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ARTICLES

ABA Women Leaders: On the Importance and Impact of Mentoring

By M.C. Sungaila – February 27, 2012

In keeping with the theme of this issue of the Woman Advocate Newsletter, a select group of ABA women leaders were asked to describe how both male and female mentors had positively impacted their development as lawyers and leaders, and to pass on some of that advice to newer women lawyers. Here are their stories and advice:

[Laurel Bellows](#), ABA President-Elect; former chair of the House of Delegates; former chair of the Commission on Women in the Profession; former chair of the Finance Committee of the Board of Governors; and founding partner, Bellows Law Group (Chicago, IL)

Q: Who was the biggest influence on your career; what was the best career advice you received from them or others?

A: Biggest influence: Joel Bellows, who trained me as a trial lawyer, and whom I eventually married. Things he taught me that I now share with others: The practice of law is not a popularity contest. Your job is to represent your client, not to be liked by the other side. When they come for your client with flamethrowers, the only place for you to stand is in front of your client. Always ethical, never a gray line, but always a zealous representation of the client's interests.

Q: If you were mentoring a young woman lawyer, what advice would you give her about career advancement and fulfillment?

A: Be true to yourself. Understand what you want out of life in any given moment to obtain personal satisfaction; recognize what that is and strike a balance between working hard to assure yourself economic independence currently and in the future while retaining a commitment to family and friends and enjoying life. I have found balance, or managed chaos, because I have combined a lot of aspects of my life.

You need to go to work feeling good about yourself and what you do every day; if the kind of law you are practicing does not do this for you, find a new way to do that.

Take control of your career. It is your responsibility to make sure you are doing work you want to do and at which you excel, and that you are receiving assignments that help you advance. Seek

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stretch assignments and work with partners who can introduce you to key clients. Cultivate relationships that can both bring you joy and business.

We have not removed the barriers to equal opportunity for advancement; they persist. It is important for young women to recognize that barriers still exist. But please don't opt out before you opt in. Women need to establish and maintain their own economic independence or they will pay a price down the road.

Learn to lead. Take leadership courses. Find women in the corporate environment who are being groomed for leadership. It is not complicated, but it is a mindset that is not taught in law school.

Be a dealmaker and a problem solver, and seek to achieve your client's objectives. Get creative and make it happen.

[Roberta D. Liebenberg](#), cochair of the ABA Section of Litigation's Strategic Planning and Implementation Task Force, former chair of the ABA Commission on Women in the Profession; a founder (and current Vice-Chair) of Direct Women, an ABA initiative to prepare women lawyers for service as directors on corporate boards; and senior partner, Fine Kaplan and Black (Philadelphia, PA)

Q: Who was the biggest influence on your career and what was the best career advice you received from them or others? Have you ever had a mentor or sponsor who made a genuine difference in how your career turned out?

A: I have been very fortunate to have had a number of wonderful mentors who had a significant impact on my career. When I first started practicing antitrust law at a large firm, one of the senior partners, Seymour Kurland, took me under his wing. He made sure that I was given substantial responsibility on major matters for significant clients. He also saw to it that I developed a broad range of litigation skills and helped me navigate my way through the maze of large-firm politics and culture. The most valuable advice he imparted to me was to take risks and to always seek out greater responsibility and challenges.

I was also privileged to work with Jerry Shestack, a former ABA President. Jerry was instrumental in my becoming more actively involved with the ABA and, in particular, the Commission on Women in the Profession. Jerry was a role model and mentor not just for me, but also for countless other lawyers throughout the country and the ABA. He taught me the importance of bar association involvement and the need to give back and serve as a champion and advocate for others.

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Another one of my mentors was Judge Norma Shapiro of the District Court for the Eastern District of Pennsylvania. Judge Shapiro has been a trailblazer for women lawyers and has provided sage counsel to me for many years. For example, when I chaired the Pennsylvania Bar Association's Commission on Women in the Profession, she helped us to identify the most significant and pressing issues confronting women lawyers and provided invaluable assistance in formulating concrete solutions to help women to advance. She always emphasized that it is imperative for women to reach back to help other women to climb the ladder to success, and that admonition has served as a lifelong inspiration to me.

