Negotiating Co-Authorship, Ethically and Successfully

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Abstract

Authorship is a feature of career success and is relevant for practically all health science fields. Yet negotiating co-authorship is one of the most difficult processes academics encounter. The stakes are high, issues can be complex, and negotiators' motivations are often multifaceted. The tools presented in this article – preparation, relationship development, and communication – can be used to increase the likelihood of a successful negotiation. Through the use of a case study, this article illustrates how a typical junior colleague can negotiate with their mentor. Additionally, this article outlines various standards of co-authorship to ensure that published authorship reflects appropriate standards of the field. The goal is for academics to be able to negotiate not only effectively, but also ethically.

Keywords: negotiation, ethics, academia, mentorship, authorship.

1   Introduction

In academia, we often assume that our brain power, the strength of our research, and the eloquence of our theories will determine our success. Yet, far more scientists drop off the career path because of mismanagement of relationships at work than because of lack of smarts. Understanding how to manage those negotiations and relationships can be a crucial long-term skill to develop in order to maintain long-term success in an academic career.

Determining co-authorship is one of the most difficult negotiation processes that academics encounter. Authorship is a determining feature of career success, so this conversation would be challenging even in long-term, strong relationships. One defining complication of academic health research work is authorship division. Authorship division is relevant for practically all health science fields, given the complexity, time, and resources needed to conduct health science research. However, negotiators' motivations are often multi-faceted. Motivations are often based not only on credit for a given publication, but also for an advantage to improve opportunities for future funding opportunities and to enhance scientific reputation in general. Well-established academic hierarchies greatly influence

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negotiator interest and strength in negotiation. Additionally, international collaboration and publication may involve different cultural ethical codes of conduct and acceptable behaviors, further muddling an already sensitive situation. Many of these conversations have elements of power differences, cross-cultural and cross-disciplinary assumptions, and occur under time pressure. It is no wonder that these negotiations can and do often go poorly.

Karen Peterson, scientific ombudsman at the Fred Hutchinson Cancer Research Center in Seattle, Washington, defines authorship as the "academic currency" of scientists, therefore causing it to be a "hot-button topic" (Dance, 2012). One-fifth of disputes she adjudicates are related to authorship (Dance, 2012). Such conflicts also dominate the Committee on Publication Ethics (COPE) of *PLoS Medicine* in Cambridge, United Kingdom (Dance, 2012). While there is no perfect approach to prevent and solve authorship conflicts, negotiating authorship disagreement goes hand in hand with scientific responsibility (Dance, 2012).

This article outlines some tools for dealing with these negotiations – how we can prepare, prevailing standards and concerns in authorship, ways to develop relationships that can transcend and manage this tension, and, at the end of the day, management of these conversations so that the negotiation around co-authorship does not become a procedural block to substantive, ongoing work.

2   Case Study

To illustrate the myriad issues that rise in a co-authorship negotiation, we will employ a case study (Schneider & Kupfer, 2017). A post-doctoral fellow at a medium-size university, Mika, has spent her first and second academic years settling in, learning how her colleagues operate, doing her own work, and getting to know her mentor, Nancy. Regular monthly meetings have helped them slide into a relationship that is both professional and cordial. Mika greatly admires Nancy, who has done impressive work in their field, and she is pleased to think that the two women have learned to talk with some ease in a relatively short time. However, their most recent meeting leaves Mika wondering how to proceed.

In their monthly meeting, Nancy had told Mika that she needed to put higher priority on completing and submitting a manuscript summarizing exciting findings from her dissertation research and a subsequent follow-up study. Mika agreed with her mentor that getting one more first-author paper published within the next year was very important, since Mika was also working on a proposal for a research career development award, a grant specifically aimed at helping young scientists pursue their work.

Then, speaking casually but clearly, Nancy told Mika that about a month ago, another prominent researcher in their field at another university, Professor Zimmerman, had asked Nancy to write a chapter on recent scientific advances for an updated edition of Zimmerman's very popular textbook. Because she thought so highly of Zimmerman and knew she could make a meaningful contribution to what was likely to be an important, widely circulated work, Nancy had quickly agreed to Zimmerman's request. But when she returned to her office, she

promptly got caught up in an especially busy fall, and she didn't write a word for the book. Her chapter was overdue. Would Mika like to work on this project with Nancy over the next few weeks? Mika was completely taken aback and ducked the question since she wasn't sure how to answer this. But Nancy needed an answer since she herself was already late.

