

# How to Mentor Another Lawyer

By Lori L. Keating

**L**awyers universally agree that serving as a mentor is an honorable thing to do. However, not all lawyers know how to be a good mentor. To be an effective mentor, follow these steps:

**Share expectations.** Start by looking at yourself critically and thinking about the strengths you have that you hope to teach—whether it is your ability to network, write, communicate effectively with clients, or balance the demands of career and personal life. Share your perceived abilities with your protégé, and ask what he or she hopes to gain from the mentoring experience. Discuss how often you would like to meet and how you will communicate between meetings. Expectations are much more likely to be achieved if they are shared.

**Don't undermine the process.** Do you multi-task? Listen for facts instead of underlying feelings? Prepare your response to statements while listening to others? Instantaneously problem-solve? These habits, which may benefit your legal practice, undermine the mentoring experience. Good mentors practice active listening. When your protégé comes to you with a problem, remain in the present moment and resist the temptation to immediately offer a solution. Restate what your protégé says and ask clarifying questions to demonstrate that you are giving the conversation due attention. Encourage your protégé's train of thought when appropriate, rather than agreeing or disagreeing outright. Be sure to acknowledge your protégé's feelings as needed. Feel free to share struggles and successes from your own career to highlight similarities in experiences, but, at the same time, honor differences between your protégé and yourself. Protégés are fellow professionals, not clients. Offer assistance to your protégé as he or she works through obstacles, rather than solve these problems yourself.

**Bring food (or sports or art) to the conversation.** Sometimes the most meaningful mentoring takes place outside the office. Sharing breakfast, lunch, dinner, or even a coffee break is a great way to bring comfort and connection to your mentoring relationship. In addition, mentoring can happen while playing a round of golf,

attending a baseball game, or viewing paintings of the Impressionists. Enjoying common interests and stepping outside your usual professional environment can lead to a freer exchange of thoughts and feelings.

**Follow up.** It is easy to promise your protégé that you will meet again soon and then, months later, realize you have not kept in touch. After a meeting, mark your calendar with a future reminder to get together. Better yet, don't leave a meeting without setting the next meeting's date. When big life events happen to you (e.g., you make partner at your firm, have a baby, or buy a new home), let your protégé know, and ask your protégé to keep you updated on life events, too. Taking a moment to call or e-mail about special occasions keeps you and your protégé on the same page.

**Promote networking.** Do not expect to be the one and only mentor in your protégé's life. Sometimes the best way to assist your protégé is to introduce him or her to others who may provide better assistance in regard to a particular experience or issue. Attend networking events together, such as bar association meetings or continuing legal education classes. Influential mentors help their protégés find a place for themselves in our professional community.

**Enjoy the rewards.** The benefits mentoring brings to protégés are obvious, but mentors, too, should understand what they have to gain from their significant investment of time and resources. Mentoring introduces a new perspective to your own. It reminds you of where you once were and how far you have come. It asks you to reexamine your professional life, and it challenges you to improve. As a result, you may find a renewed sense of pride and purpose in your work. You may also discover a feeling of community in a profession based largely on competition. Mentoring invigorates. Enjoy the experience. CRS/LO

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