

Mentors as...Past and Present

By Amber Eck, Barrister

A couple of years ago, I was thinking about making the move from private practice to the public sector. After being in private practice for nearly 15 years, this would have been quite a major change, so I wanted to get the advice and input from someone who successfully made the same transition. I immediately thought of Victor Barr, since he had been in private practice for over 10 years, then joined the City Attorney's Office and ultimately became a star prosecutor at the District Attorney's Office. He had interviewed me many years before, and I believe had some input in hiring me as a summer associate at Chapin Fleming & Winet after my second year of law school. While I was at the firm, my biggest mentor was Ed Chapin (and not only because of his height). Ed taught me by example the importance of working hard, serving your clients well, but even more importantly, always acting ethically, with integrity, professionalism, and courtesy to the clients, opposing counsel and the court.

But going back to Victor Barr, I really hadn't spoken to or seen him much over the past decade, so at first was reluctant to call him. But my options were limited since I didn't know many lawyers who did anything other than civil litigation, so I took the leap and called him up out of the blue.

I was overwhelmed by his immediate willingness, despite his busy schedule, to talk with me, and share his experiences, advice and insight. But he did more than that. He got me in touch with numerous friends and colleagues at the City Attorney's Office, District Attorney's Office and U.S. Attorney's Office, made introductions, and generally went out of his way to help me network and get the information I needed. An opportunity landed in my lap, and I ended up starting a small civil litigation firm with two former colleagues, but I was so grateful for all Victor's help that when I was able to "give back" and be a mentor with the Lawyers Club I jumped at the chance.

In the Lawyers Club, I was fortunate to be assigned to a young protégé who recently graduated from my alma matter, Boston University. We immediately hit it off, and I am genuinely interested in helping her succeed in any way I can. Since she is looking for a new legal position, when I learned of an opening at the federal court for a Magistrate Judge clerkship, I immediately forwarded her the listing, encouraged her to apply, talked with the current clerk for advice (who just so happens to be a member of this Inn and my small group), and helped her write a tailored cover letter for the position. I was immensely pleased to learn that out of hundreds of applicants, she received an interview. She is an incredible, inspiring person, and I am very grateful to have the chance to get to know her.

Finally, one of our team leaders, Dan Eaton, yesterday challenged us with the question of whether, in this digital, social-networking age, we have ever sought mentorship from someone on the Internet we don't know. I contemplated it, and thought, "It's worth a shot." In a consumer fraud class action we brought against Trump University, Trump turned around and sued our lead plaintiff for defamation, which is raising some complex and unprecedented issues, so I've e-mailed three scholars/experts on defamation law, asking for their help. Maybe I will have a new cyber-mentor. Time will tell.