

Mentors as...Predecessors

By John Gomez, Master

What I do best as a lawyer is try lawsuits before juries. As I began to reflect upon the topic of “mentoring,” I realized that I learned virtually everything I know about trying cases from “mentors” I had never before met.

I first began trying cases at the United States Attorney’s Office here in San Diego. In the office library, I discovered a great collection of books and video tapes by people like Herbert Stern (*Trying Cases to Win*), and now-Judge Larry Burns. I read and watched everything that was available. On my own, I discovered a great series of videotapes by former Federal Defender Terry MacCarthy (“Killer Cross Examination”). That tape is what taught me cross examination.

As I transitioned into a plaintiffs practice, I began to study and learn from books and tapes by Gerry Spence, the founder of the Trial Lawyers College and a master of voir dire, David Ball (*David Ball on Damages*), and Rick Friedman (*Rules of the Road, Polarizing the Case*). Spence without question taught me how to effectively select a jury. Ball taught me virtually everything. While I have now met Spence, Ball and Friedman in passing, I had never spoken to them once prior to employing their wisdom and advice. In short, my “mentors” for trial advocacy purposes (what is most important to me) were by and large people I had never even met.

I imagine that there are similar resources available to attorneys regardless of practice fields. Perhaps at some level, “mentors” in this information-rich and internet age, are being replaced in some part by resources available to anyone that is interested. That may be a good thing for those that face some barrier to developing actual mentoring relationships. On the flip side, perhaps, mentors may be more valuable than ever for other purposes, including maintaining balance, perspective, and ethical boundaries.