

YOU ARE A MENTOR

Throughout your career, others will look up to you. Whether you have a student, a junior or a colleague, you will have opportunities to share what you know and influence their learning. These are a few tips to help you be an effective mentor.

1. Be An Enthusiastic Partner

Be enthusiastic about the mentoring partnership. You will help your mentee gain knowledge, skills and professionalism.

Empower your mentee to develop their own strengths.

Exchange ideas, do not merely lecture.

You are growing your future colleague or partner. Help them become that person.

Look for potential and encourage it.

Be dedicated to their success.

2. Model Positive Behavior

Your mentee is learning more than the substantive and technical aspects of the law; you are also helping them develop soft skills, such as effective communication, and how to handle the pressures and challenges of practicing law.

Model positive behavior, including ethical behavior, professionalism, and compliance with the Code.

Demonstrate the importance of your assistants and staff and treat them respectfully and appreciatively.

Be inclusive.

Model and encourage good work/life balance.

3. Be Available

Have an open door. Try to never be too busy. If you are, offer an alternate time ASAP.

Check in regularly. Don't wait for your mentee to come to you with a problem.

Be mentally present and available. LISTEN actively, and without distraction.

4. Be Open

Be open to questions. None are too silly, too basic or not worthy of attention.

Be open to new ideas and welcome innovation. A person who does not think they already know the answer may find a novel approach.

5. Answers

Be a sounding board.

If appropriate, don't just provide the answer. Help your mentee, with guidance, to find the answer themselves. Ask the mentee what they think the answer might be, and then find the answer together. For example, if it's a question about procedure, look together at the King's Bench Rules, discuss where the answer might be found, look it up and then expand upon it. This will help your mentee find the answers themselves next time.

Give them the benefit of your experiences. Sharing stories from the trenches can give valuable insights.

6. Delegate

Give proper, clear and detailed instructions.

Welcome questions and answer patiently.

If you have resources, give a head start by providing them.

Be mindful of deadlines. Never set the deadline for the last moment you actually need something. Give plenty of leeway in case it takes more time.

Don't give your mentee an isolated task. They are part of the team. Involve them in the file as much as possible, even if just to observe various parts. Let them know why you need what they are working on. Explain how it fits into the file. Discuss the aspects of the file that will help them see the whole picture.

Ensure their reach exceeds their grasp.

7. Feedback

Give compliments freely and criticism gently.

Give feedback on work. It's not fair to accept the work product, amend it without comment and use it. Explain the changes that are needed, or "the one thing" that could have made the product better. Let the mentee give it another try after receiving the feedback.

Feedback should be honest but diplomatic, constructive, and encouraging.

View mistakes as opportunities to learn.

Also be willing to accept feedback which may allow you to be a more effective mentor.

8. Observe

Let your mentee watch things, even if they are not directly involved. They can learn a lot by listening.

If there is something novel or special, invite them to participate or observe. Explain why it is unusual.

Observe them in all aspects of work – let them handle a client meeting or a motion in your presence so that you can later offer suggestions.

9. The Business of Law

Explain your office processes.

Discuss the tasks needed to run a law office.

Include time management, billings and collections and client development.

10. Help Build a Network

Include them in your network, with other lawyers in the firm and elsewhere.

Introduce them to other professionals you work with such as accountants or experts.

Introduce them to the clients on whose files they are working.

11. Be Respectful

Be thoughtful, patient and kind.

Be interested in your mentee as a person. Go for lunch.

Be respectful of their personal time and responsibilities. Nights and weekends should not be part of the ordinary work week.

Don't ask your mentee to get you coffee, office supplies and certainly not to run your personal errands.

12. Be Appreciative

Be appreciative of your mentee's contributions in client relations, work product, efficiency and creative thinking.

13. Make Sure Your Mentee is Supported

Be sure your mentee has the supports they need including administrative assistance and equipment, access to resources, and relevant memberships such as the CBA.

Introduce them to Law(yer) Strong and the resources in the LSM Education Center. Take a look yourself!

Watch for signs that your mentee is overwhelmed or needs help. Take action early.

Conclusion:

Guide - Challenge - Support

Your mentee may be junior now. But they may grow to be your associate, your colleague and your partner. If you are very lucky, your mentee will grow to become your friend.

Learning and growing never stops. No matter your years at the bar, you can always learn from someone else, and others can learn from you.