

# The Scavenger Hunt: An Educational Technique for Preceptors and Athletic Training Students

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**Context:** Entry-level athletic trainers (ATs) often lack tools necessary to help build confidence and professional networks, especially if they are the only clinicians in their facility. One-way athletic training education can help is to encourage preceptors to assist in mentoring athletic training students (ATSs) as they navigate the shift from student to AT.

**Objective:** To describe 1 educational technique developed by a preceptor that showcases effective mentoring, networking, volunteer opportunities, and communication.

**Background:** Mentorship is important for all entry-level ATs. By providing opportunities before graduation and assisting ATSs in learning how to network and communicate with potential mentors, future ATs can then continue the mentoring pipeline as they accept preceptor positions.

**Description:** This activity was developed by a preceptor while the ATS was in her immersive setting. It provided the ATS an opportunity to develop networking skills while still having support from the preceptor as mentor and while also growing the number of colleagues in her network. By providing a self-discovery activity, the ATS learned how to effectively maneuver through a large conference while gaining confidence, contacts, and a better understanding of the profession.

**Clinical Advantage(s):** The preceptor developed a mentoring relationship with the ATS while also giving her the opportunity to build connections and identify characteristics that she would like to have in future mentors.

**Conclusion(s):** Networking is often a difficult skill for new professionals. By creating this scavenger hunt, the preceptor demonstrated effective mentoring in addition to pushing the ATS outside of her comfort zone to develop her own professional network and observe how professionals can give back to their association.

**Key Words:** Networking, mentor, conference

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## KEY POINTS

- Preceptors play a vital role in preparing athletic training students for entry into the profession.
- Mentorship is critical to professional development of athletic training students.
- Programs should empower preceptors to function as mentors by helping to create activities outside of normal clinical skills-building.

## INTRODUCTION

Within athletic training education, attention has been placed on didactic and clinical skills; however, transitioning into clinical practice requires more attention. Newly credentialed athletic trainers (ATs) have cited the difficulty in independent decision-making, communication, role ambiguity, and mentor inaccessibility as challenging in transitioning to practice.<sup>1</sup> To best navigate the transition, a mentor would help new ATs foster continuing education and become socialized into the postgraduation workplace. A mentor's role is to guide a novice into greater areas of expertise.<sup>2</sup> This can start before graduation; research has shown that athletic training students (ATs) perceive mentors as those who provide support and understanding, advance their clinical practice, and allow for the development of career goals, with the ATs often identifying preceptors as their mentors.<sup>2</sup> Having mentoring relationships is imperative for producing competent, confident ATs who can serve their patients and "give back" to the profession as effective mentors later in their careers.<sup>3</sup> Creating an opportunity for the ATs to see professional behaviors in action and to learn to develop communication skills with future colleagues can be one way to highlight effective mentoring, networking, and communication.

For ATs, meetings offer broad opportunities for engagement and professional development. Found at the local, state, district, and national levels, these meetings provide ATs with a means to expand their professional circle beyond their home institution. The ATs may be unaware of the purpose, meaningfulness, and scope of activities available at a meeting. Though important, many meetings provide information sessions, poster and oral sessions, career development workshops, and a hospitality suite specifically targeting students, all of which may unintentionally sequester the ATs from the rest of the conference attendees. By providing guidance to the ATs regarding the range of offerings at any meeting, a plan of action from a well-trusted source could offer better engagement for the student.

Attending a conference with no direction can be overwhelming and intimidating, especially at a national level; a plan of action would provide structure for a first-time participant. Having structure is critical for the experience to be positive, rewarding, and educational. A directed, fun, educational way to learn how to experience and maneuver the convention is important. Providing an outline showcasing events, individuals, education, and opportunities allows the ATs to feel empowered, energetic, and excited to learn, engage, and plan.