Since Nancy will be Mika's primary researcher on the proposed grant award proposal, Mika wants to make sure she will give Mika a strong recommendation and endorsement. Another factor to consider is that Mika also greatly admires Professor Zimmerman, the editor of the book, and considers her a leader in Mika's field. In fact, many of Professor Zimmerman's books were required reading in Mika's own training.

2.1 Negotiation Preparation

This scenario above raises a multitude of issues that Mika will have to consider. First, there is the relationship between her and Nancy – the mentor-mentee relationship. This relationship is often one of the most important ones in a young scientist's career and is not to be taken lightly. For this paper's purposes, mentoring refers to the set of relationships that are often initiated and developed in academic and personal life and are an integral part of the career trajectory. Second, she should consider that this relationship with Nancy – and perhaps with Professor Zimmerman as well – is the establishment of her reputation in the field. Each action that Mika takes – each commitment that she makes – and each response establishes her reputation and trustworthiness. Does she perform as promised? Does she carry out her commitments to others? Third, Mika needs to consider her goals in terms of her larger career and then, more specifically, when she has the next conversation with Nancy, she should consider what she really wants to accomplish in terms of her own research, co-authorship, her research grant and future career plans. Fourth, as she considers her goals, Mika needs to understand the larger context of scientific co-authorship and how this has evolved. Furthermore, she should also understand the standards or typical patterns of co-authorship, so that she knows what is fair and what Nancy may or may not expect from her. Finally, Mika needs to pull all of this together as she determines how best to approach Nancy and to ask for what she wants. We will review each of these elements in order.

2.2 The Mentor-Mentee Relationship

Because mentors play such important, necessary, and often complicated roles in one's personal and professional life, the topic of mentors and mentoring merits inclusion in any discussion about how to accomplish professional goals. Given the complexity of academic life, separating career advancement and mentoring is virtually impossible. Mentoring – and having a mentor – have always been important in any professional sphere, but only in recent decades have these topics received considerable attention and study from observers and scholars, most of whom consider mentoring an essential part of career development. Academic literature is now filled with articles devoted to mentoring. Note that in this context, the basic importance of mentoring, supervising, and training is not examined.

The focus is only on mentoring as one of the crucial arenas where negotiation occurs. In assessing mentor/mentee relationships and their quality, benefits result from reviewing some key characteristics you want in a mentor. Organizing them into a few sections is recommended: the personal characteristics of a mentor; the mentor's availability; the mentee's skill development; and networking (Lee et al., 2007).

Mentoring happens over the course of the entire career. Some people were not necessarily labeled as mentors, nor was the relationship with them ever thought of in a traditional mentor/mentee sense. However, as in so many areas of life, this kind of early relationship is worth some analysis. In many ways, one's first mentor represents your first good or bad work negotiation experience, and that relationship may play an outsized role in setting up future expectations. In other words, Mika's prior relationship with her mentors or counselors probably impacts how she views Nancy and what Mika expects from Nancy.

2.3 Building a Professional Reputation

Mika needs to understand that this negotiation with Nancy – as well as past interactions – develops her reputation. In terms of negotiation, effective negotiators think carefully about their own trustworthiness as well as their willingness to trust the other side and work with them. The reputation of the negotiator is a crucial part of negotiation. Almost all negotiations within an academic or research setting will operate from the foundation of the negotiator's established reputation. Simultaneously, the negotiator's reputation will be built upon and altered.

Negotiations are inherently uncertain, and a reputation helps manage this uncertainty by giving others signals or predicting an individual's behavior, and why (Welsh, 2012). The phrase "your reputation precedes you" is particularly helpful. One's reputation will explain actions and motivations in any interaction in which the other party does not fully know what other options or information is accessible. As empirical negotiation studies have clearly demonstrated, different reputations can lead to different outcomes (Tinsley et al., 2002). Those with a reputation for working well with others, for instance, will have their actions interpreted in that light.

