

How to write a winning nomination for the *Leading Mentor in Cancer Prevention* award

Evaluating a Mentor's Role as Teacher, Coach, and Sponsor

A good mentor helps his or her trainee in many different ways. The mentor might help a trainee refine an experimental design, encourage the trainee when he or she is struggling, or take the trainee to important scientific meetings and introduce him or her to senior colleagues to help build the trainee's professional network. In thinking about how to nominate a mentor for the Leading Mentor award, think about many aspects of your relationship. Even though you might see all of these qualities as simply the normal attributes of a "teacher," your nomination will be richer and more developed if you distinguish them, where possible. Of course there will be gray areas where these qualities overlap—don't worry about that. The best approach is to write as many different types of specific examples of how your mentor has fulfilled his or her role as possible. Also, *the most successful nominations usually include several brief stories of real events that illustrated these qualities.*

You can think about the three roles in this way:

1. **TEACHER:** The **teacher** role concerns **learning**—learning science, learning technique and methodology, learning writing skills, and more.

Examples:

- *She teaches me how to learn from my mistakes rather than just pointing them out to me. On my last experiment, I was performing a technique in a less-than-efficient way, and she demonstrated it for me and had me try it out while she observed, giving great feedback.*
- *Dr. M. sets goals that are ambitious but realistic. I have submitted 3 abstracts since beginning work with her.*
- *He is always available for consultation at short notice.*
- *She reads my work carefully and gives thorough and constructive feedback. My last two manuscripts were accepted with very few revisions thanks in part to her guidance.*
- *I have been inspired by the energy and enthusiasm he shows for the project.*

2. **COACH:** The **coach** role concerns **emotional and professional support**—encouraging you to submit abstracts and manuscripts, pointing out which professional meetings will be advantageous for you to attend, helping you recover your confidence if something didn't go well, helping you plan your career pathway, talking to you about balancing family life and work life.

Examples:

- *Dr. R. lifts me up when I feel discouraged. He noticed when I was distracted by a personal issue, took the time to talk to me, and really showed compassion.*
- *He helps me develop my strengths and minimize my weaknesses.*
- *She attends to our needs, not just our productivity. She frequently has lunch with us and asks about how things are going for us.*
- *Dr. B. allows me the freedom to discover my own professional boundaries. I wanted to attend a workshop on developing teaching skills, and she was very supportive.*
- *She allows me to develop my leadership skills by treating me as a colleague rather than an apprentice.*

3. **SPONSOR:** The **sponsor** role concerns helping you **develop scientific and career networks**—introducing you to colleagues, writing strong letters of recommendation for you, informing influential people of your success and promise as a scientist, including you as co-author on papers and co-investigator on grants, pointing out funding sources for you, etc.

Examples:

- *He speaks highly of me in public and private settings and has advocated for me in many instances.*
- *She provides additional financial support for me to take classes, attend conferences, etc.*
- *Dr. W.'s trainees are successful in transitioning from postdoc to faculty. He gets our names out to his colleagues whenever he can.*
- *He includes me as co-author and as co-investigator on grants.*
- *She shares data with me.*
- *Dr. Y helped me so much with my K award application.*