

Review Article

Speed Mentoring: An Innovative Method in Orthopedic Surgery Mentorship

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This paper will describe a specific speed mentoring model as a forward-thinking approach to mentorship in orthopedic surgery, discussing its structure, benefits, and its growing role in shaping the field.

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INTRODUCTION

Mentorship is a cornerstone of personal and professional growth, serving as a powerful tool for individuals at all

stages of their careers. Rooted in a relationship between two individuals—typically a more experienced mentor and a less experienced mentee—mentorship provides a framework for knowledge transfer, skill enhancement, and pro-

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fessional guidance. Its significance is widely acknowledged, with numerous studies and initiatives highlighting its pivotal role in fostering career advancement, leadership development, and personal fulfillment (Murali et al. 2023).

At its heart, mentorship is more than just a relationship between two parties; it is a collaborative partnership aimed at achieving shared goals. This dynamic has been consistently linked to tangible benefits, such as enhanced self-confidence, accelerated career progression, and improved readiness for professional opportunities (Roberts et al. 2021; Aiyer et al., n.d.). For mentees, the guidance and support offered by mentors often translate into greater clarity of purpose, and access to networks that might otherwise remain out of reach. In exchange, mentors benefit from the opportunity to give back to their professional community and gain fresh perspectives from mentees (Salazar, Schiff, and Light 2019).

In orthopedic surgery and other surgical specialties, mentorship has traditionally followed a hierarchical apprentice model, where experienced surgeons mentor trainees. These relationships, defined by trust and mutual respect, include regular interactions, goal setting, and feedback. Through this process, mentees refine their surgical techniques, gain career guidance, and learn to navigate professional challenges. Mentors, in turn, shape the next generation of surgeons, sharing their expertise while helping mentees build strategies for long-term success.

Despite its value, traditional mentorship in orthopedic surgery faces challenges, particularly in ensuring inclusivity and accessibility (Roberts et al. 2021; Aiyer et al., n.d.). Many aspiring surgeons, particularly those from “orphan medical schools” (without an orthopaedic residency program); from minority institutions; osteopathic medical schools, and individuals from underrepresented backgrounds, encounter barriers to finding mentors, possibly limiting their ability to enter and advance in the field. Geographic disparities also contribute to a lack of mentorship opportunities, further widening the gap for those without access to established orthopedic programs (Murali et al. 2023).

To address these challenges, alternative mentorship models have emerged. One innovative approach is speed mentoring—a concept adapted to make mentorship more inclusive, efficient, and accessible (Caine, Schwartzman, and Kunac 2017). Inspired by the structure of speed dating, speed mentoring provides short, focused conversations between mentors and mentees. This format allows mentees to engage with multiple mentors in a single session, gaining diverse advice, insights, and perspectives in a short amount of time. Medical organizations have increasingly adopted this model to foster meaningful mentorship relationships in professional settings (Cellini et al. 2017).

This paper will describe a specific speed mentoring model as a forward-thinking approach to mentorship in orthopedic surgery, discussing its structure, benefits, and its growing role in shaping the field.

A SPEED MENTORING MODEL: CONCEPT AND BENEFITS

The American Academy of Orthopaedic Surgeons (AAOS) has sponsored a Speed Mentoring Program for residents at its annual meeting since 2019. This initiative was designed to provide residents with a structured and impactful mentorship experience. The program actively recruited participants through advertisements featured in the AAOS meeting materials, newsletters, online platforms, and social media channels such as Facebook, Instagram, and Twitter. All residents attending the conference were eligible to participate as mentees, ensuring broad accessibility to this unique mentorship opportunity.

Mentors for the program were carefully selected to create a diverse and experienced group. Leaders in orthopedic surgery who are committed to education were invited to represent various orthopedic surgery sub-specialties, career stages, interests, and work settings. Special attention was given to ensure diversity in the mentors regarding gender, race, interests, age, and expertise, providing mentees with a rich and varied mentorship experience. This approach fostered an inclusive environment, offering residents the opportunity to connect with mentors whose backgrounds and insights aligned with their specific needs and career aspirations.

The program begins with a rapid-fire question-and-answer session, in which a group of senior, well-recognized orthopedic surgeons serves as panelists and respond to a series of concise, thought-provoking questions. Topics include reflections on personal and professional milestones, such as one’s biggest accomplishment and regret, advice to one’s younger self, and goals for the year ahead. This activity sets the tone for open, candid conversations while encouraging self-reflection and connection among participants.