Not surprisingly, when a counterpart is known to be adversarial and have a competitive approach to negotiations, negotiators share less information, will talk around the subject, and achieve less beneficial and creative outcomes (Tinsley et al., 2002). Having a reputation for being competitive, of course, can be useful in certain situations, especially when trying to deter another from even beginning to negotiate, or making threats that seem credible (Tinsley et al, 2002). In the majority of scenarios described in this article, however, these interactions will benefit from a long-term perspective that seeks to bring together multiple interests.

When parties have the reputation for being integrative or problem-solving, the result is likely to be more satisfying. Facing someone with a good reputation makes people more inclined to share information and to share it more efficiently and earlier in the negotiation, saving time. This increased information-sharing then leads to better, more comprehensive agreements.

Furthermore, trust and distrust operate separately from each other (Lewicki, 2017). For example, one might trust a graduate assistant to calculate data accurately but not necessarily to be truthful about total hours of work. While someone may be trustworthy to perform research, they may not be trustworthy to write it up carefully and professionally. A student might trust their mentor to help them get a paper published, but not to help them leave the lab when the time is right. Rather than thinking of trust and distrust as opposite ends of one spectrum, they are to be thought of as separate spectrums that coexist in each situation.

Trust also makes the negotiation more efficient because the agreement itself is shorter – two people who trust each other do not need spell out every single component of their resolution. They trust each other to abide by the agreement and to act in its spirit. (Imagine an agreement to co-author in which all the elements of co-authoring had to be spelled out: who will write what by what date with what parameters; who will edit what when; who will deal with the publisher. An agreement to mentor would be even more ludicrous if it were necessary to outline every element.) Increased trust between the parties means that whatever the agreement is, the relationship will be strong and perhaps grow even stronger over the life of the agreement.

Mika should do her "homework" about Nancy: at the least ask what to expect from the other side. If Mika knows Nancy is usually willing to compromise, she should be thinking about that during their meeting. Mika should also carefully review Nancy's curriculum vitae to see whether other mentees have received co-authorships for chapters – and whether granting authorships or co-authorships is a regular practice for Nancy. Mika also might want to check out Nancy's work habits on similar assignments as well. Does she routinely push deadlines? If she is working with a co-author, does she require a rough draft or a completely polished piece? Extensive homework will pay off: Mika is making decisions that will affect her own career, so she will want to know in advance if someone works in a way that will make it hard for Mika to achieve her own goals in a timely fashion without excessive aggravation.

2.4 Setting Goals

The next step is for Mika to set some goals for herself in any upcoming negotiation with Nancy. Mika avoided answering Nancy's question to give Mika some time to think and prepare. This is one of the most important actions that a negotiator can do in advance of any conversation. What specifically should Mika aim for in this conversation? Goals in a negotiation should be both optimistic and reasonable (Shell, 2006). Reasonable – based on past practice, standards in the field, etc. – so that you can persuade your negotiation counterpart that what you want is fair. And when your goals are reasonable, you yourself will be more assertive in arguing for them.

At the same time, goals need to be optimistic so that one will get more of what one wants. In general, one will only get what one asks for – not more – and so we should aim high and leave room to negotiate (Schneider, 2017). You also want your goals to be specific rather than vague (think about the difference in setting a goal to "be more healthy" versus specific goals like "exercise three times

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Table 1   Setting goals

Issue: Authorship	**Mika's Goals**
	Other Parties: Nancy, Mika's Mentor
Goals	**Action**
Specific	Mika needs to:
	– Continue working on first-author paper that she hopes to get published within the next year
	– Continue working on the research career development award proposal that she hopes to get funded
	– Calculate how much time it will take to figure out the contribution to the article and how manageable that time demand will be
	– Stay in Nancy's good graces (if she wants Nancy to recommend her and endorse her award proposal)
	– Get a clearer understanding of Nancy – how she thinks and why she brought up the chapter as she did. Any workable plan to understand Nancy better needs specific steps and a way to measure Mika's progress
Aspirational	– Mika should ask for co-authorship on the chapter
Reasonable	– Mika needs to plan to work with her mentor to set out a time frame (or game plan) for balancing the three projects: getting an article published under Mika's own name, writing the chapter for Zimmerman's book, and working on her career development grant proposal

a week" or "only eat red meat once a week." Not surprisingly, studies show that specific goals are far more likely to be met. Specific goals also serve to "anchor" the negotiation around the first offer. The table herein is an illustration of how Mika might set specific, aspirational, and reasonable goals for her conversation with Nancy.

