

USING MULTIPLE MENTORS IN BAR AND
LAW FIRM MENTORING PROGRAMS*

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Empirical studies establish that using multiple mentors provides stronger career satisfaction and career success benefits than traditional one-on-one mentoring. The added benefits are significant enough that bars and law firms with mentoring programs should encourage their use as a supplement to traditional mentoring. Information on the benefits associated with multiple mentors should be provided both to mentors and new lawyers being mentored. New lawyers should be encouraged to develop their own mentoring networks.

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| I. INTRODUCTION | 2 |
| II. THE BASIS OF MENTORING NETWORKS | 4 |
| A. <i>Traditional Mentoring and Mentoring Networks Compared</i> | 4 |
| B. <i>Mentoring Theory and Workplace Realities: Conceptual and Practical Factors Affecting Mentoring Relationships</i> | 5 |
| III. EMPIRICAL RESEARCH ON MULTIPLE MENTORS | 6 |
| IV. THE PRACTICAL APPLICATION OF MULTIPLE MENTORING IN BAR AND LAW FIRM MENTORING PROGRAMS..... | 8 |
| IV. SOME SUGGESTIONS FOR BAR AND LAW FIRM MENTORING PROGRAMS..... | 10 |
| V. CONCLUSION..... | 11 |

* *An Issues of Professionalism Series* paper published by the NELSON MULLINS RILEY & SCARBOROUGH CENTER ON PROFESSIONALISM, University of South Carolina School of Law, March, 2009. *Contributors:* Doug Ashworth, Transition Into Law Practice Program, State Bar of Georgia; David Bateson, Director of Mentor Externship, University of St. Thomas School of Law; Hon. Lynne A. Battaglia, Judge, Maryland Court of Appeals; John E. Montgomery, Director, Nelson Mullins Riley & Scarborough Center on Professionalism, University of South Carolina School of Law; Cheryl Niro, Executive Director, Illinois Supreme Court Commission on Professionalism; Melvin F. Wright, Executive Director, North Carolina Chief Justice’s Commission on Professionalism.

I. INTRODUCTION

New lawyers using multiple mentors in bar and law firm mentoring programs are likely to obtain additional benefits compared to those who use a single mentor.¹ Empirical research suggests that added career success and career satisfaction benefits come from such mentoring networks.² However, the administrative issues in setting up a mentoring network with multiple mentors are complex.³ The purpose of this paper is to investigate the use of multiple mentors, the benefits such networks provide, and their usefulness to bar and law firm mentoring programs.

State bars increasingly are considering or adopting mentoring programs for new lawyers.⁴ Many law firms use mentoring as a major component of their professional development initiatives.⁵ While much more limited in scope, some law students receive mentoring through their law schools or through state bar programs.⁶

These mentoring programs are based primarily on the traditional mentoring model, a hierarchical relationship where a single experienced mentor works with one new lawyer or law

¹ An early influential early argument for the benefits of multiple mentoring was KATHY E. KRAM, *MENTORING AT WORK* (1985).

² Monica C. Higgins & David A. Thomas, *Constellations and Careers: Toward Understanding the Effect of Multiple Developmental Relationships*, 22 *J. ORGANIZATIONAL BEHAV.* 223 (2001).

³ In bar mentoring programs, administrators are challenged every year to find many individual mentors and firms willing to mentor their own associates. Placing responsibility for finding multiple mentors on bar mentor program administrators would double or triple the number of mentors they would need to find. The administrative costs to the program would be too great.

⁴ Georgia and Ohio have well established programs. South Carolina and Utah start mandatory mentoring program for all new lawyers soon. Maryland and Illinois are actively considering programs.

⁵ Many large firms use mentoring as an essential part of their professional development programs. See Proceedings, NALP Professional Development Conference, Washington, D.C. (2008).

