

Mentoring Roles and Responsibilities

It's a Two-Way Street

Mentoring is a two-way street. The role of a mentor is not to train and discipline or assert a position of power over the mentee, but to build a relationship with the mentee. Each participant brings something of value to the relationship and in turn receives something of value. For the mentoring relationship to be effective, the understanding of this principle is essential. Mentoring relationships are only successful if the participants do their part to make it so.

Here are general guidelines for the roles each participant should play:

Mentor

- A mentor is defined as “a trusted counselor or guide.” A mentor can be so much more.
- A mentor can be a trusted friend, a caring colleague, a teacher, an ally, a motivator, an advocate, as well as a positive role model.
- The role of the mentor is three-pronged:
 - **Teacher**—imparting wisdom about interacting with clients, practicing law, and handling common ethical and professional issues.
 - **Sponsor**—connecting the mentee with members of the legal community who can assist the mentee along his or her desired career path.
 - **Colleague**—providing personal as well as professional support and aiding in the development of essential life skills.
- The mentor can also reap rewards from this process.
 - Learning continuously, staying current on new developments in the law or profession.
 - Being challenged to assist, guide, and offer advice.
 - Validating his or her career by passing along knowledge and success to the next generation of lawyers.
 - Developing and improving interpersonal and management skills.
- An effective mentor listens more and talks less, and teaches by asking questions.
- Avoid telling war stories unless it illustrates an issue in which the mentee is struggling.
- Provide positive feedback and guidance during a conflict.
- A mentor must make the effort to form a meaningful relationship by maintaining regular contact with the mentee.
- Everyone is busy—if you are not able to invest time in the relationship, be courteous and communicate that to your mentee. This may not be the right time for you to be involved.

Mentee

- A new attorney is most commonly the mentee, but this does not mean a more experienced attorney cannot benefit from a mentoring relationship.
- The mentee must have a desire to learn and to continue to develop professionally.
- An experienced attorney expanding to an unfamiliar area of practice can decrease his or her learning curve significantly through a mentoring relationship with an attorney who is experienced in that new area.
- A mentee benefits from a mentoring relationship by gaining insight into the practice of law, enhanced professional growth, and new approaches to problems.
- A mentee can also form new connections and relationships with attorneys who can help guide his or her career.
- The relationship can lead to shorter learning curves, a clearer career path, higher productivity, greater career satisfaction, and enhanced interpersonal skills.
- The mentor's role is not to serve as a placement service, but through the relationship provide the mentee with appropriate connections and opportunities.
- The mentee should maintain regular contact with the mentor without badgering him or her.
- A mentee should know what they want from the mentoring relationship. Discussing and setting goals at the start of the relationship will benefit both parties. Below are examples of common goals:
 - Foster the development of practical skills.
 - Increase knowledge of legal customs and unwritten rules.
 - Learn how to act with integrity and recognize ethical areas of conflict.
 - Develop collegial relationships among legal professionals and strive for them.
 - Understand how to become more involved in legal organizations.
 - Improve legal abilities and professional judgment.
 - Recognize best practices and high ideals in the practice of law.
- Everyone is busy—if you are not able to invest time in the relationship, be courteous and communicate that to your mentor. This may not be the right time for you to be involved.