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# Handbook for the National Mentor Program for Lawyers and Law Students with Disabilities

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Adapted from work of the USC College of Mass Communications & Information Studies Alumni Society.

## I. WHAT IS MENTORING?

**Defined:** Mentoring is a developmental, dynamic, and reciprocal partnership through which two people share knowledge, skills, information and perspective to foster personal and professional growth.

### What is a Mentor?

- ✓ *Facilitator:* helps develop personal and professional growth in Mentee by sharing the knowledge and insights that have been learned through the years.
- ✓ *Teacher:* shares knowledge and experience as a legal professional.
- ✓ *Problem solver:* refers Mentee to resources and offers options.
- ✓ *Motivator:* provides support and incentives when Mentee is facing a challenging situation.
- ✓ *Coach:* helps Mentee to overcome performance difficulties through positive feedback (reinforce behavior) and constructive feedback (change behavior).
- ✓ *Guide:* helps Mentee to set realistic goals that are specific, time-framed, results-oriented, relevant, and reachable.
- ✓ *Role Model:* an inspiration to the Mentee and possibly someone the Mentee can emulate.

### What is a Mentee?

- ✓ *Achiever:* seeks advancement by taking advantage of opportunities to excel beyond the limits of a law student or recent law school graduate.
- ✓ *Learner:* shows a strong desire to learn new skills and abilities.
- ✓ *Decision maker:* takes charge of his/her career.
- ✓ *Initiator:* explores and exploits challenges on their own initiative.
- ✓ *Goal setter:* knows where he/she is going, so people understand how to help him/her.

## **II. BENEFITS FOR MENTORS & MENTEES**

### **Mentors:**

- Develop relationships with new talent.
- Share valuable knowledge gained as result of experience.
- Develop coaching, communication, & leadership skills.
- Exchange ideas and perspectives on issues and trends in your legal field.
- Enhance people, management, and relationship-building skills.
- Motivate & support a person to raise his/her level of professional attainment.
- Engage in a meaningful volunteer opportunity.
- Extend your network to other Mentors and Mentees.
- Undergo self-examination of job description, job performance, and career goals.
- Experience professional and personal growth and renewal.

### **Mentees:**

- Establish professional networks, contacts, and champions.
- Increase awareness of professional issues.
- Gain professional support and encouragement from Mentor.
- Expand growth in your sense of competence, identity, and effectiveness as a professional.
- Gain exposure to new ideas, theories, practices, and/or people that might not be pursued without a Mentor's guidance and/or encouragement.
- Receive honest and informal feedback.
- Improve understanding of work issues and exposure to different approaches to dealing with them.
- Explore opportunities, anxieties, barriers and feelings with reference to specific issues.

- Achieve an enhanced understanding of the importance of seeking out Mentors in life.
- Obtain an “insider” perspective for “non-traditional” Mentees.
- Bolster professional identity, pride, competence, and confidence.

### **III. EXPECTATIONS**

#### **Mentors:**

- Listen to the needs and expectations of your Mentee.
- Be prepared to answer questions in a forthright and honest manner regarding law school, current and past positions, career field, industry, and working conditions in a forthright and honest manner.
- Help connect Mentees to other professionals to allow them to hear different perspectives. Networking opportunities are always appreciated by Mentees, particularly those who are finishing up their legal education or those who are recent graduates.
- Maintain confidentiality.
- Act as a role model for Mentees and help teach them the importance of professionalism.
- Uphold core relationship values including privacy, confidentiality, honesty and integrity. Respect differences while discovering common ground.
- Communicate regularly with Mentee (at least monthly) and let him or her know that you are available on a basis that fits your schedule.
- Contact the Mentee if you are unable to attend scheduled meetings.
- Mentees are often seeking academic and career advice, information about bar associations, and information about accommodations in the workplace.
- Sometimes a Mentor may be looked upon as a role model.

