Twelve tips for organising speed mentoring events for healthcare professionals at small or large-scale venues

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Abstract:

Mentors play a critical role in the development of professionals, influencing their job satisfaction, career aspirations and evolving professional identity. A variety of mentoring models exist, each with distinct benefits and challenges. Speed mentoring, based on the concept of speed dating, provides mentees with opportunities to meet multiple mentors over a short time and pose focussed career development questions. At large-scale events such as the annual AMEE (Association for Medical Education in Europe) meeting, speed mentoring sessions can successfully connect aspiring, novice and mid-career educators with international educational leaders to facilitate transfer of valuable insights for professional growth. For some mentors and mentees, this might spur ongoing communications or even longitudinal relationships. In this paper, we aim to provide strategies for planning and implementing speed mentoring events, combining insights gained from the literature and our experience of organising speed mentoring at the 2019 AMEE meeting in Vienna. These tips will be useful to a variety of professionals planning to organise speed mentoring initiatives.

"One of the greatest values of mentors is the ability to see ahead what others cannot see and to help them navigate a course to their destination." — *John C. Maxwell*

When Odysseus set out for the Trojan War, he entrusted his son's education to Mentor, a trusted friend. In health professions education, mentoring has been defined as: "a relationship that may vary along a continuum from informal/short-term to formal/long-term in which faculty with useful experience, knowledge, skills, and/or wisdom offer advice, information, guidance, support, or opportunity to another faculty member or student for that individual's professional development"(Berk et al. 2005; Berk 2010). Contemporary mentoring differs from advising, coaching, counselling, supervision and sponsorship (Ramani et al. 2006; Lakhani 2015). All formats of mentoring embrace a safe relationship in which mentees take the lead in setting the agenda and are able to discuss their strengths and challenges.

Mentors can play a critical role in professional development, influencing an individual's job satisfaction, career aspirations and evolving professional identity (Sambunjak et al. 2006; Driessen et al. 2011; Sabel et al. 2014; Choi et al. 2019). Mentoring relationships that evolve spontaneously may be more successful than those assigned by departments or institutions (Jackson et al. 2003); however, many professionals may find it challenging to initiate mentoring relationships (Jackson et al. 2003; Cook et al. 2010). Consequently, institutions and organisations should provide opportunities for faculty/staff to interact with potential mentors and initiate mentoring relationships based on their goals and compatibility (Jackson et al. 2003).

Mentoring models continue to evolve; all have opportunities and challenges (Table 1). Mentoring is no longer simply seen as a traditional dyadic long-term relationship between

senior mentors and junior protégés. Newer models allow the flexibility of a one-time focussed

interaction or short-term relationships; however, prioritising mentee goals and a mentee-led

agenda differentiate them from advisory relationships. Given the range of needs and

opportunities available, a single mentor is unlikely to have expertise in all areas. Therefore, all

professionals should develop a mentoring 'network' comprising multiple mentors at varying

stages in their career (junior, peer and senior mentors), with different areas of expertise, within

and outside their own institution, and across professional disciplines (Higgins and Kram 2001;

de Janasz and Sullivan 2004; DeCastro et al. 2013; Kashiwagi et al. 2013; Chopra et al. 2018;

Disch 2018; Waljee et al. 2018). In this paper, we focus on organising a speed mentoring

session using a world café format as an effective and efficient approach to mentoring at large-

scale events. Speed mentoring and the world café format are described below in more detail.

Although the target audience for this workshop was health professions educators, the

fundamental principles are applicable to any profession.

Speed mentoring

Speed mentoring, based on the concept of speed dating (Finkel and Eastwick 2008;

Deyo and Deyo 2009), provides mentees with opportunities to meet multiple potential mentors

within a short time, pose focussed questions and obtain a variety of perspectives (Cook et al.

2010; Serwint et al. 2014; Robbins et al. 2019). This format was initially developed to broaden

professional networking between junior and senior academic faculty (Cook et al. 2010), more

recently it has been used as a one-time mentoring event offered at annual meetings of medical

associations (Serwint et al. 2014; Britt et al. 2017; Cellini et al. 2017; Patel 2018) National

programs facilitate networking across a wider network of mentors than possible at individual

institutions. This format also offers the potential to trigger successful long-term mentoring relationships (Kurre et al. 2014; Cellini et al. 2017). Speed mentoring can take different forms, ranging from quick (e.g. 5-minute) introductions where people exchange individual details and arrange to meet up later to more in-depth group sessions focussed around a particular topic (e.g. assessment, leadership, faculty development) (Cook et al. 2010; Serwint et al. 2014).

