Developing and Optimizing Your Mentor Relationships

Session Transcript: 2022-2023 Grants Conference

Ericka Boone, PhD: Alright. Hello, everyone. Thank you all for joining today's panel discussion focusing on optimizing mentoring relationships. My name is Ericka Boone. I'm currently serving as a Director for the Division of Biomedical Research Workforce, and I will be serving as your moderator for today. Thank you all for joining us for today's panel session. I'm super excited to host this powerhouse panel today. Not only are they highly knowledgeable about the topic, but as you will see, they're also very passionate about mentoring and assisting others in developing life-changing mentoring relationships. This was a logistics slide that I forgot to show you. Here we go with the title of the webinar. Here are our wonderful panelists. So I'd like to extend a hearty welcome to Ms. Rosalina Bray, who is the NIH Extramural Staff Training Officer within the Office of Extramural Research, Nicole Redmond, who is Branch Chief .. .

Person: [Indistinct]

Ericka Boone, PhD: Sorry, I can hear you for the tech people in the background. Thanks so much. Dr. Nicole Redmond, who's Branch Chief of the Clinical Applications and Prevention at the National Heart, Lung and Blood Institute or NHLBI. Sorry about that. Then there's also Dr. Melissa Green Parker, Scientific Advisor and Research Implementation Monitor with the Office of Disease Prevention. Before we get started, I wanted to just show everyone about the value or talk to people very generally about the value of mentorship and show some career success and mentorship statistics. So, as you see here on the screen, it indicates that of those individuals with a mentor, 97 percent say that their relationship with their mentor is of value to them while only 37 percent of professionals have a mentor. Eighty-seven percent of mentors and mentees feel empowered by their mentoring relationships and have developed greater confidence, and those who serve as mentors are six times more likely to be promoted. So not only does mentoring build skills and opportunity and networks for those who are being mentored, but there's also benefit for individuals who are mentoring themselves. I'm sure that all of us can recall mentoring relationships that we are a part of, whether we have been the mentor or the mentee, and we can definitely attest to the value that it brought to our experience, to our opportunities, to our new jobs and helping us to expand our networks, so we're going to talk a bit about that today. Here are our panel discussion topics. We're going to start off with the ABCs of mentoring. What's the difference between mentorship, sponsorship and coaching? There are so many different words that are used to describe what mentoring is, but I think that having a discussion about the ABCs of it and the fundamentals will be very useful to our session today. Then next is, are you seeking mentorship? What are some of the things that you should be keeping in mind? Now, for those mentors, before you say yes and you say, "I do," what should you, as a mentor, be keeping in mind? We'll also talk about structural barriers to positive mentoring relationships, and I'm not really sure that people really spend time thinking about how to overcome some of those, and finally, we will be wrapping up with resources. So we will start off with the ABCs of mentorship, and I'm going to turn this slide over to my colleague, Dr. Nicole Redmond.

