GUIDE FOR MENTORING RELATIONSHIPS

GETTING OFF TO A GREAT START:

DISCUSSION TOPICS AND ACTIVITIES

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USING THIS GUIDE

Mentoring gives people the chance to evaluate their professional goals, target career skills for improvement, explore possible career trajectories, and develop lasting relationships. The mentoring relationship has evolved to become one that is a dynamic two-way process, where the mentee shares equal responsibility for making the relationship successful. Whether using this guide as a resource for your assigned mentoring relationship through the ABA’s Commission on Disability Rights, or as a guide for any other mentoring relationship, it is intended to empower you to make the most of the relationship. The following pages offer worksheets, questionnaires, and practical information on conversations you may engage in with your mentor. Remember to bring the guide to your meetings and use it as a tool for your development. Not every activity will be appropriate or of interest to you; it is important that you collaborate with your mentor from the beginning to chart a course that is aligned with both of your experience, knowledge, and interests.
THE ROLE OF MENTOR

As a mentor, you can help your mentee develop self confidence, build legal skills, and create a clear career trajectory. Mentoring can help promote a greater sense of motivation and direction in career development, and improved interpersonal communications. Being an effective mentor involves the integration of three separate, yet overlapping, functions: coach, teacher, and experiential guide. Encourage your mentee to start the mentoring relationship with clear goals and expectations. Clarity of purpose creates a strong foundation for focused, productive learning and growth. Goal setting and coaching the mentee to take steps toward those goals is a critical aspect of an ongoing developmental process that gives the mentee greater control over a future of his or her design. There is no one correct approach - your own personal style is the very best way.

THE ROLE OF MENTEE

Working with a mentor in the early years of your development as a lawyer can contribute substantially to your learning, career satisfaction, and success. It is important to remember that creating an effective mentoring relationship is as much your responsibility as it is your mentor’s. Mentoring relationships are reciprocal. Before meeting with your mentor for the first time, think about what you are willing to do to make the relationship work. Consider agreeing upon and setting goals for the mentoring process with your mentor. Keep in mind that any opportunity your mentor provides is only as good as your willingness to take advantage of that opportunity and participate fully.

BEST PRACTICES

To be “mentorable,” there are some key practices and skills you should consider employing. The following are a few points to keep in mind as you work with your mentor and develop the mentoring relationship together:

• Keep the lines of communication open, learn to listen and ask questions
• Show interest in your own professional growth and commit to the process
• Seek and welcome your mentor’s feedback—constructive feedback, advice, and recommendations foster professional growth
• Honestly and regularly assess your needs, ambitions, strengths, and weaknesses
• Think about what you can contribute to the relationship and why someone should want to be your mentor
• Identify your short-term and long-term professional goals—the clearer you are about what you want to achieve in your career, the easier it will be for you to target your requests for support from your mentor
• Stay open to different perspectives
• Show appreciation and respect to your mentor by expressing thanks and respecting his or her time
• Keep appointments, arrive on time, follow through on commitments, and respect the mentor’s boundaries
GETTING STARTED: SETTING GOALS FOR THE MENTORING PROCESS

As a mentee, one of your first steps in embarking on the mentoring journey is to identify your goals for the mentoring relationship. What do you hope to learn from your mentor and why? What kinds of skills would you like to develop? Do you want to improve your ability to manage competing demands, become well known as a conference speaker, become a better litigator, or focus on developing specific legal skills? These are only examples, but you can use your own goals to inform your approach. Use the *Mentoring Relationship: Expectations and Goals* worksheet below to think about your goals, as well as the *Goal Setting and Action Planning Worksheet* at the end of the guide to develop targeted action steps to achieve them. The clearer your goals, the easier it will be for your mentor to assist you—either by sharing expertise and knowledge or connecting you with other “experts” and mentors who have the background and experience you seek. Your mentor is there to share his or her knowledge and experience to inform your career planning decisions.

**MENTORING RELATIONSHIP: EXPECTATIONS AND GOALS**

1. What are your expectations?

2. What three things do you hope to gain from the mentoring relationship?

3. What would make time spent together most useful and meaningful to you?

4. What obstacles do you feel you/we might face in meeting those expectations?

5. What aspects of the organization’s culture would be beneficial to discuss?

6. What ground rules are needed?

7. What are your goals for the mentoring relationship?

8. How can a mentor best work with you to stay on track and motivated during this process?

9. What do you need from your mentor that would make the process most effective for you?

10. Would you like to have an agenda for each meeting?

   a. Who will be responsible for setting the agenda?

   b. What will that agenda look like?
BEST PRACTICES

Learn all you can about your mentor before you meet to discuss his or her career path. Not only will this make for a more informed discussion, but it will send the message that you are genuinely interested both in your mentor and your own professional development. What is his or her legal background and area of expertise? Is there a particular skill or knowledge area he or she is known for? Google him/her to see what background information you can find and also ask around. After some initial research, give focused thought to what you want to learn from your mentor about his or her career path as it might relate to your own goals. What influences led him or her to choose law as a profession? How did he or she choose an area of specialization? Who or what were the factors that were most important in shaping your mentor’s career? Show interest in your mentor’s unique path and show appreciation to him or her for sharing it with you. As a part of the discussion, look for corollaries with your own interests and goals and discuss them to expand your common ground in the mentoring relationship.