World café discussions

The world café model, which draws inspiration from a café where people have informal conversations at round tables, is a simple and flexible format to encourage dialogue among groups and is easily modifiable based on group needs (*www.theworldcafe.com)*. A host welcomes participants and explains the ground rules for multiple 20-minute rounds of small group conversation. Table hosts, who facilitate the conversation, can stay at the same table or rotate to different tables. Each round starts with a question that is specific to the purpose of the world café, additional questions build on this discussion. Between rounds or at the end, insights from various conversations are shared with the entire group. World café discussions focus on problem solving, whereas speed mentoring focusses on mentees' career development.

A group speed mentoring workshop using a world café format

At large-scale conferences, it can be challenging for novice, aspiring and mid-career professionals, healthcare or otherwise, to network with international leaders and seek 'wisdom' about career development. In this Twelve Tips paper, we describe a systematic approach for designing and delivering speed mentoring workshops categorised under four major headings: Plan, Implement, Summarise and Evaluate, and Follow up (Figure 1). The tips draw upon literature and our experience of delivering a group speed mentoring workshop at the 2019

annual international meeting of the Association for Medical Education in Europe (AMEE). Our

table hosts facilitated discussions at the same table while mentees rotated every 20 minutes,

similar to OSCE (objective structured clinical examination) rotations. This is not synonymous

with traditional team or group mentoring offered at home institutions, which requires a

sustained longitudinal group relationship among groups (Table 1).

1. **Plan the workshop**

Tip 1   Define the main purpose and format of the mentoring workshop

First, the goals of the workshop need to be defined and agreed upon by the team. They also

need to be realistic. Mentors must be purposefully recruited and, depending on the workshop's

purpose, may include senior as well as newly established leaders in a given profession.

Finalising a speed mentoring delivery format requires choosing between providing

opportunities for multiple quick interactions (Cook et al. 2010; Serwint et al. 2014) or a more in-

depth small group approach such as that utilised in our workshop. Whatever the approach,

activities should provide an opportunity for mentors and mentees to build rapport and share

expertise and experience (Berk 2010; Kurre et al. 2014).

Tip 2- Assemble a high-functioning team with a leader and a cohort of mentors

One individual needs to take a leadership role and be the primary point of contact (Shapiro

2015). Important leadership characteristics include effective communication skills, attention to

timelines, consensus building, a focus on achievement of goals, conflict resolution and

recognition of individual and team contributions (Shapiro 2015). Mentors are selected for their

expertise, interest and experience in mentoring. It is important to include mentors who

represent geographic (national and international) and career diversity to ensure a range of cultural and societal perspectives, as well as diversity in subject expertise, mentoring experience and professional background. Mentees are provided with brief bio-sketches of mentors and asked to come prepared with specific career-related questions (Laprise and Thivierge 2012).

Tip 3- Communicate regularly and clearly with the mentor group and event organisers

Once the cohort of mentors is confirmed, ongoing clear communication is vital to build a team with common commitment, purpose and goals (Katzenbach and Smith 2008). This requires investment of time and energy, willingness to compromise, and reflective listening by all who are dedicated to shaping the collective purpose and process. The expertise of presenters, relevance of the subject to a given audience (local to worldwide), and alignment of objectives with the organisational mission are all critical factors that should be clearly outlined in any proposal that needs to be submitted in advance. Once accepted, information on the structure of the event, intended level of interactivity, number of presenters or discussants and the maximum number of participants is needed to ensure optimal room size and seating arrangements. Finally, audio-visual requirements, pre-registration arrangements etc. should be determined well in advance. Signage for table topics and name cards for mentors should be easy to read to help mentees choose tables during the session.

Tip 4- Determine the main focus for discussion at each table

Combining the 'world café' and speed dating approaches allows potential mentees to meet many mentors in a short time. Depending on the purpose, expertise of mentors, room layout and group size, one or more mentors may be allocated to each table which may have an

ascribed topic or not. If mentors are grouped, this should be based on shared interests and expertise. Topics should accurately reflect professional development needs of participants, regardless of location and institutional affiliation. Topics may be selected based on previous mentoring experiences of team members or challenges identified by mentees in informal discussions or formal needs assessment surveys. For e.g. our workshop topics included: starting a career in education, mid-career advancement, initiating a career in educational research, pursuing leadership in education, and organising faculty development for educators. Asking mentors to come prepared with career development strategies can serve as icebreakers while mentees reflect on conversation starters and questions for mentors.