Nicole Redmond, MD, MPH, FACP: Thank you so much, Dr. Boone. So I am happy to be here, and one of the things that I really wanted to emphasize is addressing the myth that you need a single mentor. A lot of people tend to think that their career development hinges on a single, all-encompassing person. I like to think of it as a Yoda, and in some cases, there are those rare instances where there is someone who can provide a diversity of advice and support, whether that's the subject matter expertise or methodologic experience or even some of the emotional support, but for the most part, most of us need a development network, and a developmental network consists of multiple social relationships that foster career development and personal growth, and it's a subset of their overall social network. And so these people in your developmental network are specific to your career development, and so here on this slide just illustrates some different aspects or different types of advisors that could be in your developmental network, a navigator, for example, might advise about organization dynamics, and this is the person who you might contact, especially, say, if you were joining an organization for the first time, and they help you understand some of the policies, the processes, things like if your in academia, promotion and tenure, the policies, for example. A sponsor is someone who also helps navigate organizational dynamics, but in a traditional sense helps someone identify opportunities, and they're the person who talks about you when you're not in a room and often promotes you to have new experiences and new opportunities. A coach is someone who helps you in your own personal development and is invested in helping you reflect on your own needs and then having them align with what you've learned about your organization and what's available to you. So these are all just examples of types of advisors. There could certainly be more than this, but the key take-home is that they all have different roles, and they're generally complementary. The other thing to think about is the needs of both the mentors and mentees, and so in this top graphic, you see that there's some shared needs of mentees and mentors, most importantly, clear expectations and trust, and then later in the presentation we'll talk a little more specifically about the specific needs and approaches that a mentee needs to have versus the needs of mentors and then how those come together to optimize the relationship between mentees and mentors. So this is a resource that is available to you that discusses this model, and so, again, some of these shared skills of building trust and identifying common goals and expectations, and then we'll get into some of the more mentee-specific skills in a bit. So for our mentees, when you're seeking mentorship, what are some things that you want to keep in mind? Frame-setting, defining goals, boundaries, expectations. So one of the first things I advise mentees do is to learn to manage yourself. So one of the most important things you have to do is that this is your career, so you're navigating, and so you really need to take ownership of managing yourself as an important part of that mentor/mentee relationship. First, you need to identify what are your mentoring needs and acquire the mentors. In some other settings, I've talked specifically about skills in networking and how to find mentors, and we can talk more about that in the Q and A. In being sure that these mentors have the availability and resources that align with your needs. You need to know yourself. What are your goals and values? What are you looking to achieve? What's your current level of knowledge, skills and abilities, and what are the gaps that you're looking to fill in the areas that are for strength and development? You also need to be prepared. So whenever you're engaging with a mentor or a colleague, you want to show that you've been mindful and you've viewed any materials they provided you and that you're ready to clearly articulate your goals and needs. We also appreciate quick learners. So observe. Integrate all the information you get, and then apply the new knowledge to your current task, and also request feedback and receive it in a non-defensive manner. Show initiative. Ask your questions to clarify and pursue additional resources, and then of course, follow through. Keep your agreements and then remember to persist through challenges and discouragement and provide updates to your mentor as any issues arise. Then once you manage yourself, you also have to take an active part in managing a relationship with your mentor. Again, the key thing is really identifying your goals and desired outcomes, and I want to highlight also revisiting. Sometimes a relationship evolves, and so what you needed out of the relationship, say, early on is going to change as you progress, and so maybe initially you needed to meet weekly, but now you've learned, and you're getting more independent, so maybe now you only need to meet monthly, for example. That leads into negotiating the duration of the mentorship and meeting frequency. Every person in your developmental network has a different role, and the time and investment that they have is going to align with that. Again, some people, you really just want information, and so it's a one-time whereas others you really want them to be around for a long time. So again, setting the agenda for when you meet and then also sometimes it's helpful to also follow up with a summary of the discussion and review of your action items. You should also negotiate how you want to get your feedback and what format, how formal or formal, and also know that there's different types of feedback. Some feedback you need as appreciation. "Hey, that was a good job, there. Appreciate your consistency today." Sometimes you need coaching. "Hey, I need help with how to do a task or learn a method, and so I need kind of more of the how-to." And then there's evaluation. "How am I doing relative to others? Am I excellent? Do I need work?" And so sometimes there's a misalignment in the types of feedback when you are looking for appreciation but they're giving you an evaluation, so sometimes making that explicit is helpful. And then lastly, establishing the preferred mode of communication, and this might vary in terms of the context, who the person is, the urgency, written versus oral. All of these should be discussed in terms of your preferences and your mentor's preferences, and be explicit about what those expectations are. And I think the key take-home around this is all of this needs to be reassessed and renegotiated. Once you make this agreement, you can always revisit and say, "Hey, maybe we have been communicating by e-mail, but I really need to have a phone call with you about this issue. Can we make time?" And so being able to advocate for yourself in particular places. And now I'll turn it back to Dr. Boone.

