



***MAKING MENTORS AND  
MENTEES  
EFFECTIVE AT MENTORING***

**MENTORING RESOURCE CENTER  
Colorado Supreme Court  
Colorado Attorney Mentoring Program  
("CAMP")**

**CAMP Website: <http://coloradomentoring.org>**

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# MENTORING TIPS TOOL BOX

**BASIC MENTORING ROLES** – mentors play different roles, and few mentors play all of these roles simultaneously. As a result, many mentees tend to have more than one mentor. In general, however, mentors play four different kinds of roles:

**Teacher** – these mentors educate mentees on substantive law, how to do various tasks, professionalism, civility, and the like. The teaching can be formal or informal. Sometimes these mentors are more like coaches. They teach the mentees the practical skills of law practice, but, also, motivate them to achieve the highest proficiency in those skills.

**Counselor** – these mentors respond to mentees’ questions and requests for help, and they provide advice when requested on particular matters or issues. Sometimes these mentors simply listen and allow the mentee to find the answer on their own. Sometimes these mentors need to step in, whether requested or not, and provide constructive critiques to help the mentee improve a skill or avoid ethical and professional problems. This mentoring requires a trusting relationship and a “safe” environment.

**Role Model** – these mentors “teach” by doing. They demonstrate in their daily lives and practices how best to practice law and serve the community. The topics for this teaching by doing model include law practice skills as well as how to give back to the society and attain a work/life balance.

**Sponsor or Champion** – these mentors introduce their mentees to the bar, to clients and prospective clients, to the community, and to the mentors’ own networks. These mentors use their own influence and reputation to promote the mentees’ careers in these various circles.

**TIPS FOR MENTORS** – there are some “natural born” mentors, but most experienced lawyers can become effective at mentoring with experience and by considering the following tips:

- 1) Be available for your mentee, and be responsive to his or her needs. Let the mentee control how you can help him or her.
- 2) Be a good listener. Sometimes, the mentee just wants to vet ideas and is not looking for your advice as to what to do.
- 3) Ask how you can best help your mentee. Identify his or her goals and develop a plan for meeting those goals.
- 4) Be clear about what you are willing and able to do for the mentee;
- 5) Take a personal interest in your mentee. Get to know him or her; this will strengthen your relationship.
- 6) Be open and transparent about what you get out of the relationship. Why are you acting as a mentor?
- 7) Be a good role model. Practice what you preach. Remember, the mentee will be watching your conduct in both legal and social settings.
- 8) Encourage your mentee to come to you with issues and proposed solutions and welcome open discussion. Mentees learn more from the dialogue than from a lecture as to what to do.

- 9) Remember that mentoring encompasses not just substantive legal issues, but also best practices generally, work-life balance, professionalism, civility, and all other issues that impact one's professional life.
- 10) Sponsor your mentee, which includes introducing him or her to bar activities, civic and community organizations, other lawyers, clients and prospective clients, and other networks that you may have.
- 11) Be patient with your mentee, and don't be judgmental. Remember that you were once where he or she was.
- 12) Avoid a mentoring relationship that involves your being solely a lecturer. Dialogue is much more productive. When helpful, tell stories about your practice, how you learned from your mentors, and how you apply these lessons-learned to your life. Remember "war stories" that are told for "self-puffing" usually are not very helpful to teach a lesson.
- 13) Do not treat a formal mentoring relationship as a relationship requiring you to check particular boxes. Be flexible. Think outside the "boxes to check." Find other topics and activities. Let the mentee suggest things to do.
- 14) Be a receptive audience. You will learn as much from your mentee as he or she will learn from you.

