One of my favorite definitions of mentoring is “a formal relationship between an individual with significant experience (mentor) and another (mentee) where each develops professionally through the transfer of experience and the opportunity to seek alternative perspectives.” I very much respect this definition because it focuses on the benefit incurred by both the mentor and the mentee, which is not usually what many of us expect out of mentoring. Some tend to think of mentoring as a one-way process benefiting only the receiver who, in this case, is the mentee. However, mentoring benefits both parties (the mentor and the mentee) regardless of variability in educational level, years of experience, gender, age, management style, and personal goals. It provides a wonderful opportunity to exchange information, build trust, share opportunities, and allow for long-term interaction.

When I first joined the mentoring program, I recognized the vast power of relationships in clinical specialty practice, in business and marketing, in research, in policymaking, and in social and personal life. To me, mentoring operates at three main levels and those include personal and professional enrichment, practice enhancement and professional advancement. They all involve a unique process of growth through which education and motivational support is offered, including social experiences. Mentors are supportive and can give social approval to your initiatives, helping you achieve self-esteem and self-fulfillment. Do not look for a magic cure from a mentor. A mentor should give you a perspective of how to enhance performance and leaning. A mentor can help you to:

- Develop new insights.
- Maintain focus on personal and professional goals.
- Tap into personal strengths.
- Enhance professional relationships.
- Build confidence in your skills.
- Enhance your expertise in specialty areas.

The nutrition field is continuously changing. Prepare yourself for success. Sharing ideas though mentoring can enhance your effort to stay ahead of the curve. Do it for yourself!

QUESTIONS TO ASK YOUR MENTOR

- What is your training and experience?
- With whom have you worked?
- How did you get to where you are at now?
- What is your philosophy or approach to mentoring?
- How will you assess my skills and needs?
- How will you measure my progress?

MY SELF-MENTORING BOOKSHELF

The Heart of Mentoring: Ten Proven Principles for Developing People to Their Fullest Potential — by Robert Tamasy, David A. Stoddard

In the Heart of Mentoring, you will see that sharing your life with others is the most rewarding gift you can give—and the most satisfying gift you can receive.

Making the Most of Being Mentored: How to Grow from a Mentoring Partnership— by Gordon F. Shea,

Focuses on mastering the knowledge, skills, and practices of successful mentors. Offers exercises, information, and self-study activities for those who would like to be mentored.

The Art of Mentoring: Lead, Follow and Get Out of the Way— by Shirley Peddy

Anyone looking for advice or looking to advise another will find it an indispensable reference.

My Mentoring Diary— Ann Ritchie and Paul Genoni

Provides an introduction to mentoring, emphasizes the importance and value of a learning journal, and provides space to record thoughts, ideas and actions associated with a mentoring relationship.

The Mentoring Advantage: Creating the Next Generation of Leaders— by Florence Stone

You will learn how to spot raw talent and mold others toward achieving growth and excellence, so they come away from the experience feeling better about themselves and what they do.

Be Your Own Mentor: Strategies from Top Women on the Secrets of Success— by Sheila Wellington

Women learn key strategies for propelling their own advancement.