Ericka Boone, PhD: Thank you so much, and I'll turn my camera back on before I forget. So thank you so much, Dr. Redmond, for that. I really appreciate that. There are so many individuals that were in agreement with almost everything that you were saying within the chat itself because I asked folks about their own recommendations with regards to mentoring relationships, and what they said really did mirror a lot of what you said, but now that we've defined mentorship, we talked about shared needs and mentoring relationships and how to manage yourself as a mentee within the mentoring relationship, we're going to switch tracks just a little bit to focus on preparation for mentorship. So this is a topic that some think that you're born, right? So people think that you're born as a mentor, you were born as a good mentor, when really it's a relationship or it's a situation where you can grow in this area. Some people have certain qualities that might make them a good mentor, but we should all be seeking to grow our skills and capabilities. So let's talk a little bit more about that. We'll also talk about some barriers to mentorship. I'm going to turn this over to Dr. Melissa Green Parker.

Melissa Green Parker, PhD: Thank you, Ericka. The preparation that mentors should have is really confirm your experience and make sure that it aligns with the mentee's needs. Also be sure that you enhance your skills in providing constructive feedback because many times if the feedback isn't received in the way it was intended, it can cause stress and tension in your mentor relationship really unintentionally, and as a mentor, I think it's also very important that you introduce your mentee to new opportunities as well as new people, but in addition to that, really understanding some of these contextual factors that impact you as a mentor, your ability to have a positive and effective relationship with your mentee acknowledging that there really are some barriers, and in this presentation, these next few slides, I hope to outline just a few of the structural barriers that occur to mentoring, and these barriers, as you see on the slide, can permeate at many different levels. You can have individual barriers, terms of just incongruence with personalities, for example. The interpersonal barriers exist in the diad. Maybe it's just really not a good match, but there are also institutional and systemic barriers, and I'm going to focus on those given the time that we have today. Institutional barriers are those within the organization, and these can happen at the department level or institutional level, and then there are also systemic barriers, and these are barriers that are really sometimes just culturally accepted, socially accepted, but there are also some barriers that may occur because of policies that exist. In the institutional barriers, again we're talking about department and institution level, sometimes there just really is an absence of support for mentees, so as a mentor you're trying to build this strong relationship, but you don't have anywhere to point your mentee to. There aren't any locally established peer mentoring networks, for example, and so that encourages a little more pressure perhaps on the mentor. The choice and availability of mentors is also .. . can be very limiting, and again, it really is sometimes about a match and a good fit. Mentors themselves, it's almost a mindset, a narrative that once you've reached mentor status you don't need to educate yourself anymore on how to really enhance your own skills, and so as a result within the institution there can be an insufficient opportunity for mentors to enhance their education, and we're noticing and evidence suggests that especially mentoring education as it relates to best ways to address culturally responsive and inclusive mentoring practices. It's also a myth that once you're tenure, you don't need any additional formal training of mentoring, and so we could increase those opportunities. That would be great, and then there are also tremendous, I'm seeing some highlighted in the chat, tremendous mentoring programs that exist, but are we doing a good job of capturing what the return on investment of those programs has been? And so as a result there's a lack of best practices that exist at the organization. As it relates to systemic barriers, again ,those that are appearing just from social norm, there's some unwritten politics within academia, an unwritten hierarchal assessments that are made as a result perhaps of ranking in a department that come along with an inability to positively have an influence on a mentoring relationship. We have a lot of short-term mentoring opportunities. Let's just take residency for example. Are there really some structures in place that when that residency is over or that internship expires, how do you maintain that really strong mentoring relationship? There's nothing formally in place and those policies in place, so it really .. . The onus comes back upon the individuals within the mentoring relationship to carve that out. There also just few incentives for mentors. When you talk about time that it takes to really show up in the best light as a mentor, the institutions, and there aren't policies to say that, "Okay, you should get paid for this time, or you should get some kind of promotion recognition for the time that you have put into building this next generation and really serving as a great person for the mentee to lean on." And last but not least, unrecognized conflicts of interest. You have the same individuals who might be serving as your primary mentor for an award, and that person has several different mentees, but yet there's only one award that can be given out, and this person also serves as the reviewer on the committees. How do we wrestle with some of the conflicts of interest there and how to say that one mentee is better than the other? These relationships .. . They're not black and white, and there aren't really clear objectives to define mentoring success, but yet these are eligibility criteria for awards. So it just .. . These are some things that we're used to doing or we've seen over the years, but often they can show up and provide barriers to the relationship, but I want to make sure that I'm not leaving everything in this doom and gloom kind of mindset, so I acknowledge that there are some barriers, but mentoring success is happening. It happens all the time, and again, it takes an individual commitment for that success to occur, and that is combined with just some really strong interpersonal skills between both the mentor and the mentee. It's a two-way street. We want it to be a win-win for everybody, but last but not least, to have a successful mentoring relationship, the environment should support that, and I say encouraging environment, and I want to really emphasize that this is one that really acknowledges that there are professional aspects to the mentoring relationship, but there are some very personal or private aspects of mentoring, and organizations have to be able to recognize and honor both that professional and private space. So thank you, and I'll turn it back over to Dr. Boone.