Scavenger hunts have become popular for college students<sup>4</sup> in various formats including those for instructional design,<sup>5</sup> orientation to campus libraries,<sup>6</sup> and games to advocate for diversity.<sup>7</sup> Within athletic training, one scavenger hunt has been described, but it was a campus scavenger hunt used in working with elementary school children.<sup>8</sup> Similar to a design presented to chemistry students,<sup>9</sup> the scavenger hunt being described herein was created by a preceptor for a professional-level ATs attending the National Athletic Trainers' Association Clinical Symposium and AT Expo during her immersive rotation. This project did not need research ethics approval, according to the institution where the educational technique was conducted and following the 2019 requirements of the Common Rule and the federal definition of research. During this rotation, both the preceptor and the ATs attended the conference, which provided an opportunity for the former to challenge the traditional role of preceptor. As in all scavenger hunts, the ATs was charged with completing specific items on a list (Table 1). Before this activity, the ATs discussed her goals and areas of improvement with her preceptor over several meetings to outline thoughts, ideas, and opportunities for the semester. Together, the ATs and preceptor created specific learning goals to achieve in this experience: (1) to gain confidence when maneuvering around a large educational platform and maximize learning potential, (2) to experience a conference with set purposes to accomplish objectives such as finding potential future mentors to increase exposure within the profession, (3) to increase exposure to potential volunteer opportunities within the athletic training profession by attending some of the committee breakout sessions, meetings, and social gatherings, and (4) to describe how these exposures would affect personal future goals.

## SCAVENGER HUNT DESIGN AND IMPLEMENTATION

This particular ATs was in her immersive affiliation in the final year of her Master of Science in Athletic Training program. Preparation for the activity included discussions on interacting with other professionals, providing business cards for future connections, and developing relationships. Together, the preceptor and ATs outlined areas of interest and areas of learning relevant to the specific immersive-experience site (ie, interdisciplinary concussion work, orthopaedic surgery, and postoperative rehabilitation). Before the conference, the preceptor provided the following:

- Business cards for the ATs
- A review of professional conference attire, attendance, and value
- A schedule (Table 1) for the ATs that included mandatory attendance at events and specific vendors to visit and with enough flexibility for the ATs to choose sessions of interest

Together, the ATs and preceptor created scavenger hunt tasks for the student to complete while attending the conference. Before the creation of tasks, the ATs reflected on her

**Table 1. Sample Schedule for 2 Days**

Day	Event	Room	Time	To-Dos
Monday	COPA reception	Banyan A	5:00–7:00 PM	Introduce yourself to 5 new people. What are their job settings? What do they do? Get their business cards.
	Welcome reception	Oceanside D	6:30–8:00 PM	Meet Hall of Famers: Kathy Dieringer, Nancy Burke, Tanya Dargusch, Brian Robinson, Paula Turocy; give them your card and get their contact information.
Tuesday	Exhibit Hall meetings		Anytime	Meet with and exchange business cards with specific vendors; check listing for other vendors who interest you and apply to your career goals.
	COPA physician practice meeting	Palm G	8:30–10:00 AM	Attend, listen to ideas.
	Career Skills Workshop Concussion Assessment Techniques	Bayside D	12:30–3:30 PM 10:00 AM–5:00 PM	Attend 1 or 2 sessions on concussion techniques—Check listing for what interests you.

Abbreviations: AT, athletic trainer; ATS, athletic training student; COPA, Council on Practice Advancement.

individual goals. This included expanding her network experiences to have an impact on professional growth. For example, while attending sessions and visiting the exhibit hall, the ATS would exchange business cards with people to build her professional network. There was an agreement between the preceptor and ATS that these interactions needed to have value. The ATS learned how to interact and make authentic connections with the AT or vendor, rather than just briefly exchanging business cards or introductions. For this assignment, the preceptor identified specific individuals tied to the ATS's career goals and other leaders in the profession. These individuals were a “must meet” for the conference, and the list was meant to allow the ATS to interact with various people from across the country with different skill sets. In addition, the ATS needed to triple the amount of individuals she was assigned. The ATS and preceptor met throughout the conference to debrief and check on the progress of the assignment.

