

Mentoring

Everyone Needs Mentoring

Mentoring is a time honored legal tradition and a cornerstone of the American Inns of Court. The purpose of American Inns of Court mentoring is to cultivate professional excellence in support of the American Inns of Court goal of fostering excellence in professionalism, ethics, civility, and legal skills. Inn mentoring will assist members in developing high standards of professionalism based upon internalized principles of appropriate behavior consistent with the legal professions' core values.

Mentoring is also part of what our research is calling a High Quality Member Experience at the American Inns of Court. By offering mentoring programs and opportunities, new lawyers will not only gain the skills and professionalism needed to thrive in the legal community, but they will also value their American Inns of Court membership more highly and are more likely to maintain it over the course of their careers. Mentoring is an investment in the future health of your Inn.

Goals of Mentoring Programs

To further the American Inns of Court goal of fostering excellence in professionalism, ethics, civility, and legal skills, the goals of Inn mentoring efforts should be:

Values & Standards: Develop an understanding of generally accepted professional values and standards of behavior and the importance of professionalism in the practice of law.

Ethical Awareness: Build awareness of ethical obligations and of proper practices for avoiding mishandling of other's assets, conflicts of interest, neglect of matters, and civil liability problems.

Skill-Building: Improve professional skills necessary for the effective practice of law at a high level of competence.

Involvement: Develop an appreciation of the importance of supporting and improving the justice system, improving access to justice and the importance of active involvement in the profession and the community.

Formal Mentoring Programs

In order to fully achieve those goals, we encourage all Inns to be strategic in their mentoring activities – we would love to see all Inns have a formal mentoring program as part of their annual planning. To support this ideal, the American Inns of Court, in conjunction with the Nelson Mullins Riley & Scarborough Center on Professionalism at the University of South Carolina School of Law, has developed a model mentoring program for Inns to adapt to their own needs and personalities.



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The recently updated American Inns of Court Model Mentoring Program provides a step-by-step approach for Inns to establish an effective and easily administered mentoring program. It describes the principles and goals for Inn mentoring and suggests a straightforward format of administration, operation, and scheduling that can be adapted to meet the needs of individual Inns. Here are some of the overall guidelines which are included:

- *Size of inn mentoring groups:* Inn mentoring groups should, in general, have no fewer than three and no more than five mentors.
- *Number of mentees assigned to each inn mentoring group:* To facilitate one on one mentoring, the number of mentees assigned to each inn mentoring group should be the same as the number of mentors.
- *Duration of mentoring:* Each mentoring cycle lasts for the duration of one inn program year (usually 9–12 months).



- *Frequency of meetings:* Each mentee should have at least four to five contacts with mentors during the program year, either with the inn mentoring group or in mentor-mentee pair meetings.

- *Length of meetings:* Normally, mentor-mentee meetings, whether in groups or with individual mentors and mentees, should last at least one hour.

- *Time and place of meetings:* Inn mentoring group leaders should facilitate convenient meeting schedules.
- *Mentoring topics:* Inn mentoring groups and the mentoring committee will agree before the start of the program year on the topic or topics to be covered in mentoring.

Informal Mentoring Programs

Informal mentoring is also encouraged. It is part of the nature of pupilage teams. During meetings, lawyers new to the practice of law the opportunity have an intimate and appropriate way to get to know esteemed members of the local legal community. This familiarity removes barriers to asking questions, seeking career advice and receiving guidance when handling ethical dilemmas.

In addition, some Inns have a standing “mentor moment” presentation where Masters of the Bench recall their standout memory as a mentee learning the profession, or to share an

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anonymous but real moment when they mentored a colleague about a specific issue in the practice of law. Storytelling is a powerful teaching tool.

Your Inn may also want to consider the idea of “reverse” mentoring, when more seasoned practitioners learning from newer lawyers, especially in the areas of technology and communication. The world is constantly changing, and we all need help keeping up!

Mentoring Matters

The most important aspect of your mentoring efforts should be the level of member satisfaction with the mentoring the members are receiving.

The amount of engagement is less important than the quality of engagement, and quality correlates to frequency, access and personalization. Doing one thing once a year is not likely to garner you high marks for satisfaction, but innovation and customization will definitely move you in the right direction.

Benefits of Mentoring Programs

While an established multi-faceted mentoring program is something to strive for, form is less important than outcome. Regardless of how it is done, mentoring can:

- Foster development of practical skills.
- Increase knowledge of legal customs.
- Contribute to a sense of integrity in the legal profession.
- Promote collegial relationships among legal professionals and involvement in the organized bar.
- Improve judgment.
- Encourage the highest ideals in legal practice.

Mentoring is both an investment in your Inn and in the legal profession.