Ericka Boone, PhD: Thank you so much, Doctors Green Parker, Redmond, and we're going to introduce Ms. Rosalina Bray in just 1 second. This was such an engaging conversation with regards to mentoring, whether it's from the perspective of the mentee or whether it's from the perspective of the mentor, which I think often doesn't get enough attention. I want to point the audience to a few resources that are available to seek mentoring information and resources, and this is one from teach.com, but also within the chat, our attendees have very graciously offered additional recommendations for resources on mentoring, one from the VALIDATE network, another from the American Academy of Science, which has a mentoring program. Also I wanted to point to the fact that NINDS has a podcast called "Building the Nerve," and this season is season three, and it's focused on everything related to mentoring. I love this podcast. I loved it from the very first season, and now that they're focusing on mentoring, I love it even more. So I think it's beansprout.com, something like that, but if you look on the NINDS website and you look up "Building the Nerve," you're going to find that information, and before today's session ends, I'm actually going to put that into the chat for you so that you can take advantage of that tremendous resource. Actually, Dr. Nicole Redmond also has a video that is a part of the resources from the 2021 NIH Grants Conference that is focusing on optimizing and building mentoring relationships, and she has a lot of recommendation and advice with regarding to networking. So I'm also going to put that link in the chat as well. So here are some additional YouTube, podcasts, e-books and tool kits that are available to help assist you with building your mentoring networks. Now, remember, you don't have to write this down. You don't have to screenshot. This is available as our resources for this conference. So you can download this any time, and you can replay this session as well. I want to say thank you for everyone that is attending. This is not .. . Well, while this is the last slide, we're also going to have a discussion. We have had a very active chat where our attendees have been inserting lots and lots of really great questions as well as great advice, and thank you to our tech staff for putting in the link for the NINDS "Building Up the Nerve" podcast link. So I want to start off with a few questions for our panel. Ms. Bray, I want to kind of put you on a hot seat real quick with regards to developing mentoring networks. So we talked a little bit about mentoring and from the .. . establishing mentoring relationships from the side of the mentee and the side of the mentor. Can you tell us a little bit more about how to set boundaries or frameworks or expectations? How did you go about doing that from when you were a mentee as well as how does that change from when you became a mentor? And also there was one question here in the chat that I want you to start with, and that was, when do you know within your career that you're ready to be a mentor?

Rosalina Bray, MSc, CEP: Thank you so much. I really enjoyed the presentation given by Doctors Melissa Green Parker and Dr. Redmond because my thoughts were about this question were already confirmed through their presentations. The first I would like to say about expectations. You need to know what your bringing to the table as a mentor, and as a mentee, what are your expectations of your mentor and to be clear about those. To be a mentor, you can be a peer mentor in every level. Once you've gone through a stage in your career, then you can tell someone else about how you got there, what you would have done differently and how they can move forward because you've navigated that lane. So your mentorship can happen after you've conquered, and I would expect that everyone would be able to share their experience. To answer your question about what mentees should do in setting expectations is aligned with what Dr. Redmond stated about know your goals. Know who you are. Know thyself because when you start asking others to assist you, they really need to know where your head space is, and if you haven't taken the time to determine where you want to go, it's going to be difficult for others to help you get there, and from the mentoring perspective, once you've mentored one or two people, you've got an idea of how well you communicate with others and also how we'll certain personalities or certain individuals respond to your mentorship. This helps you to frame an idea of what your best self will be when you bring your support, when you allow others .. . I mean when you're supporting others. So as a mentor, you have to also identify what works for you so that when you're discussing expectations you can share those up front as well.

