

**SUCCESSFUL MENTORING:  
ACCESSIBILITY, COMMUNICATION, AND FEEDBACK**

Mentoring programs are an important part to the growth of the legal community, but is often overlooked by practitioners. Law schools and bar associations have begun realizing the importance of mentoring programs, however some mentors commit but cannot follow-through. In order for the mentor relationship to succeed, both parties should be accessible, responsive, and realistic with their expectations. The mentors and mentees should be engaged and involved in the process to achieve the best results.

Most mentees' complaints about mentors focus on the mentor's inaccessibility or non-responsiveness. The most common criticism is that the mentor met with the mentee once, but was never heard from again. Attorneys are busy, but a mentor's inaccessibility can reflect poorly on the mentor, their place of work, and the legal community as a whole. It is very important to keep the obligation to the mentee, especially when the mentee may suffer repercussions such as a lower grade in a law school class. This doesn't mean that the mentor is expected to spend hours a week with the mentee, but the mentor should attempt to be as accessible and responsive as possible.

In today's digital society there are many ways to mentor even when you cannot meet in-person. Phone calls, e-mails, and text messages are all acceptable forms of communication in addition to meeting for lunch, dinner, or coffee. This is not to say all communications should be done electronically, but it can be a useful tool when in-person meetings are not possible. Also, keep in mind that the mentee may be anxious to make the first contact with the mentor or may

feel as though they are a burden to their mentor. If a mentor doesn't hear from their mentee for several weeks or months, the mentor should make an effort to reach out to the mentee.

Once you have made contact with your mentee, attempt to establish a personal connection. Finding common interests will help both parties understand one another and provide a foundation for the relationship. Whether the mentee is still in law school or a newly admitted attorney, try not to make everything strictly about their work or school. Practicing attorneys know that finding a work/life balance is important to your health and other relationships, but a law student or new attorney may not yet have a good idea of how to obtain the perfect balancing act. A mentor should offer ideas and provide perspective on things that are truly important. Some mentees may find it helpful for you to offer examples of how you have previously tried to stabilize your life, or how you currently keep balance in your life. This will allow the mentee to find a balance that will aid in their health and stability.

Encourage your mentee, but be realistic and honest when giving feedback or ideas. Law school students and new attorneys may have different beliefs as to how they should act, dress, or what type of law they will practice. The mentee should be encouraged on their strengths, but also given feedback on possible weaknesses or unrealistic expectations. For example, the mentee may think they will be paying back their student loans in a just a few short years and working minimal hours for top pay. The mentor and mentee should discuss realistic expectations and goals for the future. Providing honest feedback to the mentee will allow them to work on their weaknesses and shift their unrealistic expectations.

Overall, for a mentoring program to be successful, it is imperative that both mentor and mentee be accessible, have open communication, and be invested in the outcome. The mentor's

role in leading future attorneys is especially vital since this may be the mentee's first real interaction with or in the legal community. Commitment to the program by both parties will lead to a successful mentoring relationship that may last long after completion of the program.