**TIPS FOR MENTEES** – mentees can become more effective at getting more out of a mentoring relationship by considering the following tips:

- 1) Take an active role in the mentoring relationship. Reach out to your mentor and tell him or her your goals for the relationship.
- 2) Be clear about what you want from your mentor at any given time. Do you want advice right now, a sympathetic ear to listen, or help with problem solving? Don't be afraid to ask for civic type work that you want in different situations;
- 3) When you have an issue to discuss with your mentor, approach him or her not only with the issue but also with what you believe to be an appropriate solution. You will learn more this way.
- 4) Respect your mentor's time.
- 5) Be receptive to constructive criticism and new ideas.
- 6) Take the lead in setting up meetings.
- 7) Treat interactions with your mentor as dialogues. Your mentor wants to hear what you think.
- 8) When your mentor invites you to attend a networking event with him or her, jump at the chance. It is an investment.
- 9) Be a good listener.
- 10) Observe how your mentor acts in professional settings. You can learn as much from watching what your mentor does as you can from what he or she tells you directly.
- 11) Ask questions. Your mentor is happy to explain why he or she acted that way in a particular situation.
- 12) Do not treat a formal mentoring relationship as a relationship requiring you to check particular boxes. If you treat the mentoring relationship as a task or an assignment, it will become nothing more.

**RECOMMENDED STEPS FOR A SUCCESSFUL MENTORING RELATIONSHIP** -- every mentoring relationship can be improved with thoughtful planning of activities. Some activities to consider, include:

- AT THE INITIAL MEETING it is essential for mentors and mentees to jointly develop a plan for the mentoring relationship. Identify and discuss goals for the mentoring relationship;
- AT THE INITIAL MEETING it is, also, essential for mentors and mentees to draft and sign a mentoring agreement, which will help manage the expectations for both;
- Mentors can tell a career story. Share the highs and the lows of your career path or have the mentee interview the mentor about his or her own career path. What were the barriers to overcome and the pitfalls along the way about learning from failures as well as successes, etc.;
- Mentees can share short-range and long-range career development plans and ask mentors for thoughts and critiques. Identify how the mentor can help with those goals, and ask specifically for help;
- Complete actual pro bono projects or cases together (e.g. discussing actual case strategy and/or the legal implications of a management decision);
- Work together at a legal clinic to provide advice to clinic clients (Veteran’s Clinics, LawLine9, etc.);
- Help coach High School Mock Trial teams together;
- Attend bar association meetings or other legal/civic organization activities together;
- Find activities for integrating personal/family life with career objectives.

**THE QUALITIES OF A GOOD MENTOR/SPONSOR/CHAMPION – PROFESSIONALISM IN THE PRACTICE OF LAW BY STRIVING FOR DIVERSITY AND INCLUSION IN THE LEGAL PROFESSION** – the qualities for mentors in all mentoring relationships, but especially in those with diversity between the mentor and mentee include:

1. Respect in the Legal Community- Highly respected in the legal community with demonstrated success in establishing professional and inclusive networks and relationships.
2. Engages in Public and Private Advocacy - Makes continual and substantive public and private commitment of time and personal advocacy on behalf of mentee, including complimenting mentee before clients and advocating during internal performance evaluations.
3. Shows Leadership, Knowledge of, and Commitment to Advancing Diversity and Inclusiveness in the Workplace - Demonstrates leadership, knowledge of and commitment to advancing and embedding diversity and inclusiveness in the workplace at all levels.
4. Is Aware of and Sensitive to the Negative Impact of Exclusion, but Helps Mentee to Focus on Goals- Is aware of and sensitive to the challenges of exclusion to the morale and success of the diverse mentee, but helps mentee focus on what needs to be done to pursue and achieve his or her own goals.
5. Ensures that Mentee Has the Same Access to Projects, Client Contact, Helpful Resources and Supportive Relationships as Other “Non-Diverse” Attorneys - Is purposeful in ensuring that the diverse mentee is given full and equal access to challenging projects in his or her area, client contact, helpful resources and supportive relationships needed to advance.

