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## MENTORING

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# Mentoring: One Size Doesn't Fit All

**BY PAULA PIERCE, ESQUIRE**

**M**entoring, the sharing of knowledge and expertise, is a cornerstone of the American Inns of Court. Studies show people with mentors are more likely to achieve career success. Ideally, Inns provide an environment that encourages discussion and an open exchange of ideas among members that carries over to members' activities outside the Inn.

Successful mentorship programs foster long-term relationships among members that continue outside the Inn environment. The most effective mentoring relationships are lasting ones. Research indicates most one-to-one business mentoring relationships last from two to five years. Many mentoring relationships result in lifelong friendships.

## **Diversity Is Key**

Giving each Inn member the opportunity to be both a mentor and mentee is an aspirational goal. Diverse mentoring programs can achieve such a goal. The idea that an Associate member can mentor a Master of the Bench may sound counterintuitive, but as rapidly changing technology expands ethical duties, discovery, and marketing, digital natives have technology abilities that are valuable to more seasoned attorneys.

Younger attorneys may also bring fresh perspectives and enthusiasm to a mentoring relationship. Inn membership alone provides a valuable opportunity for young lawyers to seek individual mentoring from more seasoned lawyers and vice versa. But many people are reticent to ask for mentoring, and many would-be mentors are uncomfortable approaching a potential mentee out of the blue. Inn mentoring programs give potential mentors and mentees a venue for forging relationships without the social anxiety of making the ask. Providing a wealth of opportunities and encouragement achieves better participation.

Effective, vibrant mentoring programs draw plenty of volunteer mentors and mentees, are well-attended, receive positive feedback, are constantly evolving according to need, and lead to

“Mentoring doesn’t have to be complicated, and mentoring isn’t only for a select few. We are all charged to be mentors to one another. Take a few minutes to explain why you did something to your assistant, take a staff person to lunch, call up a colleague. . . . It may not seem like much to you, but it may make all the difference in the world to that person.”

—MATIAS EDUARDO GARCIA, ESQUIRE  
Mentoring Chair, Robert W. Calvert Inn

longstanding interpersonal relationships outside the Inn. Conversely, ineffective mentoring programs are lackluster, stagnant, and limited. They draw few participants and do not foster social relationships outside the Inn. Meeting the needs and expectations of members is key to building a successful program.

When brainstorming new mentoring opportunities, consider factors such as participants’ professional experience level, commonality of subject area interests, expected benefits, scheduling and time commitment involved, and members’ personalities. How personality traits affect mentoring relationships is related to the participants’ goals. Researchers have identified two distinct but related benefits mentees receive: career and psychosocial benefits. Career benefits include coaching and exposure, while psychosocial benefits include role modeling, counseling, and friendship. Ideal long-term mentoring relationships result in both career and psychosocial benefits.

Extroverts are more likely to initiate a one-on-one mentoring relationship than introverts are. Therefore, mentor assignments or group mentoring activities may be more effective for introverts. Large-firm associates have ample opportunities for mentoring within their firms, while the local Inn’s programs may be essential for solo and small-firm practitioners. Furthermore, Inn members may have specific mentoring goals related to topics such as professional ethics, client development, or courtroom deportment. Short roundtable discussions facilitated by experts are an excellent way for Inn members to explore specific matters.

Effective mentoring programs meet members where they are in their professional journeys by making opportunities in all membership categories: Masters, Barristers, Associates, and Pupils. Additionally, effective programs give consideration to practice types. For example, litigators benefit from mentoring by seasoned litigators, appellate lawyers, and judges. Transactional lawyers may be ideal mentors for anyone seeking to improve

writing skills. Transactional lawyers can benefit from mentoring by seasoned transactional attorneys, as well as from appellate lawyers whose practices are also writing intensive.