Ericka Boone, PhD: We've heard a lot about .. . I am muted. We've heard this, you say, and Dr. Redmond say, know thyself, right? Can you guys hear me? Okay, great. How do you know yourself? How do you get to know yourself? How do you get to know what your strengths are and what you bring to the table? And this is for any of my panelists because the first time someone asked me to be a mentor, I was like, "Girl, what? I am still trying to figure out where the bathroom and the light switches are, so why would this person want for me to serve as their mentor?" And my best friend always says that people don't live their best life because they don't know what their true gifts and talents are. So how do you figure out who you are, and where do you start?

Rosalina Bray, MSc, CEP: I can take that one, but since I just spoke I'm going to allow someone else on the panel.

Nicole Redmond, MD, MPH, FACP: Yeah, that's a really interesting question, and I think to dovetail off of your comment, Ericka, is then I would ask that best friend. "Well, what do you see in me? What is it that you're seeing and that you're expecting?" And sometimes that's a good resource of getting that outside perspective, and then sort of owning that. So I think that's a start. But, yeah, I'm interested to hear what Ms. Bray has to say as well.

Rosalina Bray, MSc, CEP: Yeah, I was going to say, when you're in pursuit of anything, there are some commonalities in why you do things. Why are you doing this? You're pursuing it, but why? And that gives you some clues to who you are and where you want to go.

Ericka Boone, PhD: There's also the strength finder's tool that I think might be of interest, but I'm so sorry, Dr. Green Parker. Can you please go ahead?

Melissa Green Parker, PhD: Yeah, I'll just say, and this happened very recently just for me, many of you are familiar with the SWOT analysis, strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and threats. While it's commonly used in program management, I used it for myself and took the opportunity to do my own personal SWOT analysis. From my perspective, I wrote down, what are my strengths? What are my weaknesses? Where are there opportunities for me to grow, and what is really threatening my growth opportunities? And then once I had that in writing, I actually used it to get feedback from others to see if they could add to this, and this SWOT I now update every year because I'm growing. I'm changing, but it also helped me to gain the confidence to just say, "Hey, this is who I am. I'm not perfect. Here's where I can grow, and here it is in plain sight, black and white," and it gives me an opportunity to work at those, quote, unquote, weaknesses and threats on a regular basis, and it also gives me clarity that when I'm talking to somebody about what I know or think I can do, here's why I think I can do this, and because of other conversation, I probably got some confirmation.

Ericka Boone, PhD: I love that answer, Dr. Green Parker. First of all, knowing you personally, I know that you do this kind of work on yourself, so I love to speak with you because you do operate centrally from that core concept of this is who I am, and who you are can ebb and flow. It can grow over time, and I think that people overlook that, and they overlook some of their growing capabilities that they're incorporating as well. So I love the idea of that personal SWOT analysis. Let's change tracks just a little bit. There are some questions in the chat about, how do you find a potential mentor, especially if a person is a bit of a introvert? How do you .. . Well, let me back up 1 second. That's my next .. . Not the next question, but the next, next question. The first question is, do mentor relationships have to be long term, or can they be short term? Because we're all talking about growth and all these things that seem like they're going to take a long time. So can these mentoring relationships be short or long, and this was triggered by something that you said, Ms. Bray, about knowing what you want from out of a mentoring relationship. So do they have to be long? Can they be short? Can they be very finite and discreet, or do they all have to be long?

Rosalina Bray, MSc, CEP: Most mentoring relationships are for a shorter period of time. They won't be lifelong. However, that person has influenced some part of your life. So there are seasons to mentoring relationships. Some will last a lifetime, but they may not be every mentoring relationship that you would have. The key is whether or not this mentoring relationship, how did it impact you? Even if it was a failed mentor relationship because you're learning from that experience as well. But in that interim of time, you want to ensure that you know the purpose of that relationship, what went well, what did not go well, and as you go into additional mentoring and even coaching and coaching experiences, you want to ensure that you are fully present for that experience so that you're aware of when that relationship should end or how to move it forward.