**Mentees:**

- Have a sincere interest in developing a personal and professional relationship with a Mentor, and be committed to fostering that relationship by making regular contact with him or her.
- Take ownership to keep the Mentor relationship moving forward. Be proactive to ensure that the group stays on task and meets identified goals and keep the Mentor informed of progress.
- With an open mind, accept feedback and suggestions from the Mentor.
- Follow through on requests made by the Mentor.
- Negotiate ideas and activities with your Mentor.
- Explore opportunities presented to you by your Mentor.
- Uphold core relationship values including privacy, confidentiality, honesty and integrity. Respect differences while discovering common ground.
- Contact Mentor if unable to attend scheduled meetings in a timely manner.
- Maintain confidentiality.

**IV. TIPS & SUGGESTIONS****For Mentors:**

- Remember that effective Mentoring requires commitment, time and skill.
- Think about what you have to give in a Mentoring relationship.
- Make a list - preparing for your first meeting make a list of things that you would have wanted to know when you were in the position of the Mentee, e.g., information about yourself (as the Mentor), the organization you work for and your position there, expectations concerning the Mentoring relationship.
- Create an agenda e.g. 1. Getting to know each other, 2. Logistics, 3. Goals and expectations, 4. Concerns that might interfere with meeting again, 5. Initial impressions, 6. Questions to ask Mentee, etc.

- Make yourself accessible and make every effort to respond within a reasonable timeframe.
- Project yourself in a positive manner (i.e., as someone interested in supporting your Mentee).
- Set Expectations and define ground rules the beginning of the Mentoring relationship.
- Help your Mentee learn when he/she may be operating from incorrect assumptions.
- Tell your Mentee a bit about yourself, both professionally and personally.
- Look ahead at your calendar. Are there any days you know that you'll be available or ultra-busy? If so, let the other person know, so that if he/she doesn't hear from you, that person knows why.
- Be supportive, yet set clear boundaries. As a Mentor, you are not expected to be a therapist.
- Make a special effort to be available to your Mentee at least once every two months.
- Interact and share – share your mistakes and struggles, as well as your successes.
- Learn about your Mentee's attributes, preferences, aspirations, challenges, failures, and successes.
- Identify special learning opportunities in your organization or in professional networks.
- Actively assist the Mentee in developing his/her own personal network of professional contacts.
- Honor any commitments to and confidences of your Mentee.
- Provide honest, caring, regular, and diplomatic feedback to your Mentee.
- Listen deeply, ask powerful questions, and maintain and respect privacy, honesty and integrity.
- Accept that the relationship is temporary, but be alert for the possibility that it may last for a longer time frame—this should be a mutual agreement as to how you wish to proceed.

## **For Mentees:**

- Contact your Mentor initially via e-mail or telephone.
- If desired, plan a face-to-face meeting with your Mentor as soon as possible. Keeping in contact via email is perfectly acceptable, although it would be good to have some face-to-face contact.
- Initiate meeting with Mentor at least once a month.
- Take responsibility for structuring a preliminary list of what is discussed at those meetings.
- At the beginning of the relationship, communicate clearly and negotiate with your Mentor the goals for your time together.
- Invest time in learning about the Mentor's organization and professional roles and responsibilities.
- Honor any commitments made to the Mentor and respect the basic privacy and confidentiality inherent in the communication that occurs within the relationship.
- Actively request information and advice from the Mentor on a periodic basis and communicate with the Mentor as to how the advance or information might have been used.
- Accept that the relationship is temporary, but be alert for the possibility that it may last for a longer time frame; this should be a mutual agreement as to how you wish to proceed.
- Express your appreciation for the Mentor's time, information, counsel, and sharing of opportunities with you.
- Invite your Mentor to a law school event or activity or meet at your Mentor's job site.
- Plan your contacts with your Mentor around your academic schedule.
- Take advantage of mid-term breaks, lunch breaks, and other windows of opportunity.
- Be punctual and prepared. Don't prevail upon your Mentors for special privileges which include not attending or leaving early.
- Dress appropriately for all meetings with Mentors.
- Have a positive attitude – believe in achievement and have confidence in yourself.

- If it arises, accept criticism gracefully and gratefully- not defensively and argumentatively.
- Be of value to your Mentor- send interesting articles or recent case summaries.
- Honor your Mentor's space, time, and good will.
- Know that your Mentor is not there to get you a job.