2.5 Standards of Co-Authorship

Once Mika has created a first draft of her goals, it is time to do some research on how co-authorship typically works in her field. There is a demonstrated and pervasive lack of understanding regarding what authorship means, what responsibilities constitute it, and how it is determined (Strange, 2008). This perhaps may be explained by the fact that scientific authorship was largely individual from the 1600s until the 1920s (Strange, 2008). Today's research world looks very different. Single-authored papers are a rare phenomenon and papers are often multidisciplinary. Multidisciplinary research is commonly synonymous with international research, incorporating different cultural norms and social behaviors.

   Research practice in the health sciences is to rank authors in academic publications in a decreasing level of contribution. This practice lacks clear universal guidelines and is largely journal-dependent, therefore requiring authors to utilize negotiation to solve such issues. Poor research practices exist in many forms. However, some are more prevalent than others, and are worth defining. The fol-

lowing numbered list outlines poor research reporting practices (Rohwer et al., 2017).

1 Guest authorship: adding authors who did not contribute substantially to the work.
2 Ghost authorship: omitting authors who have contributed substantially to the work.
3 Plagiarism: copying a text or part of a text, an idea or image from someone else's work, without properly referencing the source and using it as one's own work.
4 Redundant publication: republishing one's own work, including copying a manuscript (duplicate publication), publication of parts of results in separate publications (salami publication), or reusing text in several publications (text recycling).
5 Non-disclosure of conflicts of interest: not declaring a financial or non-financial (personal, political, academic, religious, institutional) interest that can potentially influence professional judgment and bias conclusions.

In other words, "misbehaviors" include, but are not limited to, authorship dishonesty, dual publication, self-plagiarism, conflict of interest, and publishing the smallest publishable unit (Al-Herz et al., 2014). Intellectual honesty and accurate personal responsibility for actions is crucial for maintained integrity of academic accountability (Rohwer et al., 2017). While scientists often get caught up in the most accurate representation of data within publications, this often comes at the price of the research's integrity due to blatant professional misconduct (Rohwer et al., 2017). For this reason, authorship is commonly misrepresented on scientific publications. While academics must take responsibility for the seemingly "accepted" failing research behaviors, they may find solace in the fact that they are not alone. Such behavior is not a secret: 33% of researchers funded by the National Institutes of Health (NIH) admitted that they engaged in one or several "serious research ethics misbehaviors" (Al-Herz et al., 2014). Mika will want to keep all of this in mind as she considers how to set her goals.

Finally, while this paper strongly focuses on authorship negotiation at the individual level, it is important to explain the murkiness and problematic power relations present at an institutional level regarding authorship. Oftentimes, institutional authorship guidelines follow the generally accepted rules (explicit or not) of the disciplines that they represent. For example, large physics labs such as CERN, Europe's particle-physics laboratory near Geneva, Switzerland, give authorship to everyone that was involved in the lab that makes a significant discovery, even if they have not seen the paper, and regardless of contribution (Dance, 2012). In contrast, the biological sciences have a strictly-ranked author list where the "top spot" is at the end of the list, representing the principal investigator running the lab (Dance, 2012). The student or post-doctoral fellow who did the work and primarily wrote the article is listed first (Dance, 2012). Those listed in the middle have varying levels of contribution, and from the author list, it is hard to define their participation (Dance, 2012).

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Committees such as the International Committee of Medical Editors (ICMJE) based out of Philadelphia, Pennsylvania, have developed guidelines adopted by many institutions and journals. According to the ICMJE, running a protocol that anyone could do does not justify authorship (Dance, 2012). ICMJE authorship derives from creativity and intellectual engagement that molded the paper enough to the point that without their contribution, the paper would not look the same (Dance, 2012). The British Sociological Association (BSA) recommends listing authors in correct order in every draft in order to limit confusion or false expectations (Osborne & Meadow, 2009).