Following this introduction, attendees are invited to choose seven main tables to rotate for the mentoring session from a list of several topics ([Table 1](#)). The topics deal with a variety of career development and nonsurgical skills not covered in traditional residency programs. Resident feedback from previous years drives the topic selections. Each topic has a designated table, with the room set up with tall round tables forming a circle for interaction. Tall round tables are used so the mentors/mentees are standing and engaged versus sitting down which may have less active engagement. Two faculty mentors are each at the tables based on their expertise and interest, while mentees choose the tables they wish to rotate. Mentees are encouraged to not rotate with the same group of residents to further serve as a way to meet individuals. By having such a variety of topics, the students are able to individualize their schedules to meet their needs.

During the 75-minute session, each mentor and mentee pair has 9 minutes to engage in focused, topic-specific conversations, completing a total of seven rotations. The time goes by rapidly, and extensive interaction is noted. The session concludes with a five-minute wrap-up and evaluation period to gather feedback and solidify key takeaways.

Table 1. Sample Topics of Discussion for the Speed Mentoring Program

1. Operating on Your Leadership Skills
2. If I Knew Then What I Know Now: Advice to a Young Me
3. Deal or No Deal: Mastering the Art of Contract Bargaining
4. Finding a job and expectations in the life of an Academic Orthopedic Surgeon
5. Digital Dilemma: Social Media's Double Edge Sword
6. Sharpening the Scalpel: From Residency Roots to Fellowship Wings
7. Putting Your Best Foot Forward (In Interviews & Meetings)
8. When There are Forks in the Road: Is there a right decision?
9. Data Detective: Cracking the Code to Effective Research
10. The 24-Hour Surgeon: Mastering Surgery and Me Time
11. On My Own and Feeling Alone: What I Wish I Had Learned
12. The Orthopaedic X-Factor: Unlocking Hidden Keys to Success
13. Financial Management in Your Personal Life
14. Getting Help: Developing Your Mentors and Networking
15. Good to Great is More than a Book: The Intangibles for Success
16. Putting a Feather in Your CAP: Developing Career Action Plan
17. Things You Never Thought of that Make a Difference
18. First Impressions Count: How to Wow from the Start
19. Playing in the Sandbox Together: The Art of Conflict Management

To facilitate meaningful dialogue, mentors are provided with suggested talking points, allowing them to tailor discussions to their comfort level and areas of interest. The suggested talking points are often not needed as the resident mentees often come full of questions. This structured yet flexible format ensures that both mentors and mentees maximize their time and gain valuable insights from the experience and afford the opportunity to meet new residents and attendings who they may forge relationships with.

IMPACT AND EFFECTIVENESS

Speed mentoring is a transformative mentorship initiative, playing an increasing role in reshaping the traditional mentor-mentee experience. By offering structured, time-efficient interactions between mentees and a diverse group of mentors, speed mentoring creates a platform for knowledge exchange, career guidance, and skill development. Organizations such as the American College of Surgeons (ACS) and the American Pediatric Association (APA) have successfully implemented speed mentoring programs, with participants reporting high levels of satisfaction and ongoing relationships that extend beyond the initial event

(Caine, Schwartzman, and Kunac 2017; Cellini et al. 2017; Serwint et al. 2014). By implementing a similar program at the annual AAOS conference, the goal was to create a much-needed opportunity for mentoring with this networking model.

The event made a lasting impact on many attendees. For example, one of the faculty surgeons shared their enthusiasm, stating, “Speed Mentoring is an incredible process that ensures there’s never any ‘dead air’ in the conversation. The format is exceptional, creating a dynamic sense of energy and engagement with its fast-paced timeline and variety of options. I always leave with a list of participants eager to follow up more in-depth, and I am continually inspired by the quality of questions and the depth of understanding. Speed Mentoring should be adopted at other society meetings to foster meaningful mentor-mentee engagement.”

Another faculty member echoed a similar sentiment, adding, “Speed Mentoring is a highly impactful initiative for both mentors and mentees. Mentors leave energized after interacting with an outstanding group of young orthopedic leaders eager to learn. Meanwhile, mentees gain new insights and expand their networks, connecting not only with peers but also with established orthopedic surgeons. I am inspired by their enthusiasm and curiosity. It’s an incredibly valuable experience, and I only wish I had the opportunity to participate in Speed Mentoring when I was a resident!”