It is also important that all members have opportunities to serve as mentors. If the only mentoring opportunity is within the Inn, younger lawyers may only be mentees; if the only mentoring opportunity is outside the Inn, associates lack a way to receive mentoring from masters absent personal initiative. Associates may be excellent mentors in technology-related areas such as social media. Associates and law student members may also serve as mentors for college and high school students interested in careers in the justice system.

Finally, the size and scope of the Inn will determine what types of activities will be most effective. A specialty Inn of modest size has very different dynamics from a large general Inn.

### **Building Successful Mentoring Programs**

How should an Inn begin to build a mentoring program? Start by appointing a mentoring committee. The mentoring committee is charged with reviewing the makeup of membership, creating mentoring goals for the Inn, and crafting programs to meet those goals. The process is fluid and never-ending. At the end of each year, the mentoring committee should solicit feedback from the membership and review programs. Using member feedback, the committee should revise mentoring goals, tweak existing programs, abandon ineffective or unpopular programs, and create new mentoring opportunities to fill unmet needs.

### **Different Mentoring Models**

The Calvert Inn offers a variety of mentoring programs. Perhaps the most obvious mentoring opportunity in an Inn is the pupillage team. Teams are made up of members from all levels who come together for a common purpose—their presentation. However, the team environment is one that

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can foster development of long-term mentoring relationships by giving team members a chance to get to know one another.

Currently, the Calvert Inn provides members a wealth of mentoring opportunities in addition to pupillage teams. These opportunities include:

- **Lunch with a Judge.** This program is only for associates. Judges host brown bag lunches at the courthouse for small groups of associate Inn members. Judge Tim Sulak, presiding judge of Texas' 353rd Judicial District Court, conceived the idea as a way for associates to connect with judges and their staff. Participants give the program rave reviews.
- **Squads.** Squads are small mentoring groups with six members: two associates, two barristers, and two masters. Squads aim to meet bimonthly. Each squad has a leader tasked with arranging meetings and activities. Each squad is unique. Some meet for meals, others for happy hours, and others for volunteer activities. Squad assignments remove the anxiety of the ask, while the small size encourages deeper discussion and formation of lasting relationships.
- **Larry York Luncheons.** A joint program of the local Inns of Court, the luncheons are named for Larry York, a member of the Robert W. Calvert Inn who was well-known for encouraging younger lawyers to be models of integrity and professionalism. Each lunch is organized around

a table and features an engaging speaker tasked with facilitating group discussion on a chosen topic or problem.

- **Mentoring A Student (MAS).** This community mentoring program was founded by Judge Orlinda L. Naranjo, presiding judge of Texas' 419th Judicial District Court, to foster mentoring relationships between Inn members and high school students interested in law-related careers. With Judge Raul A. Gonzalez, justice of the peace for Travis County's Precinct 4, Naranjo built an active crew of volunteer lawyers who meet monthly with students in the criminal justice class at Austin's Travis High School. Inn members prepare a short presentation on a legal topic and hold small-group discussions with the students. MAS volunteers frequently use materials from popular Inn presentations. Travis High School students are predominately from modest-income families, and many will be the first in their families to graduate high school and go to college. The MAS program ends the school year by hosting a mock trial in a courtroom with a judge presiding. This program is an excellent opportunity for associate and law student members to serve as mentors.

The wealth of the Inn's mentoring programs allows every member to be a mentor and mentee.

### Lessons Learned

The Calvert Inn's mentoring committee has learned volumes on the journey. There is no "one-size-fits-all" in mentoring. Achieving 100 percent participation is a lofty goal not likely to be met every year in a large Inn. Achieving maximum member participation requires consistent committee effort, deliberate inclusivity, and offering a diverse set of mentoring opportunities each year intended to meet people where they are in their professional journeys.

Successful mentoring programs are not built in a day. The process is fluid, and the mentoring committee must be willing to seek out and use member feedback to guide its efforts. Once established, successful mentoring programs foster long-term mentoring relationships that identify future Inn leaders and boost the competency and professionalism of the profession. ♦

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