Postconference, the ATS and preceptor debriefed and reviewed attainment of goals, reflections on the overall experience, and identification of future professional development opportunities. As a part of this experience, the ATS was required to send a written thank-you to everyone she met and with whom she had exchanged business cards. Reflecting upon the experience, the preceptor and ATS described the advantages and opportunities for growth (Table 2).

### STUDENT AND PRECEPTOR FEEDBACK

The ATS reported the activity to be “an incredible experience.” Before the convention, she had trepidation of it being overwhelming, but experiencing it with directional guidance proved rewarding and exciting. After this experience, the ATS articulated specific areas of growth, including a higher comfort level in making decisions and navigating a large conference with specific goals. She also stated that she was able to lead while learning, by encouraging her fellow ATSs to participate with her. Through this experience, she described an

increased awareness of the importance of learning objectives and planning in continuing education.

The preceptor noted growth in the overall confidence level of the student, based on a comparison of discussions pre-convention and postconvention. This experience was created by reflecting with the student on her personal career goals, which was made easier by the open working relationship they had cultivated from the beginning. The ATS was aware of the mentoring advice, in addition to the assignment showcasing the need for mentoring throughout her career. Together, there was open communication about precepting and mentoring and how they should complement each other. The transition from preceptor to mentor was initiated 2 weeks before the activity and developed into the continuous mentoring relationship it is today.

The preceptor described a fun and rewarding experience, particularly because she was able to stay 2 to 3 steps ahead of the ATS. By “planting” people, ideas, and opportunities for the ATS, the ATS gained knowledge beyond that initially anticipated. A positive was the reward of watching an ATS learn and grasp experiences and professional culture at a rapid-fire pace. Preceptors need to decide the amount of time and effort they are willing to spend to create this activity, including finding individuals from their own professional networks to participate. Although it took commitment and effort to create the event, it also allowed the preceptor's view of the convention to be altered, seeing it through the student's eyes and looking for more opportunities to create learning experiences. The preceptor compared this project with “being on a field trip that lasted more than 1 day.” They were able to connect regularly throughout the convention, yet stay to their own schedules. The preceptor was willing to adapt if the experience was not what was hoped for the ATS or if the ATS was overwhelmed by her encounters.

Overall, success was evaluated in 2 ways. Objectively, the ATS handed in a finished checklist of items completed, plus extra

**Table 2. Advantages and Areas for Growth**

Goals	Objectives	Expected Outcomes
Mentorship	The ATS introduced herself to 10 Hall of Fame members at the opening reception.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Communication</li> <li>• Networking and building a network for the future</li> <li>• Gaining an understanding of opportunities within the profession</li> <li>• Appreciation for history</li> <li>• Exhibitors that were outlined to visit tied to her learning agenda for her current immersive site and included interdisciplinary concussion work</li> <li>• Orthopaedic surgeon practice</li> <li>• Postoperative rehabilitation</li> </ul>
Exhibit hall navigation	The ATS needed to meet with 20 vendors. Twelve vendors were specifically outlined because they would be used during her immersive program. She collected all handouts to review and discuss when she returned to the clinic.	The ATS was invested in creating her own “continuing education” opportunities, which were reviewed postconvention regarding learned objectives
Education	Each day there was an outline of courses for the ATS to attend. There were no more than 2 each day because the ATS needed to find others through the conference app to complete her agenda.	
Volunteerism	The ATS was set to meet her preceptor during the convention to attend specific sessions with committees and members of committees to learn details about committee charges, expectations, goals, and impact for the future of athletic training, specifically in her areas of interest and the immersive clinical site.	The ATS was exposed to several volunteer opportunities to create a future agenda for potential ways to “give back” to the profession through advocacy for the profession and specific initiatives
Social events	The ATS was encouraged to attend at least 1 social event each night to gather with friends and other ATs from throughout the country. The ATS was expected to garner at least 3 contacts each night.	The ATS learned to feel comfortable speaking with others, as well as professionally socializing with others from across the country. At the conclusion, the ATS was able to identify a network of individuals from across the country whom she can contact for ideas, concerns, or mentoring.
Personal investment	Guidelines were created by the ATS with help from her preceptor to set up a successful learning agenda at a convention.	The ATS was able to discern which aspects of the convention can help with her growth and development as a student and future professional.

