

May I Have Some Help Please?



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Keep the gold and keep the silver, but give us wisdom.

—Arabian Proverb

Does this statement sound familiar? “I am frustrated with the practice of law because I am expected to undertake a tremendous amount of responsibility without the necessary mentoring and training to make me a good lawyer.” Unfortunately, I have heard this statement or similar statements all too often among young lawyers. The combination of a grueling schedule combined with a lack of training and mentoring are threatening to drive away some of our best and brightest from our profession.

Lawyers have the opportunity and (I believe) the obligation, to lead by example and give back to the profession by mentoring young lawyers as wise and trusted counselors, teachers and guides. Young lawyers—whether caught in the whirlwind of practicing in a firm, corporate or agency counsel’s office, or for a nonprofit—need mentors to help them with their careers. Unfortunately, mentors are all too rare. Often, the same handful of individuals (whether in a firm, corporation, judiciary or agency) is available to mentor. Consequently, the ill-received message is that senior lawyers don’t really care about the growth of young lawyers or the future of our profession. Having communicated with many lawyers around the Commonwealth this year, I know this is not the case.

Becoming a mentor is not challenging, yet mentorship remains beyond the grasp of many lawyers. Business constraints, pervasive technology and compressions of time, are all potential reasons why our profession has failed to prioritize mentoring and developing the skills of young lawyers. This is where professional organizations and bar associations can provide growth and guidance.

I cannot cover this subject in such a short article. However, it’s never too early to give back to others or too late to learn how. Tips for both the mentor and mentored follow:

- Do engage in the mentoring relationship prepared to exert energy, and from time to time experience frustration,
- Don’t expect the mentored to adopt your precise style or comport themselves in the very shadow of your image,
- Do make yourself available at identifiable times and for briefer, impromptu questions,

- Don’t frustrate by being unavailable or inaccessible, impatient or amnesiac about how hard the practice of law was for you in the earlier years,
- Do work consciously on your listening skills and create an atmosphere in which inquiries can be freely posed,
- Don’t avoid the harder questions requiring judgement, but avoid being judgmental,
- Don’t give up. Even if your efforts don’t show tangible or consistent results, remember that mentoring is a long-term process and an important act, in and of itself.

Suggestions for those being mentored are:

- Do be mindful of you mentor’s schedule,
- Don’t schedule a mentoring meeting and fail to show up on time,
- Do take initiative: Your mentor is likely to be busier than you are,
- Don’t take offense if your mentor has to cancel a session or is a bit difficult to reach from time to time,
- Do express gratitude for your mentor’s involvement and energies on your behalf,
- Don’t take for granted how hard it is for most lawyers to mentor others,
- Do your part to develop the relationship, so that your mentor will trust you and embrace his or her role in your career,
- Don’t quarrel with the advice your mentor provides—listen well, reach across your differences to accept the guidance you sought and need.

Becoming a mentor to a young lawyer can make a big difference in their career and their perception of our profession. Give it a try. Make the decision to mentor a young lawyer. Inspire another lawyer and help the profession, too, by being a wise and trusted counselor, teacher and guide. ☺