Ericka Boone, PhD: Thank you so much for that. Now I want to go into this other question that I had about finding and approaching a mentor. How do you go about doing that?

Nicole Redmond, MD, MPH, FACP: I think I'll take that one, and so I think in the chat they dropped and it was mentioned that I have done this workshop in the past and focused a bit on those actual networking skills. So invite you to check out that YouTube, which goes into more detail, but briefly I think part of it, it does start with knowing yourself, and then I talk about kind of creating that elevator pitch: who you are, what your goals are and then what you envision to get out of that mentor relationship. So are you asking for information? Are you asking for advice? Are you asking for a resource? And so I think thinking up front about what your intention is, and then the actual logistics of reaching out, it's as simple as a Google search and an e-mail or an instant message to someone's LinkedIn just detailing all of those kind of key points, but I do provide some structure. In all publications there's always that contact information and an e-mail, and it's put there for you to use it. "Hello, I read your paper with great interest, and I'm also interested in X, Y, Z. I am looking for a method, a tool, a what-have-you." I think also leaving options. "I'm open to a call. I am open to learning more," and then that's when a mentor can then respond with what their availability and resources are, and a lot of times they might redirect you to someone else if they're not available, but that's the basics.

Ericka Boone, PhD: I appreciate that. Dr. Green Parker, there's a question in the chat that says, how do you go about connecting with mentors? So we'll start with Dr. Green Parker, and then we'll open it up to the other panelists. "How do you go about connecting with mentors with similar identities and backgrounds? So as a BIPOC early career investigator, most of my mentors in my topical area of expertise, autism, are white. They aren't many faculty of color at my institution. Ideally I'd have a BIPOC mentor who helps me with specific support related to surviving and thriving in academia." That sounds like a podcast, "Surviving and Thriving in Academia."

Melissa Green Parker, PhD: It does. Awesome question, and I know that there's an idea out here that people that look like you don't often exist in the spaces and places that you travel, but that's okay because in this world of Zoom and virtualness that has been so accepted in the past the several years, they don't have to be there to really understand you and some of the struggles that you have. So don't hesitate to, one, ask those mentors that you have at your disposal physically in front of you. Do they know individuals that they could recommend? But there are also just some great resources. Again, I saw some in the chat, but I know NIH has invested quite a bit of energy into the National Mentoring Network.

Ericka Boone, PhD: National Research Mentoring Network.

Melissa Green Parker, PhD: Yes, National Research Mentoring Network, NRMN. I was like, "I'm missing something."

Ericka Boone, PhD: Oh, they're on in the chat. They're like, "NRMN."

Melissa Green Parker, PhD: Yes, there it is. They would also be a great resource to start, and sometimes they are right in front of you and you didn't even know it. So .. . And, hey, here are all of us here too. So please don't hesitate to reach out to any one of us as well, but those would be a few places that I would start and just know it will grow exponentially from there.

Ericka Boone, PhD: Dr. Redmond.

Nicole Redmond, MD, MPH, FACP: Yeah, I'd like to reiterate that. This is why you need a network because, again, you might have someone that's really excellent in your area of science in autism, but what it sounds like is you're looking for maybe a broader social supporter around academia. That person may not be an autism researcher, but they might be someone familiar with the politics of your institution or familiar with just academia in that that would be complementary to the more scientific-specific expertise. So I think, again, thinking of just like a number of you are .. . might have PhDs or pursuing PhDs, and part of that is a committee, and when you form that committee they're all supposed to have complementary expertise and fill in very specific needs. So I would just want to reiterate you can find that person, but you might have to manage your expectations a bit, not to say that that person doesn't exist, but I think you can still get some value from someone who is close enough, but maybe is focused a little more specific on those broader contextual issues, even if they don't have your scientific expertise.

Ericka Boone, PhD: This is such a awesome, awesome panel discussion, and I wish we could keep it going for so much longer because there's so much more to talk about. I think I have three questions I want to get to real quickly. One question from out of the chat is, what's your advice to mentors from underrepresented groups, for example disabilities or people of color, who feel pressured to mentor every student from every minority group but aren't given time for that from their institutions? This is a topic that none of us are familiar with, right?