2. Implement the workshop

Tip 5- Provide a clear orientation on purpose, structure and time allocation

Some have described a speed mentoring structure which includes a brief introduction followed by 5-10 minute discussions between dyads of mentors and mentees with flexibility for dyads to follow up based on compatibility (Cook et al. 2010; Serwint et al. 2014). Given the international audience at the AMEE 2019 conference and, anticipating a variety of career development needs, we used a world café format of 20-minute group discussions with three mentors (the 'hosts') at each of five tables. We limited the number of mentees to 6 per table to maximise interaction. Mentees could rotate through three tables during the 90-minute workshop, while mentors remained at their tables awaiting the next group of mentees. The three table mentors rotated the roles of timekeeper, discussion leader and facilitator of group interactions. Whilst there are similarities between speed mentoring sessions and 'meet-the-professor or expert'

sessions, the former focusses on career-development related questions and challenges raised

by mentees rather than the content-led expert discussions that are at the heart of the latter.

Tip 6- Maximise communication and engagement between mentors and mentees

Whichever format is selected, it is essential that mentors do not dominate discussions. To

facilitate meaningful conversations and facilitate rapport building, mentees should be

empowered to initiate conversations, ask questions and describe their career challenges

specific to the table topic for most of the time allocated to each rotation.   Mentees should

come prepared with at least one career-related question such as: 'how should I begin a career

in educational research?', or 'what are important steps to start a career in medical education?',

or 'if I want to be a leader in education, how can I seek advice on developing my skills and

looking for openings?'. Our team discussed these ground rules during workshop planning and

instructions were included in the workshop announcement. Group size should be limited so

that mentors can manage group dynamics and ensure participation from mentees who are

comfortable initiating conversations as well as those who are more reserved. This is important

because junior mentees may feel somewhat daunted at the prospect of talking to senior

leaders, especially if the conference is not in their first language. We asked participants to pre-

register for the workshop and limited the number at 30 participants so that there were no more

than 6 participants at each table during each time slot. We will continue to reflect on optimal

group size for future sessions that maximise mentee conversations.

Tip 7- Provide diverse perspectives but avoid conflicting advice to mentees

One of the challenges in setting up a session with a number of diverse mentors is that they will,

by nature of their expertise and experience, have differing (possibly conflicting) viewpoints and

may not have worked together (or even met) before. Setting ground rules for mentors helps

minimise the risk of mixed, potentially confusing messages, while ensuring rich and different

perspectives on the issues raised. Collaborative mentors are also role-models to their mentees.

The organiser should connect mentors who share topics, enabling them to have email or other

contact beforehand and asking them to meet up prior to the workshop to discuss their roles on

the panel. For example: in the AMEE workshop, the three table host mentors had a mixture of

clinical and non-clinical backgrounds, included both women and men and were from different

institutions around the world to ensure that the mentee questions were answered from

multiple perspectives and a variety of recommendations were provided. It should be

emphasised that many mentees have relevant expertise and experience, therefore mentors

should facilitate and encourage them to provide suggestions and advice to one another as well

(Akinla et al. 2018).

3. **Summarise and evaluate**

Tip 8 - Conclude the workshop with a summary of the discussions from each mentor

To provide closure at the end of the session, it is important to discuss some take home points.

Asking each mentor to contribute one recommendation or suggestion will enrich the final

discussion and provide each mentor with an acknowledgement of their expert contribution. In

light of this, time was set aside at the end of the AMEE workshop to go 'round the room' with

each mentor to summarising one or two 'hot tips' on their table topic (Table 2). This was

thought to be valuable for the professional development and career advancement of all

participants along varied career trajectories, even if they had not interacted with specific topics

or groups of mentors. These 'hot tips' can also be distributed as a handout to all participants (Ramani et al. 2020).