⁶ The University of St. Thomas Law School in Minneapolis is the national leader in law school mentoring with an extensive program. Campbell Law School is considering a program based on the St. Thomas Model. The Florida Bar has a voluntary e-mentoring program for law students enrolled in Florida law schools. Members of the Florida Bar voluntarily mentor interested students. For a discussion of the St. Thomas program, see Neil Hamilton & Montpetit Brabbit, *Fostering Professionalism Through Mentoring*, 57 *J. LEGAL EDUC.* 1 (2007).

student. Traditional mentoring has been extensively studied and its benefits documented.⁷ Better retention, increased job satisfaction, fewer mistakes and more rapid acculturation are all well known advantages of traditional mentoring.⁸

Relatively recently, using multiple mentors has gained prominence among leading mentoring experts.⁹ They argue that changing working environments, new technology, and the different career expectations and work habits of young professionals call for rethinking the traditional one-on-one mentoring relationship.¹⁰ Multiple mentors can better serve this cohort of professionals as well as provide benefits beyond those associated with traditional mentoring. Importantly, using multiple mentors is considered a supplement to, not a substitute for, traditional mentoring.¹¹

As mentoring becomes more common in the legal profession and especially as more bars are considering mentoring, an exploration of the usefulness of multiple mentoring is timely. Part II of this paper will discuss the basis of multiple mentoring. Part III will discuss empirical research findings. Parts IV and V will consider the application of multiple mentoring in the legal profession.

⁷ A useful general work on mentoring and its benefits is THE HANDBOOK OF MENTORING AT WORK (Belle R. Ragins & Kathy E. Kram eds. 2007). See also John D. Kannener-Muller & Timothy A. Judge, *A Quantitative Review of Mentor Research: Test of a Model*, 72 J. VOCAT. BEHAV. 269 (2008).

⁸ For a discussion of the benefits of mentoring in the legal profession, see IDA O. ABBOTT, THE LAWYER'S GUIDE TO MENTORING (2002).

⁹ The most useful recent discussion is Dawn E. Chandler & Kathy E. Kram, *Mentoring and Developmental Networks in the New Career Context*, in H. GUNE & M. PEIPL, HANDBOOK OF CAREER STUDIES (2005).

¹⁰ Monica C. Higgins & Kathy E. Kram, *Reconceptualizing Mentoring at Work: A Developmental Perspective*, 26 ACAD. OF MANAG. REV 264 (2001).

¹¹ There are no suggestions in the empirical literature that traditional one-on-one mentoring not be used. A primary mentor is easy to find or assign and can confer significant career benefits. Additional mentors can broaden and strengthen those benefits.

II. THE BASIS OF MENTORING NETWORKS

A. *Traditional Mentoring and Mentoring Networks Compared*

Traditional, or hierarchical, mentoring is a one-on-one relationship which lasts for the duration of the mentoring process and covers everything the mentoring process is designed to address. The relationship may last for months or even years. Typically both mentor and protégé remain in the same organization. Mentoring networks involve multiple mentors, either inside or outside the protégé's organization. Mentoring networks may be contemporaneous (multiple mentors during the same time period) or consecutive (one mentor at a time, but in a sequence over time).

Traditional and multiple mentoring usually involve both psychosocial mentoring and career mentoring.¹² Anyone involved with mentoring programs should be aware of the existence of these mentoring types and their important differences. Career mentoring focuses primarily on substantive issues, job related skills, coaching, and role modeling of professional situations. Psychosocial mentoring is more subjective, focused on counseling, affirmation and critiques of work tasks, honest feedback and being a trusted confidant. As will be discussed later, these different mentoring approaches bring different benefits.¹³

In the course of any mentoring relationship many mentors usually will use both approaches. Depending on the needs of the protégé and the interests, skills, and personality of the mentor, one approach may often be more frequently used.

¹² The distinctions between career mentoring and psychosocial mentoring are fully discussed in Higgins & Thomas, *supra* note 2.

¹³ Career mentoring brings greater career success while psychosocial mentoring yields greater career satisfaction.