The anticipated outcomes of the speed mentoring initiative are multifaceted and far-reaching. For residents, participation in speed mentoring could result in improved confidence, clearer career direction, and access to a network of influential mentors who can provide guidance throughout their professional journeys. Over time, these connections have the potential to evolve into strong, mutually supportive relationships that extend far beyond the program itself. Reflecting the overall sentiment shared by many resident participants, several residents voiced similar perspectives. As one resident expressed, “The Speed Mentoring session was truly transformative for me! As a more introverted person, I often find it challenging to connect with surgeons in the field with confidence. This session pushed me beyond my comfort zone, and I’m so grateful it did. I made meaningful connections that extended well beyond the conference, opening doors I never expected. I can’t wait for the next one!”

Building on this, many others also highlighted the unique value of the event. Another participant put it, “Speed Mentoring offers a unique opportunity to gain valuable wisdom and advice from experts in a short yet engaging format. In just 60 minutes, I learned so much from a diverse group of experienced surgeons who have already navigated the challenges I’m facing in early on in my career. Their mentorship was truly transformative.”

As the program continues to grow, strategic refinements ensure that it remains high-yield and impactful. For example, the selection of discussion topics has evolved to reflect the most pressing concerns of trainees, including navigating the residency application process amid changes like

pass/fail USMLE Step 1 scoring, understanding the signaling system, and managing professionalism in social media. Additionally, recognizing shifts in recruitment, we introduced guidance on excelling in virtual interviews post-COVID, ensuring that mentees receive timely and practical advice for their career progression. These continuous improvements reinforce our commitment to providing a focused and valuable mentorship experience, allowing the program to adapt to the evolving landscape of medical education and professional development in orthopedic surgery.

Assessing the long-term impact of speed mentoring is essential to evaluating its effectiveness and refining the program to maximize its benefits. While subjective feedback provides valuable insight into participants' experiences, a more structured approach to assessment would allow for a comprehensive understanding of its outcomes. Implementing follow-up surveys at six and twelve months post-event could help determine whether mentees maintained contact with mentors, applied received advice, or developed lasting mentorship relationships. Additionally, tracking career milestones—such as research collaborations, leadership positions, or successful residency and fellowship placements—would offer objective evidence of the program's influence on professional advancement. Engagement metrics, including the frequency of post-event mentor-mentee interactions, could further indicate the program's role in fostering meaningful connections. Structured feedback from both mentees and mentors would provide critical perspectives on the quality and impact of the interactions, ensuring that the program remains relevant and valuable. Moreover, assessing objective outcomes, such as mentees securing research opportunities, clinical observer ships, or expanded professional networks, would further validate the program's role in bridging mentorship gaps. By integrating these measures, speed mentoring can be continuously optimized to better serve trainees at all levels and enhance its contribution to career development within orthopedic surgery.

CONCLUSION

This growing initiative is reshaping how mentorship is approached in orthopedic surgery, particularly for residents, fellows, and early-career surgeons. It provides access to mentorship, making it possible for individuals at various stages of their careers to engage with leaders in the field, gain practical advice, and build connections that might otherwise be difficult to establish. The time-limited nature of the interactions encourages efficiency and focus, ensuring that mentees receive actionable insights.

Furthermore, speed mentoring is an effective tool for promoting diversity and inclusivity within the orthopedic community. By offering underrepresented groups more opportunities to engage with mentors who can provide guidance, visibility, and career support, speed mentoring helps foster a more inclusive environment that empowers all surgeons to thrive. It also breaks down hierarchical barriers, creating a more collaborative and approachable atmosphere for both mentors and mentees.

Beyond individual career development, speed mentoring is contributing to a broader cultural shift within the specialty—one that values collaboration, continuous learning, and shared success. Given its effectiveness, it is crucial for orthopedic surgery programs to adopt speed mentoring as a key component of their mentorship strategies. Integrating this model can help create a more inclusive environment, where programs can better support the professional development of a diverse range of trainees, ensuring that all individuals have the opportunity to reach their full potential. Ultimately, these long-term benefits may drive advancements in patient care, education, and research, ensuring that the field remains dynamic and forward-thinking for years to come.

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