DISCUSSION TOPICS:

TIME MANAGEMENT

Junior attorneys generally share a common struggle with time management. For most, practice presents a challenge of completing tasks of equal priority with insufficient time. Have a candid discussion with your mentor about current obstacles you face in using time effectively. Seek suggestions from your mentor and work with him or her to set priorities in order to make the most of time available. Ask your mentor to share his or her own struggles and strategies with time management. Complete the Assessment of Organizational and Time Management Skills worksheet below and work together with your mentor to identify areas for improvement. Use the Goal Setting and Action Planning Worksheet at the end of the guide to develop targeted action steps to achieve those goals.
**ASSESSMENT OF ORGANIZATIONAL AND TIME MANAGEMENT SKILLS**

Please answer the following questions, adding any additional comments that you think would be useful in assessing the current state of your organizational skills and time management techniques.

1. If you were able to carve out more time during any given week, what are the top 2 things you would do with that “extra” time at work? And in your personal life?
   
   **Work**
   1. 
   2. 
   
   **Personal**
   1. 
   2. 

2. Do you have a system for tracking “to do” tasks and appointments? Is this system effective? Explain why it is or is not working.

3. Do you regularly take the time to plan priorities for the week ahead?

4. Do you set aside time each morning to plan your day and prioritize tasks?

5. Do you block out calendar time for important/prioritized tasks?

6. Complete the following statements:
   
   No matter how busy I get, I always find time for ______________________________.
   My goals are well-defined when it comes to ______________________________.
   I never procrastinate about ______________________________.
   I am never late for ______________________________.
   Meeting deadlines is easiest for me when ______________________________.
   I am at my happiest when I am ______________________________.
   I never have enough time to ______________________________.
   I spend way too much time on ______________________________.
   I always underestimate how long it takes to ______________________________.
   I procrastinate whenever I have to ______________________________.

7. Would your colleagues know if you were under a lot of stress? If yes, how? (Describe what they might notice)

8. How do you reduce stress for yourself?

9. Do you have a system for capturing your voice mail, email and tasks/assignments to be completed? Please describe.

10. If you could change anything about the way you have your office organized, what would it be?

(Resources for these questions: Julie Morgenstern’s *Time Management from the Inside Out* and *Time Management: The Three Keys and Three Stumbling Blocks*, (chapter by Kathleen Post) in *The Lawyer’s Career Management Handbook*, 2010.)
WORK-LIFE INTEGRATION

You may struggle with this developmental hurdle more than any other. It is never too early to begin discussing the inherent challenges of work-life integration and developing an approach to work that makes it more likely that you will be successful. Have an honest discussion with your mentor on this topic, but keep in mind that there are no easy answers to the question of work-life integration. Talk with your mentor about strategies he or she has learned to employ and/or challenges he or she has faced in trying to implement those strategies. Share your own challenges. The Work-Life Balance Quiz below may help focus your conversation.

THE WORK-LIFE BALANCE QUIZ

Answering the following questions may help you begin to identify and define your professional goals and personal priorities. It is important to identify priorities, personal motivators, and potential obstacles before creating a comprehensive strategy to address work-life balance issues.

PRIORITIES IN ORDER OF IMPORTANCE: (number them in order of importance to you)
1. providing expert legal services to clients
2. supporting my family financially
3. having time to spend with my family
4. taking on a leadership role in the organization
5. developing stronger relationships with my co-workers
6. having stronger ties to my community

PERSONAL MOTIVATORS: (check all that apply)
1. financial rewards
2. recognition for my work
3. promotion
4. happiness in personal and family relationships
5. control over substance of work
6. control over personal schedule

OBSTACLES TO ACHIEVING YOUR GOALS: (check all that apply)
1. lack of time
2. conflicting demands (e.g. work/family, vocation/avocation)
3. shyness or feeling uncomfortable with self-promotion
4. not sure what you really want
5. ambivalence about your future

The one skill I possess that will be most helpful to me in balancing my work and the rest of my life is:

The skill I most need to develop to help me balance my work and life is:

The one activity I must make time for that is not currently on my schedule is:

The one activity that could be deleted from my schedule is:
CAREER PLANNING

Creating a career plan at this stage in your professional life is an excellent way to identify the skills, knowledge, and experience you hope to gain as you work toward your overarching professional development goals. Have an honest discussion with your mentor about your short- and long-term goals and any potential gaps you see in your experience, knowledge, and skills. Developing a plan early in your career can help inform day-to-day decisions on assignments, assist you in determining how best to invest your time in professional activities, and choose an area in which to specialize. At this point in your career, your primary objective in creating a development plan is to focus on the attainment of experiences and training that will build substantive skills and knowledge, including research, writing, negotiating, and presentation skills. Complete the Career Planning questionnaire below to assist you in thinking about your career plan, and copy the Goal Setting and Action Planning Worksheet at the end of the guide, to set goals and begin action planning.

