

Tips on Creating Effective Mentoring Relationships

IF YOU ARE A MENTOR...

- **Take the early initiative.** Although the initial contact is a responsibility of the new lawyer, we find that many new lawyers are hesitant to be overly burdensome to their mentors. Mentors should take the initiative to reach out, set up good times to call, and communicate their openness and availability early in the relationship.
- **Set both expectations and boundaries** early on. At the initial meeting, set a regular date/time for your monthly meetings. Inform your new lawyer about the best time to call with questions or issues, when they are more likely to get your undivided attention.
- **Listen** to your new lawyer's concerns and, especially in the beginning, draw out those concerns that the new lawyer may be reluctant to raise.
- **Recognize** that new lawyers may differ in what they hope and need to get out of a mentoring relationship. Adjust your own approach to assure you are providing your new lawyer with what he or she is seeking, rather than any fixed perceptions of what your role may entail.
- **Create** a safe environment for the new lawyer's growth by being accessible and non-judgmental, keeping confidences, and inviting open and frank conversations.
- **Acknowledge** the issues facing new lawyers who are ethnic minorities, or who may face particular challenges because of their religion, sexual orientation, economic status, national origin or age.
- **Use your friends and colleagues.** No one bar member can be all things to a new lawyer. Reach out to your fellow bar members to expose your new lawyer to a diversity of experience, approach, style and perspective. One analogy may be to consider yourself in a "primary care practitioner" role, while connecting your new lawyer to the breadth and depth of the bar as broadly as possible.
- **Remember** that the only dumb question is the one that isn't asked. Encourage your new lawyer to ask, ask, ask. Be respectful and responsive with your answers.
- Your responsibility is not to direct or supervise your new lawyer's work, but to be a **coach and guide** for the development of professional values and skills.
- **Share** your experience and talent freely. Be the role model you would want.
- **Be candid** about some of the humbling experiences you have had as a lawyer. Your new lawyer will be more likely to openly discuss their difficulties knowing you too have struggled.
- **Take the time** to develop a meaningful mentoring relationship. At its best, this relationship is an opportunity for mutual learning and growth.
- **Bear in mind the program's goals.** In the rare event that a new lawyer is displaying poor professional habits, consider the best possible mentoring approach to address these issues for the long-term health of both this new lawyer, and the bar. Seek guidance from other experienced mentors. The goal is to develop all new lawyers in the highest ideals of professionalism. Simply withdrawing from the program could be a missed opportunity, and could defeat the larger purpose of public good behind your service.

IF YOU ARE A NEW LAWYER...

- **Start by setting a regular schedule.** It is highly recommended that the initial meeting includes establishment of a set schedule for monthly meetings if possible. Flexibility will be required at times,

but having the regular meeting time will help the mentoring relationship develop more quickly, and the curriculum progress more reliably.

- **Be respectful** of your mentor's time. Be prompt and give plenty of notice if you need to reschedule a meeting. Make good use of your meeting time; come prepared with a list of things you want to discuss.
- Your mentor's "war stories" can be **valuable learning tools**, especially if you can relate them to a situation of your own.
- **Ask questions!** Don't let your ego get in the way of accepting feedback and constructive criticism from your mentor.
- **Do not cover up a challenge.** New lawyers will make mistakes. It is inevitable. First acknowledging a problem and then correcting it will avoid any snowball effect or worse – impact on clients or colleagues. Your mentor could be an invaluable ally in helping through these challenges. Use your mentor as a resource, particularly in the more challenging circumstances.
- **Build multiple mentor relationships;** your NLMP mentor will not be able to advise you in every aspect of your professional or personal life. Develop effective networks with peers, other lawyers in and outside your workplace, judges, family and friends.
- Your reputation in the community will be based on your interactions with your mentor, your clients, your work colleagues, opposing counsel, court staff and judges. **Nurture it and guard it jealously.**
- **Address any problems in the mentoring relationship promptly.** The court and the bar want this to be as useful and valuable an experience as possible. If for any reason, the program or the mentoring relationship is not meeting your needs, contact the NLMP staff to begin working toward a resolution. This program is intended as a service, not a burden. Changes will be made promptly to address your needs.