Tip 9   Communicate any follow up plans clearly

All mentors and mentees need to be aware of how they might take things forward to avoid inappropriate expectations. Speed mentoring events are typically designed to be one-time networking sessions. If any ongoing relationship is envisaged, then mentors should be asked prior to the meeting about their preferences, availability and/or willingness to commit to ongoing contact. At the end of the workshop, mentees should be informed about any follow up activities and processes or advised that this was a one-time opportunity with no expectation of a longitudinal mentoring relationship. Follow-up activities might include a facilitated matching process, where potential mentees are put in touch with suitable mentors, a website or blog where questions can be posted to mentors, or an open invitation to mentees to contact mentors with contact details provided. At the AMEE conference, a separate one-on-one program was implemented to promote longitudinal mentoring relationships and workshop participants were given information about this program.

Tip 10- Evaluate the workshop

A continuous quality improvement mindset requires debriefing and group reflections among mentors and mentees on the value of what was effective and what should be changed in future sessions. In our workshop evaluation, all 15 mentors stated that they welcomed the opportunity to give back to the profession and association and agreed to participate in future workshops. They suggested that table topics should be different each year so that all important career-development topics are covered over a number of years. Surveys of mentees had a low

response rate (<50%), but many provided brief narratives and suggestions posted on social media. All respondents stated that AMEE should continue to organise such workshops, and that they gained valuable insights on career related challenges. They suggested name tags for mentees with institutional affiliation and educational role to minimise time on group introductions. Quotes from two mentees summarises how they experienced this activity, "this workshop was the highlight of my conference" and "this workshop was a masterclass". It is not possible to measure longer term impact after only one event, however if a number of mentoring activities are carried out, longer-term evaluation will provide more meaningful data on the impact of such activities and alignment with organisational goals.

Follow up after the workshop

Tip 11- Create a supportive community of mentors and mentees

Mentors and mentees who connect at a large-scale event or international meeting have great potential for developing and sustaining a 'mentorship network', which can help them to find like-minded people to discuss various aspects of their career development. Such a network or community needs to be actively nurtured and facilitated in order to be sustained. A more proactive (though more time-consuming) approach may be for the organisers to pre-assess mentors who can provide ongoing mentoring and help mentors and mentees to make contact and facilitate communication. Those interested could also engage in scholarly collaborations.

Tip 12 Reflect on the session and alignment with organisational mission

The organising team should continue to reflect on establishing a safe environment in which mentees and mentors can openly acknowledge their own career challenges, vulnerabilities and

uncertainties. This can be challenging for mentees from different countries, as most are strangers to one other; therefore, mentors could role-model and discuss their own challenges, errors and lessons learned. Mentors also need to emphasise that all questions are welcome and there are no right or wrong answers. The diversity of mentors and mentees at a large international conference adds multiple layers of complexity. It is critical for the mentor team to reflect honestly about what did and did not work, seek feedback from participants and embrace alternative options for future sessions.

Speed mentoring opportunities offered at institutions, large-scale organisational, national and international meetings can be one aspect of a larger professional development scheme. For example, AMEE is supporting a range of mentoring activities which together aim to shift and expand our thinking about the purpose, approach and mind-set in relation to mentoring for health professions educators across cultures and professions. These activities include a matching scheme for novice educators that links them with senior leaders and educators from around the world; support for the mentoring group to engage in scholarship and publications on mentoring to advance our understanding about 'what works, why and how?', and the mentors themselves providing mentoring to one other. Such a systems change approach can be applied in academic and clinical education settings as well as in any professional organisation, with the key principle being that all mentoring activities are aligned with the overall approach to professional development and support (Choi et al. 2019).

Conclusions

Speed mentoring events are a potentially valuable addition to other mentoring activities, helping professionals to become more motivated and energised through hearing a variety of

perspectives and 'lessons learned' from a group of diverse leaders. Starting with speed

mentoring may help some mentees to experience the benefit of this process and encourage

them to seek out longitudinal mentoring relationships. A group format may be less threatening,

yet, provide a valuable opportunity to understand the benefits of mentoring including peer

mentoring. For mentors, reflection on own career development and 'passing on' advice can be

equally energising, and this energy has the potential to foster collaborations across countries

and continents and form a community of mentors. These 12 tips can be adopted and adapted

by a variety of professions across the world planning any type of speed mentoring event at

conferences or at their own institutions and organisations.

