

## The Case of the Magnificent Mentor

Case Written by Dr. Brent Thoma

### Case

Dr. Brent Thoma

### Objectives:

Dr. Teresa Chan  
Dr. Brent Thoma

### Expert Responses

Dr. Jonathan Sherbino  
Dr. Michelle Lin

### Curated Community Commentary:

Dr. Teresa Chan

### Column Editors:

Dr. Teresa Chan  
Dr. Brent Thoma

### ALiEM Editor-in-Chief

Dr. Michelle Lin

Twice the fortnight before Christmas... Sundeep, a junior emergency medicine resident at A.W. Esome Hospital, walked into the resident lounge just as Kara, one of the senior residents, was closing down Amazon.com. "Sneaking in a bit of holiday shopping?" he asked.

Kara looked quite pensive as she responded "No. It's just that Dr. Melden has been so helpful to me over the past few years. There's no way I would have found my niche or gotten involved with that research project if it wasn't for him - not to mention all of his amazing teaching and exam prep."

"And what, exactly, does that have to do with the Black Friday sales?" he asked.

"Well... I want to thank him, but I'm really not sure how. I nominated him for that mentorship award last month but he didn't get it. I was thinking about getting him something small and thoughtful, but I'm not even sure if it's appropriate to get him a present."

"Yeah, I've never really thought about that before. I guess I should be doing a better job of thanking all of the people that have helped me out along the way. Buying him something almost seems silly though - if he wanted something he'd have it already, wouldn't he?" Sundeep asked.

Kara sighed as she responded, "I guess. And he always says that he is just happy to see me succeed, but I wish there was an easier way for me to let him know how much I appreciate everything that he has done for me over the years."

### Questions for Discussion

1. How would you advise Kara to thank her mentor?
2. Is it appropriate to give your mentors gifts? If so, what would be too much?
3. What is the most memorable way that you have been thanked by one of your protégés or mentees? Why?

### Usage

This document is licensed for use under the creative commons selected license:  
Attribution-NonCommercial-NoDerivs 3.0  
Unported.



## Competencies

ACGME	CanMEDS
Professional Values Accountability	Professional Collaborator

## Intended Objectives of Case

1. Describe how context and timing can affect the gift-giving between mentor and mentee.
2. Identify issues around gift-giving from the mentor and mentee's point of view.
3. List non-monetary or non-material ways in which one might show the appreciation for their mentors.

# Expert Response

## Success is a form of Thanks!

by Dr. Jonathan Sherbino MD, MEd, FRCPC

Thanks for the opportunity to be a part of MEdIC Series. Your question is a very interesting one. I don't think there is an 'evidence-based' answer, but I'll take a stab at it.

### Your success is a form of 'Thank You'

It's not a present, but a note of thanks that is meaningful for a mentor. In the same way that being a teacher gives you the pleasure of watching a learner achieve, being a mentor is about the pleasure you get from watching a person you have invested in succeed.

I think mentors are key in everyone's careers - and a board of directors (multiple mentors for multiple aspects of your professional life) is even better! I would highly recommend that all medical educators become both a mentor and a mentee.

The Harvard Business Review Blog recently covered this issue, suggesting that [smart leaders have protégés](#) - someone you can sponsor. Read the following paragraph from the [HBR Blog](#) by Sylvia Ann Hewlett (2013) and you'll realize that this concept probably extends to medical education too:

Think of a sponsor as a talent scout. He'll get his protégé ... to audition for a key role. He'll nudge them to choose her. He'll coach her on her performance so that she proves to others what an excellent choice he made. He'll train a spotlight on his protégé so that other directors take note of her abilities and he'll make introductions afterward so that she can follow up with them to bring her talent to a wider audience.

A career in medical education can be a long and hard road to travel alone. Having energetic (often, younger) people

around can be invigorating. Their enthusiasm can be infectious, and at times can help to bring in new ideas and perspectives. It helps, also, if they're empathetic to your workloads, and lend a hand occasionally.

### But, it doesn't hurt to remind us (out loud) once in a while

I'm sure that students, protégés/mentees often *think* very fondly about their teachers. Too often, these sentiments are not articulated. It's key to share with you mentor the impact they have had on you and provide them a touchstone.

