



STATE BAR *of* TEXAS

TRANSITION TO PRACTICE

A MENTORING INITIATIVE FOR LOCAL BAR ASSOCIATIONS

UPDATE

BY BLAIR McBRIDE

The theme of State Bar President Buck Files's year as president has been Working Together to Strengthen Our Legal Profession. There is no better way to strengthen the practice of law than to educate the newest members of the Texas legal community.

TRANSITION TO PRACTICE ALL AROUND TEXAS

The goal of *Transition to Practice*, a 2009 initiative of past State Bar President Roland Johnson, was just that. Based on a pilot program by the Dallas Bar Association, the yearlong curriculum provides a template for local bar associations to create a mentoring program that best fits the needs of their members. It is structured but adaptable, easy to use, and inexpensive. Newly licensed lawyers are matched with more experienced volunteer attorneys. The pairs assemble once a month and alternate between attending CLE programs and meeting in small groups or one-on-one sessions. The objective is to create a comfortable relationship that allows the mentors to serve as a sounding board on issues often encountered by new practitioners.

The tool kit provided with the program contains a proposed calendar, a planning timeline, materials for recruiting participants and mentors, a mentoring agreement, program curriculum, evaluation forms, and frequently asked questions. But the resources don't stop there. As bar associations across the state implement *Transition to Practice*, the program evolves and grows.

The Dallas Bar Association's original pilot program sought to help new lawyers through the transition from the study of law to the practice of law, and to continue the profession's highest standards of competence, service, collegiality, and professionalism. Mentoring and professionalism are innately connected. The practice of law cannot be taught without a lesson on the values and morals that uphold the legal profession. Consequently, the State Bar of Texas Professionalism Committee has been working to develop additional components to the *Transition to Practice* program to help instill these values.

In fact, the Professionalism Committee recently added new content to the existing tool kit. A member of the committee shared a series of vignettes that follow fictional characters through their first year as associates in a firm. These stories provide examples of the challenges and questions first-year associates often encounter, as well as how to respond to those challenges and avoid potential problems. These scenes are funny and lighthearted, but they contain valuable information.

The Professionalism Committee has also produced a series of videos to help smaller regional bar associations. Through feedback, the State Bar learned that some local bar associations easily adapted the program to fit the needs of their members while others found the model unsuccessful.

Currently, the Professionalism Committee is compiling a video series that covers the six topics presented to mentees. Subjects include wellness and job satisfaction, attaining success while maintaining integrity, how to deal with clients, and more. These videos will be available to local bars free of charge through the *Transition to Practice* tool kit.

For the past two years, the **Amarillo Area Bar Association** has offered a lunch mentoring program every other month. Approximately 30 lawyers participate in the program, which is designed to build valuable relationships between mentors and young mentees.

In the second year of its mentoring program, the **Austin Bar Association** has 54 participants and has hosted three CLE programs. In addition to increasing the focus on networking, the Austin Bar Association is encouraging participants not only to meet one-on-one but also to meet in small groups to provide a rich diversity of perspectives and insights on any subject.

The **Dallas Bar Association** kicked off its 2013 program in January with 100 new mentees matched with experienced mentors. In alternating months, the pairs meet one-on-one and attend scheduled CLE programs held at the Belo Mansion.

In November 2012, the **El Paso Bar Association** launched its new mentoring program with *Speed Mentoring*, an event in which mentees rotate in three-minute intervals with experienced attorneys, allowing them to network in all areas of practice. This exercise was followed by *Lunch and Learn CLE*, a program promoting discussions on areas such as time management, opening an office, and client management.

The **Houston Bar Association** offers a *Mentor/Protégé* program sponsored by its Professionalism Committee. The program pairs attorneys who have been licensed for three years or less with more experienced attorneys who have been licensed and practicing for at least five years. The informal nature of the program encourages one-on-one guidance and advice. The program also sponsors breakfasts, events with guest speakers, and networking opportunities.

The **San Antonio Bar Association's** mentoring program, which is in its fourth year, now has 36 mentors and mentees and is still growing, with applications coming in weekly. The initiative, which has become so popular that CLE programming is scheduled six months out, is a wonderful resource to recruit new lawyers into San Antonio Bar Association membership.

The **Tarrant County Bar Association** currently has 29 mentees signed up and continues to add more. Participants generally follow the *Transition to Practice* program, but they often introduce local variations to suggested topics and select speakers based on their expertise and years of service to ensure real and practical guidance for members.

The State Bar wants to hear from you. If you are using **Transition to Practice** or want more information on how to start a mentoring program in your area, please contact Blair McBride at bmcbride@texasbar.com or (512) 427-1726.