B. Mentoring Theory and Workplace Realities: Conceptual and Practical Factors Affecting Mentoring Relationships

The potential usefulness of multiple mentors, or mentoring networks, was noted in the 1980's.¹⁴ Social science researchers developed the concept of “relationship constellations,”¹⁵ based on social network theory. Social network theory deals with the numerous ways people connect, formally and informally, to accomplish life tasks. This theory supports the idea that career development networks, which include mentoring networks, offer significant advantages beyond one-on-one relationships.¹⁶

Mentoring network proponents argue that developmental networks will become more common because of the changing nature of employment.¹⁷ Professionals now are more likely to change employers and even careers. They have different career expectations than previous generations. Even as they change their employment situation, they usually retain ties with previous associates. Also, technology facilitates easier establishment of networks of all types, including developmental networks, across and outside organizations. Many professionals are “knowledge” workers who can use technology for their own career development. Organizations themselves are changing. People work remotely or in teams, often from multiple locations. Of increasing significance, the great majority of young professionals are accustomed to using the internet to stay in touch with each other through social network web sites and blogs. These factors both make reliance on a single mentor more difficult and use of multiple mentors easier.

¹⁴ KRAM, *supra* note 1.

¹⁵ These “relationship constellations” can involve networks of different people sharing information and opinions on friendship, families and careers. Mentoring networks can be viewed as a subcategory of a career networks.

¹⁶ The basis of this argument is that a group, or network, has collectively more experience, balance, diversity of ideas and frequency of interaction than two individuals interacting. This brings greater benefits. The disadvantage is that some information and opinions in a network may be conflicting.

¹⁷ The argument is most completely developed to Higgins & Kram, *supra* note 10.

The strength of the mentoring network should also affect the benefits it provides. The power and prestige of the network, its diversity (size, composition, nature of ideas exchanged) and frequency and nature of communication within the network, all can play a role in the benefits received. Effectiveness can also be affected, either positively or negatively, by the interpersonal skills of people in the network. Especially with mentoring, high interpersonal skills of protégés and mentors likely will increase the benefits of mentoring relationships.¹⁸

III. EMPIRICAL RESEARCH ON MULTIPLE MENTORS

The relatively few empirical studies on multiple mentors conducted in business, academic and law firm environments, suggest that multiple mentoring provides greater benefits than one-on-one mentoring.¹⁹ There are also studies on the use of e-mentoring as a tool to facilitate mentoring networks.²⁰

The most useful study followed about 130 associates in twelve large New York City law firms for seven years, from their hiring as new associates to partnership decisions.²¹ Study participants formed their own mentoring networks.²² The study attempted to measure: 1) whether mentoring networks provide more benefits than traditional mentoring; 2) whether those

¹⁸ This is a common sense assessment that mentors with good interpersonal skills will provide more benefits than those without such skills. The empirical basis of this assertion is well established. One of the seminal works in this area is DANIEL GOLEMAN, *EMOTIONAL INTELLIGENCE* (1995).

¹⁹ Gayle Baugh & Terri A. Scandura, *The Effect of Multiple Mentors on Protégé Attitudes Toward the Work Setting*, 14 J. SOC. BEHAV. & PERSON. 503 (1999); I.J. Hetty Van Emerik, *The More You Can Get the Better: Mentoring Constellations and Intrinsic Success*, 9 CAREER DEV. INT'L 578 (2004); Monica C. Higgins, *The More the Merrier? Multiple Development Relationships and Work Satisfaction*, 19 J. MANAG. DEV. 277 (2002); Higgins & Thomas, *supra* note 2.

²⁰ Ellen A. Ensher, et al., *Online Mentoring and Computer-Mediated Communications: New Direction in Research*, 63 J VOCAT. BEHAV. 264 (2003); Betti A. Hamilton & Terri A. Scandura, *Implications for Organizational Learning and Development in a Wired World*, 31 ORGANIZ. DYN. 388 (2003).

