Things to Consider When Choosing a Mentor

Based on an AAPS Education (now SPOD) Committee roundtable at our 2003 Annual Meeting & Exposition in Salt Lake City, UT, we’ve developed the following tips to help you find the right mentor for your needs. Graduate students, postdocs, academics and industry representatives participated in the forum.

Keys to Successful Mentoring Relationships:

- Mutual respect
- Trust and confidentiality
- Commitment to the relationship
- Willingness to learn
- Established, and common vision
- Maintaining professionalism through interactions

What to Keep in Mind:

- Mentoring is a dynamic and complex, often life-long, relationship. Choosing a mentor can be one of the biggest decisions a graduate student can make.
- A mentor should be a good listener and non-judgmental.
- Mentors should ask logical questions that lead you to your own conclusions instead of providing you with answers.
- It is up to you to recognize which qualities you respect in a mentor.
- When looking for a job, be sure to ask the interviewer about the organization’s philosophy on mentoring.
- It is ok to have cultural differences in mentor/mentee relationship.
- Keeping in contact with classmates from graduate school can be important in creating co-mentoring groups among peers.
- Some of the most effective mentorships are non-directed, informal relationships.

Managing Your Expectations:

- Advisors don’t necessary make good mentors.
- Don’t try to emulate your mentor. Ultimately, the decisions you make are your own.
- Mentors may not cover all aspects of your life or serve every roll.
- Be aware that hierarchy in a company/industry setting can make mentoring roles confusing.
- There is no such thing as a bad mentoring experience. Even a “bad” mentor helps you to determine how you want to grow personally and professionally.