In a review of 12 scientific institutions with established authorship guidelines including institutions such as the American Chemical Society, the American Psychological Association, the National Academy of Science, the National Institute of Health, and the Society for Neuroscience, Osborne and Meadow concluded that most authorship stems from project conception or design, data collection and processing, analysis/interpretation of data, and writing substantial sections of the paper (2009). Those who do not merit authorship but deserve to be recognized are to be mentioned in either a footnote or in the "Acknowledgements" section (Osborne & Meadow, 2009). Nine of the twelve guidelines of Osborne and Meadow's review addressed the importance of the research group jointly deciding on who will receive authorship and contributor credit. Eight guidelines also recommended that all authors approve the final draft of the manuscript before publication (Osborne & Meadow, 2009). Less than half of reviewed guidelines touched on student authorship (and when so, only in the social sciences) (Osborne & Meadow, 2009).

While most institutions have some authorship guideline infrastructure in place, Osborne and Meadow encourage institutions to view this subject as an ethical obligation worthy of discussion in every department. After all, despite valiant efforts and partially to fully established guidelines, transdisciplinary, multidisciplinary, and interdisciplinary publication quickly muddles well-intentioned authorship guidelines set within institutions and specific fields. Again, Mika will also need to consider her discipline and any particular instructional guidelines that will influence her and Nancy's expectation in this negotiation. To make an informed decision, Mika will need to perform "due diligence" on the first edition of the book edited by Professor Zimmerman. How well did that first edition do when it was first published? Is the book still prominent in Mika's own field? If Mika chooses to pursue the invitation, what is the likelihood that she will be able to network with other book contributors and even Zimmerman herself?

2.6 Choosing a Negotiation Approach

Negotiating through academia effectively and smoothly, like any skill, requires both knowledge and practice. Such negotiation is developed in tandem with individual existing tendencies, talents, and strengths. With this in mind, before beginning to think about negotiation skills, individual baseline skills and preferred styles must be identified. Methods of communication might come from family upbringing: large or small, loud or quiet, an environment in which conflicts were discussed openly, smoothed over, or ignored. Other methods of communica-

tion result from personal choice: team or individual sports, strategy games, or debate. Additional expression methods are deducted from professional choices. For example, in contrast to law or business school, academic experiences based in the social or hard sciences do not emphasize self-advocacy as a major part of formal curriculum.

Many communication habits derive from personality and temperament. Those who are outgoing have an easier time making their points in conversation. Those who tend to stay back, and listen are probably good at reading others' signals and understanding their motivations. Other skills are developed in relation to what has worked in the past. Most people know a person whose negotiation tactics have not progressed much past their toddler personality: assuming that if they throw a fit, they will get their way. Although people often criticize someone's style (as pushy, passive aggressive, or even obnoxious) there is no "right" or "wrong" style of negotiation. There is only the most effective style for a particular situation. Compromise is not always wise, and avoidance is not always cowardly. Instead, different strategies may be used as needed.

First and foremost, Mika realizes that maintaining a good working relationship with her mentor Nancy is vital. Flexibility will help ensure an outcome that makes both parties happy. As she thinks about how best to respond to Nancy's surprising request and its possible impact on Mika's work, Mika will want to consider several options. One is to agree to work on the book chapter, with or without authorship, in addition to completing the one manuscript directly related to Mika's own work and hope Nancy grants co-authorship to her anyway. A second choice would be to explicitly ask for co-authorship on the book chapter. Mika could also decline to do the chapter for Zimmerman's book.

In analysing the range of possible responses, Mika will see that the first option, agreeing to do the chapter and continue working on her own articles, represents a straightforward accommodating style aimed at keeping Mika's and Nancy's relationship agreeable and supportive while to some extent sacrificing Mika's own interests. This is an easy negotiation – but one that could turn Mika's workload or stress level into a more challenging situation. The second response, in which Mika is asking to do the book chapter as a co-author, would require a more competitive style, one in which Mika is seeking to be assertive and make a strong case for her own current and future position. The third response, saying no to the chapter, is essentially there to avoid internal conflict and stress – although Nancy may well see it as a competitive, selfish, or even silly choice, especially if Mika does not explain to Nancy that her refusal is prompted by the demands of Mika's own work. With this in mind, Mika may also consider having a more open conversation with Nancy about such concerns, which would be a good example of collaboration and seeking to work out a collaborative arrangement. If Nancy is interested in that conversation, this option may make sense. Exploratory discussions can be viewed as intermediate negotiations on the way to a final resolution. If, however, Nancy has indicated that she wants an immediate answer, an extended conversation may not work. Collaboration takes time, and in the face of an impending deadline, it may not always be a useful strategy.