SuSaNi Nash Harris, Sr. Director for Diversity & Inclusive Excellence, Univ. of Colo. Law School  
Karen Hester, Executive Director, Center for Legal Inclusiveness (CLI)

## Resources:

Colorado Attorney Mentoring Program (CAMP) Mentoring Resource Center literature at CAMP website <http://coloradomentoring.org/mentoring-resources/mentoring-literature>

Fogg MA, Gabriel RL, Parker ML, “The Mentoring Relationship: How to Make it Work and Why it Matters,” 42 *The Colorado Lawyer* 53 (October, 2013) at [http://coloradomentoring.org/wp-content/uploads/2013/09/10-2013\\_FoggGabrielParker.pdf](http://coloradomentoring.org/wp-content/uploads/2013/09/10-2013_FoggGabrielParker.pdf)

# NAVIGATING YOUR RELATIONSHIP

## Getting Acquainted

*"Fit and chemistry must be considered when pairing the mentor and the protégé.  
If the two don't get along, it matters little what each can offer the other  
in terms of knowledge and skills."*

—Michael Zey, Building a Successful Formal Mentor Program

An important part of getting acquainted is determining compatibility. Schedule a few sessions to get to know each other before setting goals, and alert your admin if you do not feel comfortable interacting with your mentor informally and having intimate discussions on sensitive topics. It is better to discover an imperfect match early on than to waste time in an unproductive relationship.

To begin getting to know each other, online messaging is an unthreatening, flexible approach. Many people find it easier to open up to someone new in writing. Your Mentoring Area includes a messaging component where you can get to know each other, plan meetings, or even discuss progress on tasks and milestones. To break the ice, ask your mentor questions and share a little about yourself, such as:

- ✓ Jobs, hobbies, and extracurricular activities
- ✓ Classes you have taken, projects you have worked on, or career-related interests
- ✓ Your favorite class in college, favorite book, favorite movie, etc.

As you progress to more serious topics, you are also encouraged to voice professional concerns and challenges. If you find it difficult to discuss certain topics in technical terms, try to paraphrase your questions the best you can. You may find these discussions easier face-to-face or on the phone, but online communication can work if you are deliberate and thoughtful. Although it might take several online discussions to clarify a point, your mentor is likely to appreciate your interest and your passion to learn.

## Means to Communicate

There are various ways in which you can communicate with your mentor. These include:

- ✓ Email
- ✓ Discussion boards
- ✓ Audio or video conversations using Skype
- ✓ Meeting in person

When in-person interaction is not possible due to distance and time, we strongly encourage you to use the rich online communication mechanisms found in the mentoring portal, including the messaging feature in the Mentoring Area.

## Set Your Goals and Summarize Completed Sessions

To have a successful mentoring relationship you must:

- ✓ Understand your needs
- ✓ Set your goals
- ✓ Convey your needs and goals to your mentor
- ✓ Discuss how you can accomplish your goals
- ✓ After completing a discussion session, write a summary to form new action items

For a good start to the first two, answer the following questions:

- ✓ **What are your goals for this mentoring relationship?** (e.g., competency development, career advancement, leadership skills development, gain knowledge in a particular topic area, etc.)
- ✓ **How will you know if you reached these goals?** (e.g., improved performance, promoted, attained a new credential, etc.)
- ✓ **What challenges can you anticipate?** (e.g., availability of advancement opportunities, need to further your formal education, length of time needed to develop a new skill or competency)

Make the best use of your time with your mentor: take the time now to define goals.

## Effective Online Communication

Communication is a two-way process that includes just about any type of interaction with another person, from subtle to overt. Poor communication can leave us feeling angry or worried.

In person or on the phone, you can use voice modulation, facial expressions, and hand gestures to convey meaning. Because those cues are absent in writing, written communication is a skill and an art. The better people can express themselves, the more the relationship will deepen.

When communicating through writing, the following tips will help prevent miscommunication.

