

A Mentor is an experienced lawyer or judge who goes out of his or her way to help a law student set professional goals and assist the mentee in reaching those goals. The mentor coaches, listens, advises, reacts, and otherwise assists, in an informal, casual manner.

1. Take the initiative and allow the mentoring relationship to evolve.

Take the initiative to reach out to your mentee. Make the first call or send an e-mail to arrange a meeting. Share your cell phone numbers and e-mail addresses. Make sure to stick to your meeting day and time. Do not shift it around to accommodate your busy schedule. The Minority Mentoring Program only requires that the mentor and mentee meet a few times during the academic year and call or e-mail a few times every month. Set these as your minimum goals. Many relationships develop and more frequent communications and meetings are common.

Allow your mentor-mentee relationship to evolve. Try to maintain an unstructured, informal, relationship. In an effective mentoring relationship, the mentee does not put the mentor on a pedestal and the mentor does not put himself or herself on a pedestal. A comfortable and open level of communication is crucial to a successful mentor/mentee relationship. If there is no “connection,” ask for another mentee.

2. Be available.

One of the biggest complaints in all mentor/mentee relationships is lack of availability. Mentors need to be available no matter how supposedly “important” they are. You should try to make time whenever asked. Respond to e-mails at the earliest opportunity. Treat your mentee like an important client.

3. Maintain Confidences.

Mentoring relationships are built on trust. Keep your discussions private – no one else needs to know what you discuss. When your mentee confides in you within limits that have been set, respect his or her expectation of confidentiality. Mentors must not share information with others that their mentee shares with them confidentially. Violating a mentor’s or mentee’s trust can quickly destroy a mentoring relationship.

4. Try to see things from mentee’s perspective.

Prepare for your first meeting. Make a list of the things you wanted to know when you were in law school. Try to see things from the mentee’s perspective. The list might include information about you (as the mentor), your law school experiences, bar exam tips, and what it was like starting out as young attorney. Prepare an agenda. Ask your mentee if it is ok if you identify some areas for an agenda. List two or three areas and ask your mentee whether they have any items they would like to add. Some typical items may include (1) getting to know each other, (2) goals and expectations, (3) concerns that might interfere with meeting together, (4) law school advice, and (5) law practice advice.

5. Honest Interchange of Experiences – discuss problems and difficulties.

Two skills essential for successful mentoring are (1) in-depth listening, that is, suspending judgment, listening and providing an accepting atmosphere; and (2) asking questions that are challenging in a friendly way and that help the other person talk about what is important to that

person. Ask open-ended questions. Both the mentor and mentee should update each other on important events in their lives and careers. The mentor is in a position to share his or her wisdom and experiences and, thereby, give valuable insight to a mentee.

Anyone considering becoming a mentor must have good interpersonal skills, be willing to share with his or her mentee, and be willing to accept that the mentee may not always follow the mentor's guidance. Moreover, mentees may be hesitant to ask for advice for fear of sounding foolish. A mentor must be willing to break the ice and set the stage for open discussions.

6. Offer Guidance on specific topics and be supportive.

The Minority Mentoring Program tries to pair mentors and mentees who share common areas of interest. Frequently, mentees are simply trying to decide whether your area of practice is suited for them. Provide them with insight into a typical day in the life in your practice area. Introduce them to real-life experiences associated with working in the legal profession. The best teaching opportunities are often routine, everyday occurrences that present occasions for you to point out lessons, pitfalls, and alternative perspectives. Stay alert for those moments, share your knowledge, and raise questions that provoke thinking and facilitate learning.

Although you should give guidance and advice, a mentor is not there to make choices for the mentee. Remember, it's their life, not yours. You should try to be supportive of your mentee's choices even when you disagree.

7. Bring the mentee into your world.

Invite your mentee to your office, courts, career-enriching functions, receptions, etc. Some of the best opportunities evolve out of your multi-tasking. For example, ask your student mentee to attend a bar event or drive with you to a hearing. You should open doors for your mentee through your own contacts. You may wish to serve as a reference for your mentee. However, this is not a requirement.

8. Balance of personal and professional life.

Law students and lawyers alike sometimes lose sight of the importance in balancing personal and professional life. Stress the importance of balance between school, family, work, physical exercise friends, and relationships.

9. Make sure your mentee is comfortable.

You should make sure that mentee feels comfortable as an experienced attorney can be an intimidating presence. As the relationship develops and the mentee feels more comfortable, it should become less and less intimidating.

10. Plan for the next meeting.

At the end of your meeting, review your mutually developed agenda and determine your progress. Solicit ideas about what you might want to discuss at your next meeting, and schedule a date and time for your next meeting. Never allow the passage of time to be an impediment to communication.

11. Review your Mentee's Resume.

Reviewing your mentee's resume as an initial project is a way to establish a relationship of trust and value, while providing a necessary service that seems to be in great demand. I have yet to mentor a student whose resume did not need a major overhaul. Since obtaining a job is an immediate and important concern for every law student, be it a clerkship or permanent job, your

help in focusing the student on his or her particular assets and showcasing them well provides an immediate dividend from the mentor mentee relationship.

Note: This list was initially prepared by the Cuban American Bar Association (“CABA”) for its Annual Mentoring luncheon on April 15, 2010. It has been slightly edited. CABA has been a long-time, big supporter of mentoring.