The relationship between a senior surgeon (mentor) and his or her protégé (mentee) is like no other; thus, mentors are acknowledged more in surgery than perhaps any other medical discipline. One of the reasons surgical mentors are so highly respected is that we want to emulate them. This is exemplified by most successful surgeons having had at least an association with other successful surgeons. Although one can argue the associative versus causative nature of this relationship, it is irrefutable that something “happens” between these individuals which makes each a better surgeon.

Why a book on surgical mentoring? First and foremost is to articulate the importance of a mentor to the education and growth of a young surgeon. A second goal is to provide state of the art, hands-on and didactic information on the current status and new directions in this field. Every attempt has been made to integrate day-to-day mentoring practices with evidence-based information. Surgical training in the twenty-first century is undergoing many changes which clearly alter the available time and opportunity to mentor. These changes mandate new approaches to mentoring. For example, most of today’s mentees will benefit from multiple mentors in a variety of areas including personal life, technical skills, research, clinical aptitudes and administrative duties. Additionally, exciting advances in the surgical simulation laboratory and information technology expand the ability of the mentee to learn more safely and expeditiously when compared to previous eras. Finally, we strongly believe there is a need to integrate the “old” with the “new.”

Distinguishing qualities of
humanism, altruism and empathy of surgical mentors of the past are just as relevant today as when the senior mentor was a mentee. We are concerned these qualities are regrettably becoming lost in today’s frenetic world of surgery.

By design, the collaborative efforts of the authors provide varied mentoring experiences. Catherine Loveland-Jones, a senior surgical resident and research fellow, is in the clinical and educational “trenches” in addition to being an active participant in new approaches to mentoring, surgical education and information technology. Amy Goldberg, Surgical Residency Program Director, Temple University, has dedicated her entire career to surgical education and she is intimately (and sometimes painfully) aware of the highs and lows of surgical residents and the unlimited help the mentor can provide to them. Having mentored surgical trainees for 35 years, senior surgeon John Rombeau has had the good fortune to have been mentored by several clinical and research giants whose ghosts continue to haunt him. This book is an expression of his gratitude.

Our book is organized to clearly communicate several objectives: succinctly define the topic and relevant issues affecting the mentoring process; describe why, when and how surgical mentoring should be performed; suggest ways to mentor specific groups of mentees; and, finally, speculate on future directions. Chapters are organized to present both hands-on approaches and evidence-based reports in support of these approaches. An appendix of websites with particular relevance to each chapter is included. Most of the references have been obtained from North American studies with the recognition that different issues exist internationally. Despite this continental approach, a representative review of international studies reveals striking similarities in the issues of surgical mentoring throughout the world.

Our book is specific to surgical mentoring. It is not intended to be an exhaustive review on mentoring; there are several texts solely devoted to this topic.

One of the most difficult aspects of this book has been to differentiate between mentoring and teaching. As noted in the text, all mentors are teachers; however, very few teachers become mentors. This is due in part to the extensive personal commitment of the mentor to guide both the personal and professional growth of the mentee. Nevertheless, we acknowledge the vast overlap between these two areas.

This book is written for the continuum of surgeons, as mentoring is a career-long process. Our hope is to “plant the seed” for the medical
student rotating on surgery as to both the joy of mentoring and the importance of seeking a mentor(s) early and often in one’s career. The surgical resident and fellow will learn the value of having an accessible and committed mentor and the importance of being a mentor to junior trainees. The tremendous benefits to the young surgical attending of having a wise and seasoned mentor are endless, particularly in navigating the many obstacles along the journey for career success. Senior attending surgeons will appreciate that mentoring is indeed a two-way street as they both mentor to and learn from their mentees. Additionally, we hope the immense influences of these attending surgeons (both positive and negative) will be better understood.

We are convinced that mentoring makes a significant difference in the surgical world and epitomizes our heritage. Enjoy the journey!

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