- ✓ **Use a meaningful subject line**—A good subject line ensures that the recipient recognizes the importance of your message and doesn't delete it accidentally. The subject line should also serve as a summary, conveying a clear idea of the topic you want to discuss.
- ✓ **Be clear and concise**—Take the time to write clear, concise messages. Correspondingly, if you receive messages that are not clear and concise, take the time to get clarification. Do you clearly understand your mentor's points? If not, provide an opportunity to restate, elaborate or reconsider the intended message.
- ✓ **Investigate assumptions**—What assumptions may have been made, whether stated explicitly or not? To uncover assumptions and prevent misinterpretations, state your understanding of your mentor's message or ask for clarification.
- ✓ **Communicate about communication**—It is very important to inform your mentor of your schedule well in advance. This prevents the unnecessary frustration of a communication breakdown.

Online messaging has its challenges, but it also has advantages in many situations. If you use the messaging section of your Mentoring Connection Area liberally and thoughtfully, you'll be more productive.

## Networking Tips

Networking is a learned skill that takes time and practice to improve. Your mentor has likely leveraged a network of contacts at various times in life. Learn how your mentor built his or her network. Appreciate the effort that goes into maintaining these quality relationships. If your mentor is willing, ask for an introduction to contacts who may be able to help you reach your goals.

When you approach your mentor or any of his or her contacts, be sure to follow this networking etiquette:

- ✓ **Ask politely**—When asking for a favor, ask politely. Examples of ways to ask are: "Perhaps you can point me in the right direction," and "Maybe you could help me..."
- ✓ **Follow up**—Use the 48-hour rule. Respond to phone messages and emails within 48 hours, and send thank-you or nice-to-meet-you notes or emails after a meeting within 48 hours.
- ✓ **Mention your referrer**—When calling a person to whom someone referred you, mention your contact's name. For example, "John suggested I contact you about..."

## Suggested Activities for Mentors and Mentees

Here are some activity ideas if you are planning to meet your mentor in person:

- ✓ Meet for lunch and discuss lighthearted topics such as favorite classes, career paths, and hobbies.
- ✓ Meet your Mentor's colleagues and expand your network of contacts.
- ✓ Tour the facilities together or visit some of your favorite places in your city.
- ✓ Attend cultural and sporting events together.

## Don't Lose Sight of Your Goals

There are likely to be times in your mentoring relationship when progress might stagnate and you need to re-energize. Try the following:

- ✓ Revisit your goals. Are you on course?
- ✓ Could you have done something better? Take responsibility for driving success. Self-actualization and enthusiasm will help you and your partner move forward.
- ✓ Do you need to extend the mentoring duration? Evaluate how long you will need to achieve your goals. Set a specific date—time-bounded goals are more likely to be realized.

The point is to continually reaffirm goals and commitment. Your mentor will follow your lead.

## Help during Periods of Transition

As you near the completion of your mentoring partnership, you may wonder whether your takeaways from the mentoring relationship will smooth your transition into future endeavors. You may have some loose ends to tie or some fears about moving on.

We encourage you and your mentor to discuss your transition to life post-partnership. Your mentor may be in a position to help you better prepare for what lies ahead and reduce any anxieties you have about the changes that await.

Nothing can replace experience!

## Need for a Good Closure

When mentoring partnerships end, some do so with goals accomplished. Some do not, for a number of reasons. Yet even unproductive mentoring relationships can benefit from good closure. A successful exit strategy includes five steps:

1. **Processing conclusions**—Process the learning that took place because of the relationship while working towards goals.
2. **Integrating what was learned**—Discuss how to apply the learning and take it to the next level.
3. **Celebrating success**—Plan a mutually satisfying way to celebrate achievement and new beginnings.
4. **Redefining the relationship**—Talk about how the relationship is to continue, and what it will look like: will you transition from a professional mentoring relationship to that of colleagues or friends? Will the relationship cease entirely?
5. **Moving on**—Both partners let go and identify ways of keeping in touch, if appropriate and mutually desired.

## Provide Regular Feedback

It is important to provide regular feedback on your mentoring experience to the program administrators. Please complete any surveys you receive. Your feedback will help your administrators learn how to serve you better. In addition, provide your mentor with constructive feedback as you go, to improve the quality of the relationship and to support your mentor's future mentoring endeavors.