you have no first-hand experience?

Sample answers:

- Recognize gaps in your knowledge and proactively seek knowledge and resources.
- Leverage your network for resources or additional mentors.
- Look for other support options such as through affinity organizations.
- Pursue additional training in DEIB such as those

available through the Purdue Certificate for Diversity and Inclusion, MCVMA webinars and other affinity organizations, DEIB workshops at conferences, and QPR training.

How can you ensure your mentorship program also incorporates technicians and support staff?

Sample answers:

- Consider peer mentorship, which may address power dynamics better.
- Set clear definitions of scope of roles, including how to handle both being delegated to and delegating to others.
- Offer similar resources to new technician program graduates that you offer to new graduate veterinarians, including more time to accomplish tasks, providing specific learning opportunities, scheduling outside training, finding other continuing education support, and setting up regular check-ins.

CASE STUDY 3

You work as the head veterinary technician at your practice. You bring 10 years of experience and a love of teaching. Your practice often takes on veterinary students and veterinary technician students for externships to expose them to the robust exotic medicine at your practice. As part of your role as lead technician, you help teach these students both technical and client communication skills. The practice sits in a large metropolitan area with very diverse clientele, and your practice invests a lot of time building an inclusive environment to serve the entire local community. As a queer person, the inclusive environment is important to you and something you actively work to improve and maintain in the practice. This includes posting information about continuing education and DEIB

coursework (AVMA's Brave Space Certificate Program, Purdue Certificate for Diversity and Inclusion in Veterinary Medicine, Project Implicit, etc.), actively using preferred pronouns, displaying gender-neutral bathroom signage, and posting the Gender Identity Bill of Rights.

Among your current group of externs and one of your mentees is a veterinary student, Jay, who has very little experience interacting with clients of different backgrounds and/or social/gender or sexual orientations from himself. You often see him get flustered talking to clients. A long-term client pulled you aside and expressed concerns about Jay's communication after he misgendered their partner and did not understand when the client tried to explain their pronouns. In addition, another technician said certain clients sometimes appear confused or rushed after Jay talks with them, and Jay often seems very stressed after talking to certain clients. When you try to talk to Jay about it, he says he is ok with other people's "lifestyle choices" as long as he does not have to hear about it. Jay says he wants to be respectful, though, and as an alternative to using pronouns, he will note the clients' names before entering the room and use those instead. Jay apologizes to you and says he did not mean to offend anyone. He says that just "isn't the way he was raised" and that he respects you and your leadership. In consultation with the practice owner and practice manager, you decide to address client communication around sexual orientation and gender identity with Jay.

Case Study 3 Questions

What power dynamics and aspects of privilege are involved in this situation?

Sample answers:

- Mentor-mentee relationship
- Future doctor to staff relationship

- Jay's privilege as a cisgender, heterosexual male
- The doctor/veterinary student/client relationships

What are important points to remember from a mentor's perspective for difficult conversations?

Sample answers:

- Maintaining trust between mentor and mentee
- Establishing boundaries in the relationship and the conversation
- Providing psychological safety for mentor and mentee
- If the mentee engages in inappropriate behavior that strays into discrimination, then they require correction.
- Using conflict management strategies, including listening to hear, not to respond, honest communication, giving space for processing, etc.

What additional resources could you provide Jay?

Sample answers:

- Resources recommended under the Resources tab at aaha.org/mentoring.
- AVMA Brave Space
- Gender Identity Bill of Rights
- Project Implicit
- Kirwan Institute Implicit Bias Training Modules
- Why Pronouns Matter

What would be a line-crossing interaction in this communication from the mentee? When do you no longer have a responsibility to try to understand?

Sample answers:

- Refusing to respect established boundaries
- Unwilling to learn and accept criticism
- Refusing to respect the gender identity of coworkers and clients despite education and correction on the topic
- Displaying nonverbal actions that still telegraph discrimination against coworkers or clients

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