Q: If you were mentoring a young woman lawyer, what advice would you give her about career advancement and fulfillment?

A: My advice to a young woman lawyer would be similar to what was given me—concentrate in a particular area of the law, hone your legal skills, and become involved in activities that will give you visibility within your firm and your community.

I would advise that you should think about what you would like to do with your career as early as possible and develop a business plan for yourself. If you would like to try to eventually make partner in your firm, develop short-term and long-term business development goals for yourself. Take advantage of business development training or coaching opportunities. Seek out assignments that will let you work with different partners and develop relationships with clients.

This same advice holds true if you are working in government or in corporate practice. While it sounds corny, try to visualize where you want to be and what you want to do in the next 10 years and take steps that will help you implement your plan. Taking a long-term view of your professional development helps you to set realistic goals. You may not be able to do everything at once, but it is important that you start.

Once you have established your goals, don't be afraid to reevaluate them and make changes. Moreover, it is important not to get discouraged by setbacks; learn from mistakes and never let fear of failure hold you back.

It is also important that women attorneys believe in themselves and that they promote their accomplishments. Many times, women face a catch-22—if they tout their achievements, they run the risk of being viewed negatively as a braggart or aggressive self-promoter. Conversely, if women don't promote themselves, they may not receive the compensation or credit they deserve for their work.

Finally, each woman must ultimately determine for herself what will constitute career fulfillment and success. Make the choices that you think are best, and don't allow yourself to be pressured

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by others or feel guilty about your decisions. Also, it is very helpful to have a circle of friends who can act as a strong support system and lifeline as you try to balance personal and professional obligations.

Q: How do mentors or sponsors continue to play a role in advancing your career?

A: Mentors or sponsors can play an invaluable role helping you to achieve success, no matter the stage of your career. My longtime involvement with the ABA has enabled me to meet a number of incredible, talented men and women from around the country who have become my close friends, referral sources, and sponsors. They have promoted me to positions of leadership within the ABA, enabling me to work on the issues of greatest importance to me. In fact, a highlight of my career was being appointed to serve as Chair of the ABA Standing Committee on the Federal Judiciary and then Chair of the ABA Commission on Women in the Profession.

Not only have my sponsors promoted me within the ABA, they have also introduced me to a vast network of contacts and organizations outside the ABA where I have continued to work towards increasing diversity within the legal profession, the justice system, and society as a whole. I am enormously grateful for the support of those who have sponsored me, and in turn I am always looking to mentor and champion other women as well so that they can achieve success.

Patricia (Trish) Refo, the elected ABA state delegate from Arizona and current board member of the American Bar Endowment; former chair of the ABA Section of Litigation; former chair of the Standing Committee on Membership; former chair of the American Jury Project; and Litigation Partner, Snell & Wilmer LLP (Phoenix, AZ)

Q: Who was the biggest influence on your career; what was the best career advice you received from them or others?

A: I was fortunate to have many mentors as a younger lawyer, and I still do! Surely, one of the biggest influencers of my career was Joan Hall, a senior partner at Jenner & Block when I joined the firm out of law school. She was and still is an amazing person and an extraordinary lawyer; she genuinely cared about the women who came up behind her. Throughout the years, she has given me zillions of tips on topics big and small. Keep in touch with everyone—you never know who may one day send you a case; Pearls, real or not, are always a good accessory. The best advice she gave me was this: The most important business development work you can do is to do an outstanding job on whatever task you are working on right now for an existing client. There's truth in that for every lawyer, new or seasoned.

Q: If you were mentoring a young woman lawyer, what advice would you give her about career advancement and fulfillment?

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A: Find a part in the practice of law that you love. Keep looking until you find it! This is an extremely diverse profession but in all of it, doing well means working really hard. You won't be happy working really hard if you don't love, or at least really get a kick out of, what you're doing.

Q: Would you say you ever had a mentor or sponsor who made a genuine difference in how your career turned out? If so, please tell us a little bit about that.