## **V. IDENTIFYING GOALS & OBJECTIVES**

The Mentor and the Mentee should mutually agree upon goals and objectives that the Mentee can accomplish in a realistic amount of time. The Mentee should examine their career goals and objectives and the Mentor should help to clarify those goals by assessing their feasibility. Together, the two should then establish and plan of action to achieve those goals. Here is a suggested 10-Step Plan:

- 1) Write it down – make sure your goal is specific, measurable and time-bound.
- 2) List your personal benefits – identify exactly WHY you want to achieve this goal.
- 3) Analyze your current position – specific strengths, weaknesses and opportunities re achieving the goal.
- 4) Identify obstacles and risks – everything that could possibly prevent you from achieving the goal.
- 5) Identify sacrifices – time, money and sacrifices that you will have to make.
- 6) Identify the additional knowledge and improved skill set you will need to acquire.
- 7) List your support team – the people, groups and organizations you may need help from and what role they all play. Perhaps your Mentor is among them.
- 8) Develop your plan – list each activity and any tasks to complete.
- 9) Set a deadline – on what date you will achieve this goal.
- 10) Plan to reward yourself and your Mentor- you both deserve it.

## VI. STARTING THE RELATIONSHIP

### *Quick Quality Questions for Mentors and Mentees*

#### **Mentees to ask Mentors:**

- How well did your law school prepare you for the real world?
- What do you love most about your job?
- What would you have done differently if you had a chance to start over?
- When you graduated, what were your ideas/goals? Where did you start after graduation?
- What are some important skills someone should have to find success in your profession?
- What are the opportunities for advancement?
- Why did you want to go to law school?
- Are you happy with what you do?
- What are the three keys to success in the legal profession?
- Why are you interested in participating in a mentor program?
- How do you handle accommodations at work? (if applicable)
- How do you typically disclose your disability to others, if at all? (if applicable)

#### **Mentors to ask Mentees:**

- What are your plans for your professional future?
- Where do you see yourself in 5 years? In 10 years?
- What do you think of the latest episode of CSI (or any other non-law-related question that might reveal something about your Mentee's personality)?
- Why are you interested in participating in a Mentor program?

- How can I serve you best as your Mentor?
- Why did you want to go to law school?
- What extra-curricular activities are you involved in at school?
- What do you do in your free time?

**Other topics of interest:**

- Job opportunities
- Resume writing
- Supplemental opportunities to academic coursework
- Career goals
- Life/work balance
- Salary Negotiation
- Employment prospects
- Multi-tasking
- Self-advocacy
- Experience (strategies for obtaining)
- Networking
- Strengths/Weaknesses
- Interpersonal skills
- Problem-solving
- Stress management
- Interview skills
- Qualifications
- Time management

- Prioritizing career objectives and goals
- How law firms work and how one gets retained and promoted (the “secret body of knowledge”)
- Accommodations
- Relevant affinity groups outside of the legal profession

**Suggestions for activities:**

- ❖ Attend orientation to the Mentor’s workplace.
- ❖ Job-shadow (follow the Mentor through a typical morning or day).
- ❖ Find resources for project work.
- ❖ Explore/brainstorm options for work experience.
- ❖ Go to on-site visits together.
- ❖ Do informational interviews with other colleagues or contacts of the Mentor.
- ❖ Further workplace experiences such as attending team meetings, training sessions, or other after-work activity groups.
- ❖ Go to relevant seminars, CLEs, or events together.
- ❖ Attend professional association functions together.
- ❖ Attend a non-law-related social event together.
- ❖ Work together on a project or presentation such as updating a website or write a paper for a conference or publication (great for the resume!).
- ❖ Hold a combined meeting with another Mentor group.
- ❖ Exchange meetings with another Mentor.
- ❖ Share professional literature (books, journals, magazines).
- ❖ Forward interesting articles and blogs.
- ❖ Set up a chat time using real-time messaging software (e.g., AIM, Google Chat) for a discussion.

- ❖ Offer feedback on resume, cover letter, and writing sample.
- ❖ Practice a mock job interview.