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2.7 Working with Your Counterpart

Perhaps counterintuitively, differences between parties in a negotiation can help achieve desired outcomes: Different backgrounds can create different priorities, and different priorities can allow people to trade off items. Even differences in power or stature can make some negotiations easier. When negotiating for co-authorship with a much more senior colleague, for example, her need for first-author status might be much lower than someone of a less senior status. Nancy is already a fully tenured professor, so perhaps she's more interested in mentoring, getting this paper written before the mentee completes the post-doc fellowship, and moving on to her next project. The mentee's interests, on the other hand, might be completing the chapter quickly (an interest shared with the senior colleague), having her name on the paper for prestige and thus better future job opportunities (preferably as a first author) and getting better journal placement (another shared interest). The differences in status probably will make this negotiation easier than it would be for two junior faculty members coming up for tenure at the same time who both really want to be the first author on the article.

Sometimes, however, differences can stall a negotiation as you make cultural assumptions, verbal gaffes, and fail to communicate clearly because of differences. What if Mika and Nancy are of quite different backgrounds or grew up in different countries? When thinking about negotiation patterns and assumptions, it is important to recognize how many different influences are at play. Of course, some differences, such as gender, race, and nationality, are perceptible. It is possible that incorrect assumptions are made regarding such differences. If Mika is especially cooperative, is that because of her gender? Her Southern roots, which are heard every time she speaks? Perhaps she is cooperative because she was the youngest child, trying to fit in. Perhaps she grew up in a culture where being "nice" was seen as the only acceptable behavior. The awareness of possible influences – both for yourself and your counterpart – can be very helpful.

At the same time, Mika needs to be aware of some cultural norms. Knowledge of Nancy's culture (whether realized through advance research or by asking good questions at the table) will demonstrate respect and understanding. With an awareness of the other person's culture, background, and history, one is more likely to understand where he is coming from and why she cares about some things more than others.

2.8. Outcomes

As Mika reviews the possible outcomes and decides on the best negotiating style, she could decide that compromising and looking for the middle ground may be the quickest way to arrive at a solution. If she agrees to work on the Zimmerman textbook chapter, with or without authorship, in addition to continuing her own writing, Mika can reiterate that she expects to be first author on the other manuscript coming from her work in the laboratory and that she expects Nancy to help make that happen. One huge advantage of this approach is that she would please her mentor and get assistance in completing the other essential manuscript. On the other hand, Mika would be spending plenty of time gathering information

and helping to write a chapter for which she may get no credit – and none of the professional recognition that comes with authorship.

A second tactic, one that moves the discussion to a more collaborative position, is for Mika to insist that her work on the chapter with Nancy merits authorship – but one that does not detract from Nancy's position as senior author. Mika knows that if she turned all her attention to whatever chapter Nancy had in mind, she and Nancy could finish the chapter fairly quickly, and co-authorship would bring Mika much-needed visibility. The disadvantage: because Nancy did not mention co-authorship in her initial proposal to Mika, such a clear demand could put Nancy in a tough position. Nancy definitely needs Mika to help finish this chapter anytime soon, but she may be annoyed and might not help Mika with Mika's own manuscript. To some extent, using this tactic will depend on how well Mika can read Nancy. How highly tuned are Mika's empathy and social intuition?

The third tactic, one that involves a competing style and does not provide a useful approach to resolving future similar dilemmas, is to say no to the Zimmerman chapter. Mika could say that she is committed to finishing her own manuscript as soon as possible and cannot afford any distraction. This makes sense, however, only if completing the other manuscript is more important than Mika's relationship with Nancy.

2.9. Conclusion

With respect to these discussions, Mika would be wise to record the results of her various conversations, often following them up with e-mail. For example, if Nancy agrees to give Mika a co-authorship on the chapter, Mika might want to follow up with an e-mail confirming this invitation. When the stakes are high, verbal agreements probably are not sufficient. In this situation, as in so many, Mika will be much better off if she examines and ranks her interests; exercises her social intuition, assertiveness, and research skills to really understand her relationship with her mentor; and responds after taking time for careful consideration.

Academic negotiation within the health sciences, specifically regarding issues of co-authorship, and mentoring, is a current and complex issue. This article serves a guide for academics to negotiate not only effectively, but also ethically, so that produced work has accuracy and integrity.

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