

OPEN FORUM INITIATIVE



"...this is just not for me. I can easily take a job right after and be so much better from the stress. I just didn't know who to confide in."

I am stunned. My awe-inspiring colleague, and a dear friend, is at crossroads and the timing of this phone call is critical. It helps to be aware of his strength and dedication on his best days as he maneuvers across the current road blocks. The fact that he called me – a friend, a colleague and some sort of a mentor, is significant.

The journey of a cardiovascular disease trainee is typically long and winding. There aren't many comparable professions where the decisions of such impactful magnitude are made so regularly. The limited time away from patient care may be filled with contemplating our professional "next step". Irrespective of the strength or resilience of an academic trainee, there is an undeniably strong trajectory added to her or his growth once paired with the right mentorship or support systems. The importance of such a role of finding the optimal mentor has long been recognized in academic medicine (1). However, opportunities to build purposeful mentorship during this *medical expedition*, although seemingly abundant, are in fact challenging.

As I turn the corner of my tenth year spanning *pre-* and *postdoctoral* training, I have been fortunate to meet and cultivate relationships with various types of mentors (call them *educators, challengers, sponsors, moderators, career planners, peer supporters or connectors!*) (2). During this long, *but truly short*, decade - there has been a decent share of advice given to me directly or indirectly.

Words, when said deliberately, directly and with honest dedication towards one's career and over all well-being, likely have the most profound effect. It may not be evident at that time, pragmatic leaders and supporters, can see far beyond than what is in clear sight. Over the years, some simple words of have turned into purposeful lessons that serve as constant reminders in good days and more importantly, the tougher days.

"You just have to, earnestly and honestly, keep pushing." – when complained about getting rejections from two journals back to back

"If you want to be the best, you have to be willing to work harder than the best."

"Of course...I would never go back on my word to you." – expressed surprise when a leader in cardiology training kept at their word.

"Enjoy this now completely. Your greatest asset in academia is your currency. What is your currency? Your scientific production." – when planning a career in academic cardiology.

"You can quit now or just keep persevering. But if you decide to quit and something tells you that this is not for you. Stand up and keep fighting." – after not having matched into cardiology on first try.

"I think you can do one better. You can beat them with kindness." – after complaining about unhealthy

competitiveness in medicine.

So I sit and listen to my colleague on this phone call; gauging the importance of what he needs to hear versus what the right words will be to say. That this may be my part in *paying forward* for the times someone else has been there for me. I realize what I say next may be of consequence. Words, when honest, can serve the best. Words matter.

References:

1. Sinha, S. S., et al. (2015). "Mentorship, Leadership, and Teamwork." *J Am Coll Cardiol* **66**: 1079-1082
2. Agarwal, S. (2014). "Mentorship During Fellowship." *J Am Coll Cardiol* **64**: 1637-1638.

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