### CAREER PLANNING

- What projects or assignments have you been involved in during the last four months and what were the substantive matters of law involved?
- Which of these projects or assignments were most satisfying? Why?
- Which of these projects or assignments were least satisfying? Why?
- Are there any skills or knowledge that you are not currently using that you would like to?
- What are the areas in which you would most like to develop over the next six months?
- What is your vision for where you would like to be in two years?
- What are three professional development goals?
- How would you prioritize them?
- How will we be able to identify together if you have reached these goals?
- What skills, and substantive knowledge do you consider strengths that will help you reach your goals?
- What barriers might keep you from reaching your vision?
- What habits or weaknesses might limit your progress? How will you manage these habits?
- As your mentor, how can I best work with you to help you stay on track and motivated during this process? What do you need from me that would make this process most effective for you?
- Is there any additional information that you would like to share with me that would assist us in this process?
BUILDING VISIBILITY

The immediate benefit of building visibility within the organization is feeling more connected to your colleagues and to your employer. The short- and long-term benefit is a greater likelihood of career success. Talk with your mentor about how you can build strong, mutually respectful relationships. Discuss effective approaches to networking—not only to get comfortable with the practice of networking itself, but to help you start identifying and developing expertise in a specialized area by getting to know more of your colleagues. Talk to your mentor about what is valued and how best to avoid potential missteps.

Once you have reached a level of comfort with your efforts to expand internal visibility, the natural next step is for you to elevate your profile in the community at large. Talk to your mentor about your existing external network (former classmates, professors, other lawyers, spouse or partner, friends or relatives, other professionals, etc.). Consider creating a quarterly plan with your mentor to include concrete ways for you to regularly nurture existing contacts, as well as action steps for investing time in activities that will strategically expand your network to other desired contacts. How can you play a more visible role in external organizational events, such as Bar Association meetings? What is the best way for you to seek out roles and leadership positions to promote professional expertise and build contacts? Your mentor may have ideas for you and may connect you with opportunities as they arise, but it is also important for you to stay alert for ongoing opportunities that speak to you and discuss those with your mentor as well.

PROFESSIONAL NETWORKING

Networking is an important skill to learn and it is never too early to begin making connections in the legal and business world. Attend an event with your mentor where both of you will have an opportunity to meet people and where participants will expect a networking activity to be taking place. Examples of these types of activities might include a law school alumni function, a local Bar Association networking event, or a networking event planned by a business affinity group. Work with your mentor to choose an activity. Discuss how you will organize contact information obtained at the event. During the event, observe your mentor in action. After the event, meet with him or her to develop a plan for following up with the contacts you made.
SUGGESTIONS FOR PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT ACTIVITIES:

ATTEND A SUBSTANTIVE LEGAL TRAINING OR ISSUES DISCUSSION WITH YOUR MENTOR
In the early years of your law practice, you may feel as though you are so focused on working on assigned projects that you have lost touch with continuing your education. As you begin to identify areas of particular interest to you in or outside of your day-to-day work content, ask your mentor to help you choose appropriate training programs that will be worth the investment of your time. Work with your mentor to identify possible training opportunities or issue discussions that would be interesting to both of you. Attend a program (with or without your mentor) and set a date to discuss what you learned. If you attend with your mentor, in the debriefing session, listen for the differences in what you and your mentor heard in the program. Talk about ways you might use the new information you learned in the program.

WRITE AN ARTICLE OR CLIENT ALERT WITH YOUR MENTOR
Writing an article with your mentor is an opportunity for you to hone your writing skills while learning the nuances of writing for a publication and increasing the visibility for your mentor, and yourself. Take advantage of your mentor’s knowledge, experience, and willingness to partner with you. No matter your level of experience, you have much to gain from co-authoring articles and client alerts with more senior lawyers. Even if you have not developed or selected a niche area of practice, it is never too early to gain experience publishing articles for internal publications or trade/business publications. Work with your mentor to choose a topic of shared interest and discuss the appropriate audience and possible publications that will offer access to this population. Volunteer to take on the primary writing role and ask for advice along the way. Be open to feedback on your writing and accept it graciously, no matter how hard it may be to hear ideas for improvements. Show appreciation by investing enough time to do your very best.

Please make additional copies of the worksheet on the following page, as you will need it for several of your discussions.
Goal Setting and Action Planning Worksheet

Goal:
__________________________________________________________________

Action Steps:                  Due Date:
1. _____________________________________   _______
2. _____________________________________   _______
3. _____________________________________   _______
4.   _____________________________________   _______
5. _____________________________________   _______
6.        _____________________________________   _______

Obstacles/Challenges & Strategies for Overcoming:
1. _____________________________________
   __________________________________________________________________
2. _____________________________________
   __________________________________________________________________
3. _____________________________________
   __________________________________________________________________

I will know that I have successfully completed this goal when…
______________________________________________________________________
______________________________________________________________________
______________________________________________________________________
______________________________________________________________________

Additional Notes:
______________________________________________________________________
______________________________________________________________________
______________________________________________________________________
______________________________________________________________________