You needn't be extravagant! For instance, a card (without kittens on the cover!), or my personal favourite, a book, provides a physical cue - especially if the book relates somehow to a conversation or discussion you've had together. The meta-message to your mentor is "You have helped me understand this topic and I've started to make these connections."

- JS

*p.s. A bottle of scotch goes a long way, too!*

*p.p.s. Also, please consider this a thank you to my mentees (Teresa & Brent) who have tirelessly put together this fantastic and engaging series of medical education cases. It has been a pleasure to watch you develop as Clinician Educators.*

---

#### Reference:

Hewlett SA. *Smart Leaders Have Protégés*. HBR Blog Network. Published August 9, 2013. Last accessed on January 1, 2014. Available at <http://blogs.hbr.org/2013/08/smart-leaders-have-protoges/>.



### About the Expert

Dr. Sherbino is an emergency physician and trauma team leader in Hamilton. Additionally, he is an Associate Professor of Emergency Medicine at McMaster University in Ontario, Canada where he also serves as the Director of Continuing Professional Education for the Division of Emergency Medicine. Nationally, he is also a Clinical Educator for the Royal College of Physicians and Surgeons of Canada. He is the lead author behind the [ICENet Blog](#).

## Touchstones and Keeping in Touch

by Dr. Michelle Lin MD

As an emergency physician, the mentor-mentee relationship in many ways mirrors my relationship with patients. It is my job and ethical responsibility to advocate and do what is right for my patient, using my clinician training and experience. A "thank you" is not expected, because this is my job. Similarly my job, as a clinician in academia, is to provide mentorship to others. Knowing that I played a role in healing a patient and in the success of a mentee are both rewards unto themselves. No thank you necessary.

## The best gift

If you wanted to thank your mentor, the best gift is the gift of keeping in touch. Throughout my career, I have mentored medical students, residents, and faculty. Last year, a medical student, who is now a faculty member, emailed me to update me on his career trajectory and to thank me on specific discussions that we had many years ago. This made me think – I wonder what my other mentees are up to and whether they are succeeding in life and their career? The problem is that often their institutional emails no longer exist. Before I can scour the internet for

their personal emails, quickly the avalanche of my to-do list items descends upon me.

So if you have time, a quick email update would be so much more rewarding to me as a mentor and friend than

a gift-wrapped present could ever bring. I am often surprised by the lessons and bottom-line messages they gained from our mentor-mentee relationship. This reflective feedback is extremely helpful for me, because I am constantly learning how to be a better mentor (*no one really teaches us how to be good mentors*) and want to capitalize on things that I am doing well.



### My most memorable gift

The most memorable way that I have been thanked by a mentee happened several years ago. I had shared in casual conversation that one of my random hobbies was to collect rocks from different cities and countries (see below). I would label the rocks as a geological souvenir map of sorts. The next month, I received a rock from Florida with a thank you note.



## About the Expert

Dr. Michelle Lin is the Editor-in-Chief of Academic Life in Emergency Medicine. She is also an Associate Professor of Emergency Medicine at the University of California-San Francisco (UCSF), where she also holds the UCSF Academy Endowed Chair for EM Education. She also a practicing emergency medicine physician at San Francisco General Hospital.

# Curated Community Commentary

By Teresa Chan MD, FRCPC

Thank You to everyone that participated this month in our holiday MEDIC series case. We were excited to see a wide variety of participants from students to experienced mentors. We had selected this topic in the holiday spirit, and we were thrilled to see our community join in on this much needed discussion.

A qualitative methodology was used to curate the community discussion. Tweets and blog comments were analyzed, and four overarching themes were extracted from the online discussions. Prior to publication, we sent this analysis to one of our community members to perform a 'member check' to ensure credibility. Thank You to all of our discussion participants. The following is a collection of some of the key themes that emerged from the analysis.