A: In 1996, I switched cities in mid-career when I married my husband and moved to Phoenix. It was more than a little scary to essentially start all over again after 13 years, building a new practice in a new city at a new firm. You don't exactly walk a book of business from Chicago to Phoenix. My senior partner, John Bouma, personally made it his business to ensure that I succeeded. Almost as soon as I started at the firm, John asked me to try a long jury trial with him for a major client, which allowed me to "show my stuff" both to my new colleagues and to the client. As I rebuilt my own practice, John offered me one opportunity after another to handle big and complex cases for his clients. To paraphrase Charles Barkley, John helped put me under the basket, which is where you need to be to score.

[Anne Marie Seibel](#), cochair of the ABA Woman Advocate Committee and Complex Litigation Partner at Bradley Arant Boult Cummings LLP (Birmingham, Ala.)

Q: Who was the biggest influence on your career; what was the best career advice you received from them or others?

A: I am fortunate to have had many career influences over time. Each individual, almost exclusively male lawyers, with influence over my career path has taken a personal interest in me and my career and encouraged me to take on opportunities that I may not have otherwise sought on my own. Not having any lawyers in my family, one of the first influences on my legal career was a law school professor who encouraged me to find a place to practice where I could be challenged intellectually and still have a family life. Once I followed that advice and started practice, I found that one benefit this professor had foreseen for me was an atmosphere in which senior lawyers sought to develop future partners.

Two partners in particular immediately provided me with client contacts and allowed me to participate in critical strategy decisions. Nothing can replace those discussions in terms of developing a young lawyer's ability to analyze strategy calls and teaching lessons about how to discuss those decisions with clients. These same lawyers quickly pushed me into court and into negotiations with opposing counsel. In doing so, the lawyers gave me confidence that they trusted my abilities, but were always available for advice. I'm also thankful for sponsors who

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were closer to my age and were able to give me glimpses into partnership a few years before I took that step. These individuals were also able to candidly assess my strengths and weaknesses and provided advice about career options that matched those assessments.

Q: If you were mentoring a young woman lawyer, what advice would you give her about career advancement and fulfillment?

A: The most important advice I can give is to look at your career as a long-term effort, not as a snapshot in time. It is easy as a young lawyer to get caught up in meeting individual goals for hours or trying to keep up with other lawyers of your same age. A senior female lawyer recently gave me similar advice. She cautioned that younger lawyers too often turn to each other in evaluating their professional decisions rather than speaking to lawyers 25 years their senior. She reminded me that from her perspective she can see how successful her own children are, how happy she is in her marriage, and how fulfilled she is professionally. Further, she noted that many of her contemporaries who stopped working are less satisfied in many of those respects. That may not be true for all people. But, it is a good reminder for me and explains why I continue to seek out the most intellectually challenging work.

To find these resources, I would advise a young woman lawyer to seek out mentors in a group like the woman advocate committee. While it is important to have mentors who are in your firm and can sponsor you in that context, it is equally important to find confidants who can provide advice from afar. It is a privilege for me to have friends and mentors across the country from the woman advocate committee with whom I can candidly speak and receive support and mentorship.

Q: How do mentors or sponsors continue to play a role in advancing your career?

A: My mentors are doing two things for me right now. First, they see my future in ways that I would not imagine for myself. And, second, they focus me on the reasons I continue to practice at such a high level. A good mentor looks at a younger lawyer and sees possibilities for her down the road that she does not yet see. The benefit of experience, distance, and interactions with many lawyers allows a mentor to identify paths of personal and professional fulfillment that may be less obvious to the mentee who is focused on present tasks. I am indebted to those who have taken time from their own successful practices to give me glimpses of what they envision me accomplishing in the future.

Barb Dawson, cochair of ABA Section of Litigation Valuing Litigation Taskforce and former cochair of the Section's Commercial and Business and International Committees; and Commercial Litigation Partner, Snell & Wilmer LLP (Phoenix, AZ)

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Q: Who was the biggest influence on your career; what was the best career advice you received from them or others?