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Figure 1: Strategies for organising effective speed mentoring workshops in four key steps
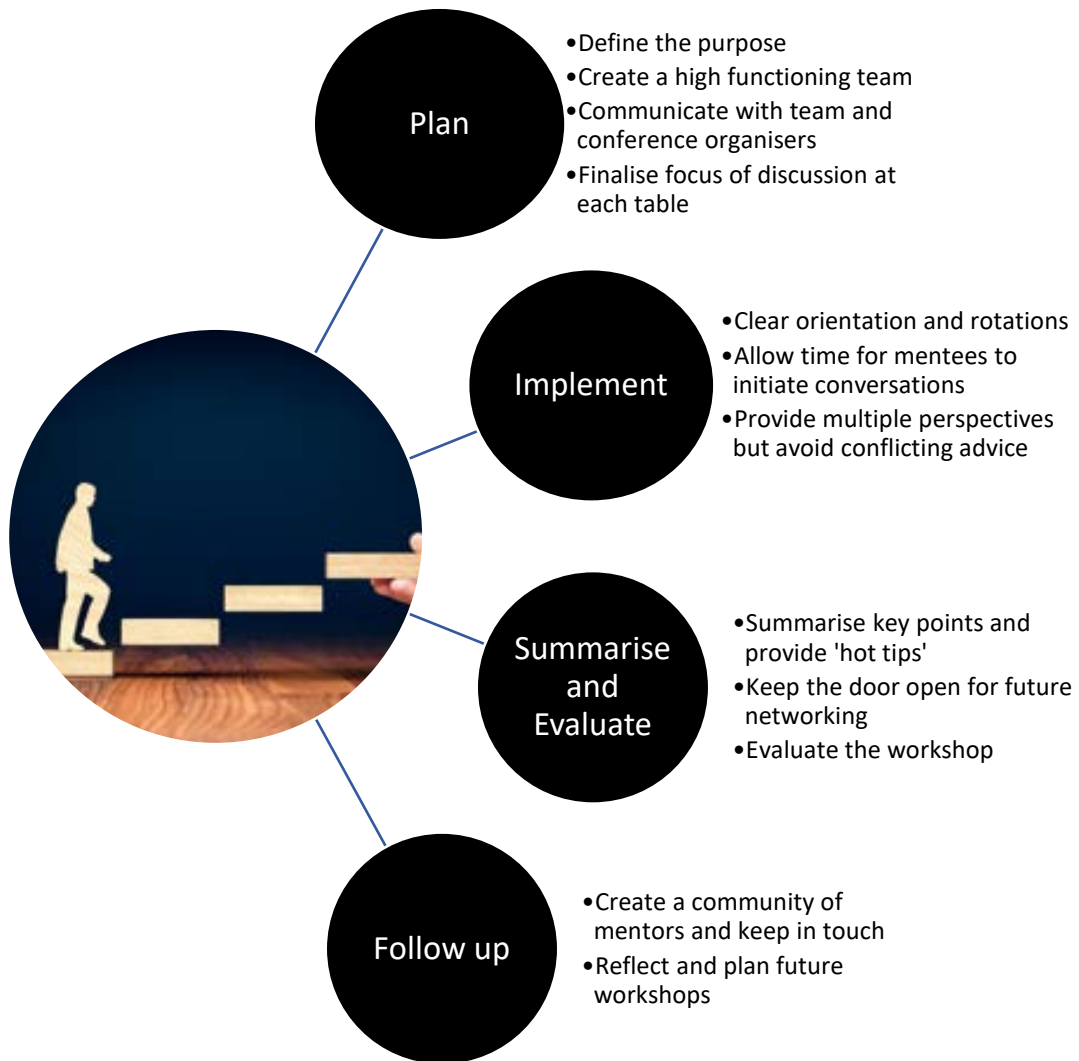

Plan
- Define the purpose
- Create a high functioning team
- Communicate with team and conference organisers
- Finalise focus of discussion at each table

Implement
- Clear orientation and rotations
- Allow time for mentees to initiate conversations
- Provide multiple perspectives but avoid conflicting advice

Summarise and Evaluate
- Summarise key points and provide 'hot tips'
- Keep the door open for future networking
- Evaluate the workshop

Follow up
- Create a community of mentors and keep in touch
- Reflect and plan future workshops