Abbreviations: AT, athletic trainer; ATS, athletic training student.

“bonuses” given to her during the week. Subjectively, her belief of the experience was positive, especially due to her list of professional contacts (vendors, speakers), as well as the list of individuals she needed to meet and communicate with postconvention. As with many experiences, the ATS formed many connections, in part, by the simple requirement of trading business cards. Of those exchanges, the ATS estimated approximately 20% have become “meaningful” for her new experiences in her professional setting.

During the postconference debriefing the ATS said she was amazed at the response from those with whom she spoke. This could be attributed to the preceptor’s personal experience of whom the ATS should meet and in devising goals to be accomplished. One important lesson the preceptor learned for future scavenger hunts was the importance of being more specific in her requests (eg, sending written thank-you notes in the mail versus a quick email) because the ATS needed some direction from the preceptor. The debriefing questions allowed the preceptor and ATS to better understand the

positive aspects of the activity as well as what could be improved for future participation.

### LESSONS LEARNED AND ADVICE

This scavenger hunt activity can be used at a conference or meeting and scaled appropriately to the event. It can also be easily adaptable to a virtual experience if students are unable to attend conferences in person. The Internet has a plethora of educational material for future ATs. Additionally, this activity can be incorporated into an orientation to the program, in a leadership course, or as a way to learn more about the profession. Using cameras to take pictures, email to contact leaders in the profession, and the Internet to search for National Athletic Trainers’ Association trivia can all be educational for the ATSs.

The learning objectives were a joint effort and should be created as such. Based on what the ATS wanted to gain from attending the conference, the preceptor focused on a unique way to have the ATS gain experience, become involved in the



profession, and learn about the experiences of those who have been in the profession for many years.

Should the preceptor have more than 1 ATS, this could become more complex when trying to meet with the students throughout the event. In addition, at a smaller conference, the ATs and vendors may feel overwhelmed at the number of requests coming from ATSSs. Therefore, having a group project may be more effective in this case.

## CONCLUSIONS

A scavenger hunt for orienting ATSSs to a national meeting both familiarizes and engages the ATSSs at the meeting. The scavenger hunt can be flexible and can be adapted to any venue, such as modifications for a district meeting. Regardless of the site, the ATSSs can participate in similar activities, albeit at a smaller level.

Effective mentoring is important for socialization as a professional and is often a challenge for entry-level ATs to find.<sup>1,10</sup> However, being a mentor is not an innate attribute and there should not be an assumption that all preceptors understand how to be mentors for their ATSSs. This scavenger hunt is a sample activity a preceptor could use to increase confidence and give the ATS a sense of support by helping to develop a professional network beyond the current clinical setting. Research has shown that discussing professional behaviors was most helpful for preparing an AT to communicate professionally.<sup>11</sup> Reaching out to leaders during the scavenger hunt can help the ATS to have these discussions and can provide more than what a guest lecturer may provide. Therefore, the ATS may be able to identify someone who more closely aligns with their goals, which is important for their future.

Encouraging preceptors to find events that help them become better preceptors will not only increase the satisfaction of the ATSSs but also increase the ability to socialize the entry-level ATs. The ATSSs with preceptors who provide mentorship during clinical education experiences beyond the clinical setting ultimately are more likely to envision themselves in the role of an AT.<sup>12</sup>

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