A: I had two strong influences—Dan McAuliffe, who was a senior partner who allowed and supportively pushed me to try new things. He gave me plenty of room to learn from doing, for which I am grateful. Clearly, his message was that there is no substitute for experience under the watchful eye of someone who wants to see you succeed; and Judge Roslyn Silver, who was chief of the criminal division of the U.S. Attorney’s Office in Arizona before joining the Federal District Court where she is now Chief Judge. She taught me, through her example, that women can be both strong and feminine, and it is not an “either/or” choice.

Q: If you were mentoring a young woman lawyer, what advice would you give her about career advancement and fulfillment?

A: It is fulfilling to do work that you love; it is a privilege to be asked to assist others in solving their problems; and the law is a powerful tool allowing us to help resolve disputes and help enrich the lives of others. We are fortunate to work in a profession that allows for such opportunities.

Q: Would you say you ever had a mentor or sponsor who made a genuine difference in how your career turned out? If so, please tell us a little bit about that.

A: Each and every mentor or sponsor who has told me the truth about areas where I’ve fallen short, and then also offered encouragement about ways to improve, has made a genuine difference in how my career is turning out. I am very grateful for such candor.

Q: How do mentors or sponsors continue to play a role in advancing your career?

A: One treat that has come with becoming more seasoned (ok, just getting older) is that many mentors have become real friends and peers as we have now worked together for decades. Given our open-door policy at the firm, a day does not go by without colleagues asking each other for a quick second opinion on various matters. This give-and-take is enriching and always results in a better product. Such team support of people all mentoring each other makes it fun to come to work each day.

Countess W. Price, cochair of the ABA Corporate Counsel Committee and Assistant General Counsel—Litigation, Monsanto Company (St. Louis, MO)

Q: Who was the biggest influence on your career; what was the best career advice you received from them or others?

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A: A trial lawyer named Jim Virtel. He took me under his wing when I was a young associate. The best advice he gave me was to always be prepared.

Q: If you were mentoring a young woman lawyer, what advice would you give her about career advancement and fulfillment?

A: If the opportunity you want doesn't present itself, then create it.

Q: Would you say you ever had a mentor or sponsor who made a genuine difference in how your career turned out? If so, please tell us a little bit about that.

A: Yes. As a young associate at the law firm I was fortunate to have a mentor/sponsor who provided opportunities for me to actively participate in litigation and try cases. Those experiences set the foundation for me to be able to become in-house counsel.

Q: How do mentors or sponsors continue to play a role in advancing your career?

A: I'm at a point where I've just elected not to have formal mentors/sponsors anymore. However, I do think you're never too old or advanced to have them and that they can be valuable.

[Bahar Schippel](#), chair of the Partnership Committee of the ABA Section of Taxation; former member of the Council for the Section of Taxation; and Tax Partner, Snell & Wilmer (Phoenix, AZ)

My background is what you may call less than conventional. I was born in Iran. When I was nine years old, it was no longer safe for our family to be there and my parents sent me to a boarding school in India. I spent the next seven years far away from my family with only their letters to keep me sane. I later rejoined my parents here in the United States and we struggled to make a new life for ourselves. My parents did not know much about the education system here and were not able to provide me with effective career guidance.

Despite the many challenges of my early years, I feel immensely fortunate. One reason is because of the many wonderful mentors I have had along the way. Among them is one of my professors at the University of San Diego, M. Carr Ferguson. He counseled me to pursue a clerkship with the U.S. Tax Court, advice that has made all the difference in my career. Professor Ferguson also helped me choose where to practice after my clerkship and, through his connections, was instrumental in obtaining a position for me at Snell & Wilmer.

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I was a good student and used to hold study sessions for other students. Professor Ferguson had noticed this and took an interest in helping me because I was helping others. He taught me that the way to get ahead in my career was by promoting the interest of others rather than by competing with them.