Table 1 – Types of mentoring models- Definitions, opportunities and challenges

Type of mentoring	Description	Opportunities	Challenges	References
Speed mentoring	Mentees pose specific questions to a number of mentors at a professional development event or conference workshop. Each discussion can last from 5-20 minutes.	- Ability to meet with a number of leaders in the field - Diverse perspectives on questions and challenges - Time efficient	- Mentors are unlikely to know how effective their advice was - Mentees would not have the opportunity to communicate impact of advice to mentors	(Berk 2010; Cook et al. 2010; Serwint et al. 2014)
Group or Team mentoring	One or more mentors work with several mentees at one time. One of the mentors may be a lead mentor but not necessary.	- Obtaining different perspectives on questions and challenges - Hearing insights from mentors and peers simultaneously - When group dynamics are effective, mentees will benefit even more than with a single mentor	- Meaningful relationships may not be formed - Lack of dedicated time with a single mentor - Sessions may lack focus if multiple mentees pose questions - Other mentee challenges may not be relevant to one's own professional development - If mentors are unable to work together, the dynamics of a mentoring team may be negative	(DeCastro et al. 2013; Waljee et al. 2018)
Micro-mentoring	Frequent, brief meetings to offer yes or no	- Specific career-related challenges or	- If advice is ineffective or confusing, brevity	(Waljee et al. 2018)

	answers on narrow topics	questions can be addressed - Some longitudinal follow up is built in	of follow up is a handicap	
Peer mentoring	Colleagues of similar levels/stages mentoring one another	- Psychological safety may be enhanced among near peers - Social and cognitive congruence - A supportive environment through a shared experience in which peers help each other	Peers may not: - Have the skillset to help professional development - Be able to provide networking opportunities or open doors - Have ability to guide on how to navigate and get your work done in a politically savvy way	(Pololi and Evans 2015; Akinla et al. 2018; Prendergast et al. 2019)
Reverse mentoring	Junior colleagues mentoring senior professionals	- Seniors having the opportunity to discuss their goals with juniors, hearing about their strengths and areas for improvement and being coached by juniors	- Juniors may be unwilling to provide honest feedback to their seniors - Juniors may lack the skills/language to provide mentoring to seniors	(Waljee et al. 2018)
Situational or functional mentoring*	Short term mentoring to serve a specific purpose	- Clear purpose. - A defined start, duration and ending of the relationship - Mentor and mentee can easily evaluate the success of the relationship	- Lack of long-term relationship and personal and professional goals that continue to evolve and change may not allow mentor and mentee to get to know each other, troubleshoot	(Thorndyke et al. 2008)

			specific challenges, and implement short term interventions	
Virtual mentoring	Mentors and mentees connect electronically	- Ability to connect with mentors from any international location	- Without the option of an occasional in-person meeting, the relationship may not be robust - Technology availability, usability and compatibility - Technology failure and glitches - Privacy concerns	(Kirk and Olinger 2003; Schichtel 2010)

* If any of these models have a supervisory faculty member of the mentee serving in a mentor role there may be a conflict of interest and/or an environment that is not conducive for a mentee-led relationship.

Table 2: Sample of hot tips for professional development of Health Professions Educators provided by speed mentors at AMEE 2019

Topic	Hot tips
Planning a career in education: early career decision making	• Seeking opportunities to network early on is important • Committing too early to an area of interest may not be wise • One should participate in a variety of educational activities to find out true areas of passion • Involvement in regional associations can later lead to national and international activities • Many opportunities are voluntary and need time outside of 'work' hours
Getting started in educational research and scholarship	• Consolidate areas of interest, develop knowledge and skills in these areas through a thorough literature review • Identify conceptual frameworks applicable to topics of interest to guide research questions and methods • It's important to say yes to some things not completely in line with interests but close • Seeking more than 1 mentor with different areas of expertise can add to one's professional development
Career advancement for mid-career educators	• Make educational activities count twice, by presenting and publishing them whenever possible • Use of social media can facilitate connections with national/international collaborators/organisations • Starting to mentor others while being mentored can be professionally enriching • Continue to network at national and international meetings
Becoming leaders in health professions education	• Successful leadership needs development of specific leadership skills • Study the literature on education and leadership

	• Getting involved in key committees and contributing to goals can expand networks • Multisource feedback on leadership impact can facilitate growth as a leader • Networking is an important skill for becoming a leader in HPE
Developing faculty development for health professions educators	• It is important to treat participants as adult learners, acknowledge their expertise and draw on their experience • Consideration of resources, audience and purpose before designing programs can promote success • Embracing technology-assisted professional development can lead to greater impact • When feasible, one should work towards a Community of Practice (CoP) model of professional development