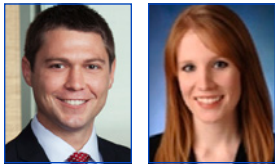


# Tips for a Successful Mentoring Relationship in a Remote Environment

By Chad Burgess and Caitlyn Haller



Even in the best circumstances, choosing to invest time in a mentor/mentee relationship requires the full and ongoing participation of both parties. Now, as more of the legal world operates in a virtual environment, the challenges of engaging with a mentor or mentee may seem daunting. Mentoring relationships may seem more difficult, with increased formality due to remote work and a loss of

the previous ways to meet mentors in the office or through a bar association and other community involvement. Yet fostering a mentor/mentee relationship is more important than ever. We have endeavored to provide some tips for mentors and mentees to establish and even further grow their relationship during this challenging time.

Mentors provide a critical role in the career development of less experienced lawyers. To maximize the benefits of mentoring in a remote environment, please consider the following:

- Spend some time learning about your mentee as a person outside of the legal environment. Ease into the conversation by discussing a home office set up, but then move to asking about his or her family, any hobbies, and his or her favorite way to spend a weekend morning in quarantine.
- Share information about yourself that is not necessarily included on your LinkedIn page. Topics may include the local restaurant that you are supporting or anecdotes about your family. Creating space for a personal rela-

tionship allows your mentee to feel more confident and less intimidated when asking you for advice.

- Share some lessons you learned the hard way. Try to resist the urge to share only your triumphs and instead share how your mentor helped you navigate the early years of your career.
- Find ways that your mentee can add value to your practice. Young lawyers may be more proficient in under-

standing e-discovery or using social media to promote business development activities. Discussing and learning skills that may be more familiar to young lawyers promotes your continued engagement as a mentor.

- Do not belittle fears. As a mentor, you may be asked for advice in something you consider routine and simple. Rather than tell your mentee not to worry, consider suggesting

ways they can approach the task with more preparation. It may be helpful to connect your mentee with a colleague who has navigated a similar issue recently. Even if you think it is elementary, remember that your mentee has less experience than you and can benefit from your advice.

- Try to meet panic with a sense of calm. As a mentor, you may be a young lawyer's first call when he or she discovers a mistake on a case. In the young lawyer's frenzied state, he or she may quickly spill out the events leading to a mistake and jump to the conclusion that he or she has caused irreparable harm to a case. While remaining empathetic, try to adopt a calm tone and work through the problem together rather than piling on criticism. Modeling professionalism in managing and correcting



a mistake will help your mentee navigate similar issues independently in the future.

- Show up. Set a calendar reminder to set a video chat once a month. Consider setting the call during your usual lunch or coffee break, allowing yourself time to engage in meaningful discussion. Provide a few suggested topics for the call and ask your mentee to bring one discussion point to ensure that it is not a waste of time.

Mentees must drive the relationship through active participation, planning, and engagement. To express your interest and gratitude adequately to a more senior lawyer in providing counsel to you, please consider the following:

- Spend time getting to know your mentor outside of the office. Always be prepared with questions about the mentor's likes, interests, family, etc. Establishing a personal connection beyond work is essential to a good mentoring relationship.
- Get time on your mentor's calendar. Make it a point to set aside fifteen minutes or more every month or twice a month to have a phone or video call with your mentor. This will help establish a rhythm for your conversations. If you do not reserve time on your mentor's calendar in advance, the days, weeks, and months will fly by without any meaningful interactions.
- Seek professional advice from your mentor. While it is important to get to know your mentor on a personal level, it is just as important to seek his or her professional advice. Make sure to ask what career advice wishes he or she had received as an associate. Also, spend time understanding how your mentor built his or her practice, including what did and did not work.
- Find ways that you can add value to your mentor's practice. Share a case law update or an article you read

that is applicable to your mentor's practice area. If possible, try to work on a case or two with your mentor or look for a way to publish an article or update with your mentor.

- Look for opportunities for reverse mentoring. While it is important to learn everything, you can from your mentor, do not let the knowledge only flow one way. Be sure to share helpful information you learned through your personal and work life. After all, we all continue to learn each day.
- Seek information and guidance from people who are not your mentors. A meaningful relationship with a mentor can be a rewarding experience for both mentor and mentee. Aside from the mentor-mentee relationship, it is also important to learn from other co-workers whether good or bad. The key is to keep learning and apply good and bad lessons learned to your personal and professional life.

Maintaining a mentor/mentee relationship during a pandemic requires flexibility, but the additional effort is well-worth the benefits of continuing to invest in other members of the profession.

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