Judge Armen, for whom I clerked at the Tax Court, was also quite influential in my career. His mentoring went well beyond the opinions that we worked on; he took an active role in trying to help me become a well-rounded individual. He was always telling me about a great opera I should see, a good book I should read, or the newest culinary delight I should visit. I learned that being an exceptional lawyer goes well beyond doing good work and that being a good mentor meant really taking an interest in the individual. To this day, Judge Armen sends me clippings of the latest and greatest cultural goings on.

I would be remiss if I did not mention my partner and great mentor Charlie Pulaski—the Boss!—who, over the years, has treated me like his own daughter. Charlie taught me that there are no easy answers, that it is important to pay attention to detail, and that I should leave the office early when my daughter has a swim meet. Everyone needs someone who has a box of Kleenex in the office just for you, and Charlie has handed me many a tissue when the goings were tough.

My experience has been that there are a lot of good individuals in any setting who are willing to go out of their way to make a difference in the life of a young person, but like any relationship, a mentoring relationship requires nurturing. I encourage young women lawyers to seek out and nurture such relationships. Very often, behind the tough exterior of a formidable senior partner is a kind and giving individual who is willing to assist a young lawyer in career advancement and fulfillment. Many such individuals are impressed by a young lawyer's initiative in seeking out mentoring and are more likely to spend time and effort with such inspiring young lawyers.

[Karen Stevenson](#), Associate Editor, ABA Section of Litigation's Litigation News and Senior Counsel, Buchalter Nemer (Los Angeles, CA)

Q: Who was the biggest influence on your career; what was the best career advice you received from them or others?

A: The biggest influence on my career was the decision to engage a professional coach to help me clarify my professional goals and make strategic, concrete steps to achieve those goals. As my career progressed, I never felt that I had a mentor or sponsor who could champion my development. The decision to invest in professional executive coaching has made an enormous difference for me in terms of learning how to build my own professional support team, refining and expanding my skills as a manager/team leader, and just increasing my happiness about the work I do each day.

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The best career advice I've received along the way has been twofold: make sure I am taking care of myself personally through enjoyable activities and relationships beyond the office; and make a written personal business plan each year and review it regularly. Writing down your goals and how you plan to get there is a powerful tool—even when you fall short of the goal, it can be encouraging to look back and see what you have accomplished along the way.

Q: If you were mentoring a young woman lawyer, what advice would you give her about career advancement and fulfillment?

A: The advice I would give young women lawyers is that they must view themselves as the CEO of their own careers. Get clear about what you want and why. It is, of course, essential to do excellent work at every stage of one's career, but it is also important for young lawyers not to wait for others in their firms, departments, etc., to bring to them the advancement opportunities they want or need to move to the next level. I think every lawyer must spend time reflecting on what she wants from her career, what values are most important for her to have a sense balance and joy in her life, and then we must each be fearless in pursuing ways to achieve that.

Q: Would you say you ever had a mentor or sponsor who made a genuine difference in how your career turned out? If so, please tell us a little bit about that.

A: Until very recently, I have not had a mentor or sponsor whom I felt genuinely supported me. In the last year, however, I have had a new experience of support from a senior woman partner in my firm and that has made a tremendous difference for me. It is so valuable to have someone who can light the way in front of you.

Q: How do mentors or sponsors continue to play a role in advancing your career?

A: I believe that mentors or sponsors can play an important role throughout one's career. How those relationships function typically will change over time as we advance in our careers. But there is always value in having those around us whom we trust to give sound advice and to be safe listeners with whom to share ideas, hopes, dreams and, yes, even failures.

Keywords: woman advocate, litigation, mentoring

[M.C. Sungaila](#), Appellate Partner, Snell & Wilmer, Orange County, CA.

Counselor, Who Is Counseling You?

By Ellen Ostrow, PhD, CMC – February 27, 2012

“As any good mountaineer will tell you, a successful ascent requires a good deal of preparation: choosing fellow climbers, ensuring team conditioning, assembling first-rate equipment and having experienced guides.”

Jay M. Jackman. Quoted in Nichols, Nancy A. (Ed.), “Reach for the Top: Women and the Changing Facts of Work Life,” Harvard Business School Press, 1996, p. 81.