Melissa Green Parker, PhD: I'll say do it because you want to. If you're looking to mentor because you're going to receive something on the end, a cheerful giver is always going to rise to the top. So do what's in your capacity to do, and also, don't be afraid to say no.

Nicole Redmond, MD, MPH, FACP: And I think I would say that just like we've talked about in your developmental network as a mentee, I think there's also kind of the network of mentors. Don't be afraid to delegate some of that responsibility to your colleagues who have a responsibility to these underrepresented groups just like anyone else. Just because .. . So it might be that, "Hey, I'm here for maybe a more specific maybe contextual, but you really need to be going to this other mentor. May not culturally concordant with you, but it still has some value and experience that you can benefit from," so I think also building your network of mentors and encouraging your mentees to actually build a network.

Ericka Boone, PhD: Now, Dr. Green Parker, something that you just said really does launch into this next question really well. How do you .. . You have a mentor. They're giving you advice. How do you graciously accept advice but not necessarily follow it if it doesn't align with your goals? I'd like to also hear from Ms. Bray on this one, too. You don't want to offend your mentor, but you also shouldn't be expected to do everything they tell you to do. That's not a mentoring relationship, right?

Melissa Green Parker, PhD: Right. You're absolutely right. You want to be able to decline respectfully and be able to explain you've given some thought or maybe it's not the right time. You appreciate the advice. You will certainly hold onto it, but maybe right now is not the time to move forward in that direction, and I think the mentor will understand.

Ericka Boone, PhD: Ms. Bray?

Rosalina Bray, MSc, CEP: Yeah, I don't have anything to add to that. I think that's how it should work, and that should happen at the onset of talking about expectations. The mentor should say, "I'm going to advise you on certain things. You may do them. You may not. And choose to do that, and I respect your decision." That's something that's part of that building trust, that initial goal-setting expectation discussion.

Ericka Boone, PhD: That's why I pitched to you because I knew you were going to end on that note. So that was absolutely perfect. I do want to give you guys an opportunity for 30 seconds of, before we end, what's the best mentoring advice you've ever given or received? Or you can talk about the best opportunity, the best mentoring relationship you've had and what it brought to you.

Rosalina Bray, MSc, CEP: I'm going to start. I have several mentors, but the one that I'm most fond of is Dr. Anthony Rene. He spent over 52 years with the NIH, but before that he had a career with the Army. One of the things that he advised me on was to be very strategic and intentional about every direction and decision that I make regarding my career and my personal life because it will define me, and that was profound to me because then I stepped back from a number of opportunities and went forward with the ones that were best suited for where I was and where I wanted to go, and that's a big thing for most people, but it does say that you have to be very intentional.

Ericka Boone, PhD: Dr. Green Parker.

Melissa Green Parker, PhD: The best advice I received was, "You're going to get knocked down. Just don't hesitate to get back up."

Ericka Boone, PhD: I love that. Thank you so much. Dr. Redmond.

Nicole Redmond, MD, MPH, FACP: Yeah, I'm looking at the time, so I know we're near the end, but I would just concur, know yourself. Know also your limits. I think learning how to say no, but sometimes it's not just no. It's a defer. It's a delay. It's a delegate, and so I think those are some of those skills that fair well in these relationships.

Ericka Boone, PhD: I really appreciate your presence, Ms. Bray, Dr. Redmond, Dr. Green Parker. I have learned so much from you all today, and I love that our attendees today have been so willing to share with their own questions or their own experience and also their own suggestions and recommendations and share resources as well. I just want to end by saying, thank you all so very much. I also do want to say that I think that part of or the best way to enhance mentoring relationships, whether it's being a mentee or mentor, is something that each one of our panelists said, and that is to know yourself, and if you don't know what your strengths, what your gifts, what your things are that you can share with someone else as a mentor, ask someone else. They can tell you those things right off the top of their brain, but also consult strength finders or do a SWOT analysis. This is all about growth. It's all about sharing. It's all about learning and all about growing and giving that gift to someone else.