

Mentor as...Humorous Advice Giver

By Samuel H. Park, Associate

Having only been in the legal profession for a few years, I have not had many mentors to this point. Still, I have been fortunate enough to befriend certain exceptional individuals who provided valuable insight on the art of lawyering.

My first firm job was with the Law Offices of Shawn A. McMillan. I consider Shawn to be a very good mentor and a friend and thankful that he is still here today. Back then, I had a terrible habit of rereading documents after they had been filed. On some occasions, I would discover small errors that needed to be addressed. Naturally, this irked Shawn, who puts a premium on the firm's work product. I was unhappily crowned "the Errata King."

One day, Shawn pointed to a poster on a wall, "The Road to Success," a cartoon drawing of the many pitfalls and traps that could beset a hapless adventurer on such a named road. Step by step, he took me through the potential mishaps – with items such as "carelessness" and "bad habits" -- lingering on the particular areas he believed I needed to work on. While the delivery was loud, humorous, and too long, the point was not missed when he finished by saying, "Sam, everyone makes mistakes. You're entitled to make mistakes too...just not fatal ones." The genuine concern combined with the rapacious joy in addressing any perceived lapse in method or intensity made his lessons memorable and effective. Shawn's understanding of human nature always ensured that advice was well taken.

In my own practice, the lessons learned while working with Shawn have had an impact on the way I view client advocacy, particularly the duty of care. In order to best protect our clients, potentially displeasing information should be disclosed, but in a tactful manner, so that the trust between attorney and client only increases. The other lesson is that our actions should be swift, deliberate, and perfect.