

Networking and Mentoring: Side-by-Side

There is often confusion around the definitions of networking and mentoring—many people use them interchangeably. In reality, they are related yet very different activities. Networking is an important component of mentoring, and mentoring is much more than networking. Below is a comparison of the two:

Networking

- Networking is an effective tool for career exploration and job or internship searches.
- It is a way to make contact with individuals who may provide specific information or make an introduction to another contact.
- It is more than a business card—it's the relationship behind the name or organization. When networking, you should strive to build authentic relationships that last over time.
- It's not just about reaching up, but also down and across—building your career LATTICE as opposed to climbing a ladder.
- Networking means making contacts, creating alliances, building support groups, and befriending others with similar professional interests.
- Building your network may include people you already know—your “personal network”: family, friends, neighbors, religious organizations, clubs, local services and stores, and professional or business relationships such as past employers, former co-workers, classmates, teachers, and doctors.
- It can also be new people and groups, such as state bar leadership, local bar members, new Inn members, or participants in CLE education you attend.
- Taking care of your network means you stay in contact on some kind of regular basis, not just when you need a new job or a favor—it requires staying in touch and giving more than you get...how can you help them?
- Networking can happen anywhere, any time with anyone!

Mentoring

- While traditionally a one-on-one relationship between a more experienced individual and someone looking for guidance—generally at the start of their career or entry into a new profession—mentoring has many shapes and sizes.
 - Small groups of multiple Inn members, in various career stages.
 - Judges hosting groups in their chambers.
 - Attorneys with more experience or different experience—maybe in a new practice area or on the other side of the aisle.
 - An attorney who more readily remembers what the early days were like could mentor those just entering the profession.
 - “Reverse” mentors—senior attorneys who need to get-up-to-speed on recent case law or technology.
 - It's possible for someone to be a mentee and a mentor at the same time!
- Mentorships last longer than a cocktail party; they involve a more substantive length of time—from six months to one year to a lifetime.
 - People can rotate out of Inn membership so there may be a set time per mentoring relationship.
 - Usually, an Inn-based mentoring relationship lasts one Inn cycle, but if it's strong and both parties agree, it can outlive that initial Inn relationship.
- The relationship involves building trust and investing time and energy into sharing and caring. It takes a commitment and level of dedication beyond a single encounter or informational interview.
- Having a mentor means having someone to turn to if you encounter an uncomfortable situation or ethical dilemma.
- Inns can create mentoring opportunities for different kinds of lawyers—especially those who may not have the resources of a big firm at their disposal (i.e., solo practitioners, public defenders or government attorneys).
- Mentorships offer benefits to both parties such as building self-awareness, exploring opportunities within the profession, and career development.
- The ROI also includes development of leadership and growing talent for your firm or organization, and the entire profession.
- Relationships can focus on building self-confidence, developing professional behaviors, sharpening critical thinking skills, gaining knowledge, and understanding unspoken rules of engagement.
- Mentoring should support and encourage making career and life decisions.
- Mentoring includes making contacts and gaining opportunities—networking.
- While mentorships can happen organically, it is beneficial to have some structure to ensure both parties find value in the relationship.
- Both parties must live up to their responsibilities to make the mentorship work.
- Mentoring is not just about connections and opening doors; it's about guidance for the long haul—not what kind of legal job you might have or want, but what kind of practitioner you want to be.