## Gestures of Thanks

The following are gestures that Mentors thought their protégés could do to thank them:

1. **Being a successful protégé:** You continued growth and commitment to excellence was something that was valued by mentors. They also valued mentees that showed they were applying and learning; dedication to the job or their work; or watching them developing their own craft or niche.
2. **Staying in touch:** Some pointed out that it is also nice for mentees to reach out and TELL their mentors (phone calls, notes, cards) about their adventures, regardless of how far out they are from their original mentorship relationship. Something as simple as a tweet or an email was suggested by several participants. Participants noted it is nice to connect by phone (Robert Cooney) or to share a meal (Edmund Kwok; @eddestyle)
3. **Paying it forward:** Mentoring others in return was highly endorsed by the respondents. Watching their protégés go on to become teachers and mentors was thought to be the greatest present of all.
4. **Being and Staying Engaged:** Our participants mentioned this in a number of different ways. Some of the simple suggestions were: to be

prepared for lessons, to contribute back to the conversation, and to have questions prepared based on the subject/content. Others found great satisfaction in seeing their mentees continue to show growth by propelling the conversation forward with new insights or teaching them something back in return.

## But We are Living in a Material World...

Things that people thought were nice gestures of thank you that they have received:

- Nominations for teaching awards
- Contributions / donations in their name
- Books
- Home-baked cookies
- Cards / Notes
- Liquids (Coffee, latte, liquor)

There were a variety of opinions on receiving material goods. As Danica K noted, some felt gifts were a good idea while they made others uncomfortable.

## Factors to Consider when showing Gratitude

Participants noted several factors to consider when giving gifts:

1. **Nature of the Relationship:** It was suggested that material gifts might be best reserved for mentors who are 'closest' to you.

*(Continued on next page)*

# Curated Community Commentary

2. **Magnitude:** Large material gifts tend to make mentors feel uncomfortable, according to some of the reflections we received. The definitions of large, however, varied. Some mentors found gifts of books, food or liquor to be acceptable.
3. **Timing:** Giving gifts in a timely fashion was considered important. Also, giving them near major events (e.g. graduation) was thought to be a good time, and may allow one to give a slightly more substantial gift than usual. Giving a gift near holidays seemed more acceptable.
4. **Context:** The situation around which a gift is given is important to consider. To prevent awkwardness, it was suggested by several people to consider giving thank you gifts for references AFTER your successful achievement (e.g. after you have matched to residency, lest it seem like a bribe).

**NB:** Michelle, Brent and I also waxed philosophical about mentorship lineages. Of note, there was a survey posted on ALiEM recently on this exact topic. Take a look and see if you might be able to contribute! Remember, nominations by former mentees was very much appreciated by mentors! Check it out here: <http://academiclifeinem.com/?s=mentor>

## Community Commentary Participants

Thank You to the following individuals or organizations, who avidly contributed to our Twitter and ALiEM Blog discussions over the course of the first week of this case's release. Starred (\*) individuals participated via both formats.

### Blog Comments

Robert R Cooney  
Teresa Chan\*  
Esther Choo  
Lisa Fields\*  
Alia Dharamsi  
Nikita Joshi\*  
Danica K  
Joe Lex  
Eve Purdy  
Sa'ad Lahri  
Michelle Lin  
Rory Spiegel  
Brent Thoma\*

### Twitter

Felix Ankel (@FelixAnkel)  
Adr Born (@ClinicalArts)  
@CancerGeek  
Esther Choo (@choo\_ek)  
Jason Frank (@DrJFrank)  
Joe Lex (@JoeLex5)  
Eric Holmboe (@Boedudley)  
Ali Jalali (@ARJalali)  
Ernesto Juárez (@DilettanteMD)  
Edmund Kwok (@eddestyle)  
Nicole Swallow (@doc\_swallow)  
Scott Weingart (@EMcrit)

## About

The Medical Education In Cases (MEiC) series puts difficult medical education cases under a microscope. We pose a challenging hypothetical dilemma, moderate a discussion on potential approaches, and recruit medical education experts to provide their insights. The community comments are also similarly curated into a document for reference.

## Did you use this MEiC resource?

We would love to hear how you did. Please email [teresamchan@gmail.com](mailto:teresamchan@gmail.com) or tweet us @Brent\_Thoma and @TChanMD to let us know.

## Purpose

The purpose of the MEiC series is to create resources that allow you to engage in "guerrilla" faculty development – enticing and engaging individuals who might not have time to attend faculty development workshops to think about challenging cases in medical education.

## Usage

This document is licensed for use under the creative commons selected license:

Attribution-  
NonCommercial-  
NoDerivs 3.0  
Unported.