²¹ Higgins & Thomas, *supra* note 2.

²² This is an important point. Participants in this study were generally graduates of elite law schools with, high academic standing and self-starters. They are not necessarily representative of all new lawyers in bar mentoring programs.

benefits are in the form of career success (promotion to partner, decision by the firm to retain) or career satisfaction (the associate's desire to remain with the firm, job satisfaction); and 3) what effects the mentoring network's quality and status have on career outcomes.

The study concluded the following: 1) using multiple mentors provided the same types of benefits as traditional mentoring, but those benefits were greater. 2) the greater the amount of psychosocial mentoring provided by the mentoring network, the greater the associate's career satisfaction as measured by the associate's desire to remain in the profession with the same firm. 3) the greater the career assistance provided by the network, the better the career success as measured by the firm's decision to retain the associate. 4) larger networks provided more benefits than smaller networks or traditional mentoring alone. 5) associate retention was improved by the network's career assistance mentoring. 6) the status of the mentoring network was very significant: networks with higher status were more likely to have associates make partner.²³

Viewed more broadly, the distinctions this study makes between career and psychosocial mentoring and between career satisfaction and career success can be useful in both the design and administration of mentoring programs. In general, mentoring focused primarily on psychosocial support yields greater career satisfaction but has less of an impact on career success. Career mentoring yields greater career success but not necessarily greater career satisfaction. Further, using multiple mentors, especially if they are a strong group, has advantages over traditional mentoring. To obtain both types of benefits, a mentoring program

²³ Higgins & Thomas, *supra* note 2.

should emphasize both kinds of mentoring. Other studies largely confirm this large law firm study.²⁴

There are a few studies on using the internet to facilitate mentoring where face-to-face meetings are difficult to arrange.²⁵ As more people use multiple mentors, this use of technology will no doubt increase. While none of the studies are evaluative, they do point out the strengths and weaknesses of electronic or e-mentoring. They conclude that the technique can be effective and less costly than face-to-face mentoring, but is still affected by such things as time commitments, availability, and interpersonal skills. In sum, e-mentoring can be influenced by the same things which affect traditional mentoring. It does offer convenience, cost savings and greater appeal to younger professionals more accustomed to communicating electronically, both personally and professionally. The obvious disadvantages are limited ability for in depth communication plus the inherent weaknesses of communications which are not face to face.²⁶

IV. THE PRACTICAL APPLICATION OF MULTIPLE MENTORING IN BAR AND LAW FIRM MENTORING PROGRAMS

This section will discuss some of the reasons why multiple mentoring could be useful in the legal profession and some ways to increase its use.

There are stronger benefits associated with mentoring networks compared to traditional mentoring. Bars and law firms already using mentoring or considering a mentoring program should consider ways to take advantage of those greater benefits. Considering the practical difficulties associated with assembling a network of mentors for every new lawyer, requiring multiple mentors, even in mandatory programs, is probably not feasible. Even so, there are

²⁴ Baugh & Scandura, *supra* note 19; Hetty Van Emerik, *supra* note 19; Higgins, *supra* note 19.

²⁵ Ensher, *supra* note 20; Hamilton & Scandura, *supra* note 20.

²⁶ Those studies are conceptual and not empirical. They analyze the potential strengths and weaknesses of technology-based mentoring but do not study actual participants using e-mentoring.

opportunities to make new lawyers aware of the benefits and encourage them to use multiple mentors.

The distinction in the empirical studies between psychosocial and career mentoring is particularly important. Psychosocial mentoring appears to be more correlated with professional satisfaction. Career mentoring relates more to career success. The focus of each type of mentoring is different. The benefits differ as well. For the maximum benefits from mentoring, a new lawyer ideally should receive both psychosocial and career mentoring. Significant exposure to both mentoring types may not occur enough in traditional mentoring relationships. Many lawyers serving as mentors and most new lawyers may be unaware of the distinction or the different benefits. Mentoring may be weighted toward the inclinations of the mentor. Even if the distinction is known, some mentors may be comfortable with only one type and rely heavily on that approach. Mentoring program design may also affect the type of mentoring which occurs.²⁷ If the program focuses primarily on developing substantive and skills competency, mentors will have to devote more of their time to career mentoring. As a result, the benefits from psychosocial mentoring may not be fully realized.

There is also a greater chance of career change among today's new lawyers. About 75% will have changed jobs within five years.²⁸ In difficult economic times, firms change as well. They may realign practice areas or groups, requiring lawyers to acquire new skills. This dynamic also makes it more difficult for new lawyers to rely on a single mentor.

These practical realities suggest that the traditional one-on-one mentoring relationship may not maximize benefits in many situations. New lawyers may need multiple mentors to achieve

²⁷ The Georgia and Ohio programs and the South Carolina pilot mentoring programs are good examples of programs where both career and psychosocial mentoring are needed.

²⁸ The National Association of Law Placement (NALP) has conducted surveys of lawyer career change for about two decades. The frequency of career change has risen steadily over time.

all the benefits, career success and career satisfaction, possible from the mentoring process. There is also the generational dynamic that young professionals are comfortable with networking because of the wide use of social networking via the internet. They may be much more willing and able to use multiple mentors if they are aware of the advantages.

Finally, a mentoring program involves significant opportunity costs. A medium size firm mentoring ten associates for two hours a month for one year foregoes more than \$100,000 in lost billing revenues even at a conservative estimate of hourly billing rates for partners and associates. For a bar program which mentors 1,000 lawyers a year with similar time commitments, more than \$10,000,000 in billable hour revenues is foregone.

These are hardly insignificant investments in mentoring. Strictly from an economic perspective, it makes sense for bar and law firm mentoring programs to maximize the effectiveness of their mentoring programs. Encouraging the use of mentoring networks with multiple mentors can be a positive step in that direction.

IV. SOME SUGGESTIONS FOR BAR AND LAW FIRM MENTORING PROGRAMS

Based on the information available about the potentially stronger benefits from multiple mentors as a supplement to traditional mentoring, bars and law firms should consider a number of factors in designing and implementing mentoring programs. These considerations apply whether the program is mandatory or voluntary.

- 1) Mentoring networks, with multiple mentors, should be viewed as a valuable supplement, not an alternative, to traditional mentoring.
- 2) The administrative costs of establishing a mentoring network for every new lawyer in a mentoring program are too burdensome to impose on the program's administrator.

- 3) As a more feasible alternative, new lawyers beginning a mentoring program should be informed of the benefits of multiple mentors and encouraged to develop their own mentoring networks in addition to their primary mentor. The benefits of multiple mentors should also be explained to mentors. Mentors should also encourage new lawyers to develop a mentoring network.
- 4) The differences between psychosocial and career mentoring should also be communicated both to mentors and new lawyers prior to the start of any mentoring relationship. While many mentors use both types of mentoring, others may not be aware of the difference or feel comfortable using both approaches.
- 5) Mentors, to the extent compatible with their own preferences, should be encouraged to provide both psychosocial and career mentoring. If the primary mentor is not comfortable with both approaches, using multiple mentors would be particularly appropriate.
- 6) This information about types of mentoring and their different benefits could easily be incorporated into mentor training programs or materials, as well as materials provided to new lawyers prior to the start of a mentoring program.

V. CONCLUSION

Multiple mentors in a mentoring network can provide greater career success and career satisfaction benefits beyond the benefits associated with traditional mentoring. Given these added benefits, the social networking comfort levels of most young professionals and changes in the nature of legal employment, encouraging the use of multiple mentors in bar and law firm mentoring programs seems worth some effort. Mentoring programs should provide additional information on the types of mentoring and their respective benefits, as well as the added benefits

from multiple mentors to both new lawyers and mentors. New lawyers should be encouraged to take primary responsibility for developing their own mentoring networks.