The need to strategically plan and navigate your career never ends. When you enter a new workplace, you need to understand the culture of the organization. As you move up the ranks, you need to master delegation and management skills. At midcareer, you may be ready for new professional challenges but still need some guidance. And retirement transitions require a different kind of assistance. Guided professional development, modeling advice, and advocacy are ongoing necessities for a successful legal career.

Every woman attorney, then, needs a mentor. But the old model of mentoring, in which a senior attorney took on a protégé, is rarely realistic in today’s legal workplace. First, the demands on the time of senior attorneys make it all but impossible for them to devote themselves to a mentor-protégé relationship. Furthermore, people are typically more attracted to those who are similar to themselves. In most legal workplaces, the most seasoned and powerful attorneys are still white men. Generational differences also make finding an ideal mentor difficult. And if you find such a perfect mentor, you will probably need to queue up—think of how many other women are searching for the same kind of counsel!

Additionally, traditional mentoring is skill focused. However, women and attorneys of color need mentoring that is not just instructional but also provides emotional support, builds confidence, and helps the protégé to effectively deal with the potential barriers to success posed by unintended bias and stereotyping. Women attorneys wanting to find ways to address work-family conflict need experienced colleagues who can empathize with their difficulties and share time-tested strategies. Similarly, women with leadership ambitions need models with whom they can identify.

Many firms have formal mentoring programs developed to address these needs. However, these relationships are “arranged marriages” in an association that in reality relies upon good chemistry. Even when mentoring programs are successful, they rarely address the needs of attorneys beyond the first few years of practice. The new partner, the midcareer attorney, and the

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attorney considering retirement are rarely offered mentors to help them navigate these transitions.

Your Personal Board of Advisors

It is essential to keep in mind that no one will ever care more about your career than you. When you take personal responsibility for your own professional development and success, you are far more likely to feel in control of your career and to overcome challenges to your success. Rather than wait for your firm or organization to provide you with the kind of mentoring you really need, why not proactively develop relationships with people who can provide mentoring across a wide variety of concerns?

You might think of this group of mentors as your own personal board of advisors. Whether or not you meet with all of them simultaneously, each board member can be chosen to fulfill specific needs. The list of expectations any attorney has of a good mentor is daunting. No wonder so few senior attorneys are willing to try to fill this role! You will be far more likely to get all the different kinds of help you need if you clarify your needs and objectives for mentoring relationships and then identify a group of people who can assist you in accomplishing your goals.

Selecting Members of Your Board

Mentoring needs change at different points in your career development. So the first step is to assess your requirements at this point in your career. Selecting potential mentors will depend largely on the results of your assessment. Ask yourself, “What expertise do I need to develop to undertake this challenge? What confuses me now that some clarification could help? Which path is so murky that I need someone who has traveled this road before?”

Your personal board of advisors serves as a kind of informal, customized, personal knowledge resource to fill in your knowledge and support gaps. Once you have determined the kind of knowledge, modeling, and advice you need, ask yourself, “Who would know something about this?”

Having identified your learning and support requirements, look for mentors in a variety of places. Ask successful attorneys to recommend people with particular expertise or those who have been helpful to them in some way. Look around your firm for people you admire and would like to emulate. Maybe you have come across an in-house attorney who is willing to advise you about how clients make buying decisions. Consider your former law school professors who possess the expertise you are trying to develop. Perhaps you have encountered an opposing counsel from whose experience you think you can benefit. You may have attended a CLE program and thought of the presenter as someone who could really help you succeed.

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Every situation presents you with possibilities for finding mentors. Listen to the contributions people make at meetings you attend. Be attentive to those who have special expertise in areas you want to develop, those whom you admire, and those who have values similar to your own. Work on collaborative projects with people, both at work and in your community, and observe others' strengths. Take note of good networkers whose success secrets you would like to emulate. If you attend a program and are particularly interested in the speaker, try to approach her afterwards. Tell her you admire her work and would like to learn from her, or that you want to achieve what she has and would appreciate her advice.

If possible, get a feel for what it would be like to work with a potential member of your personal advisory board. You might volunteer to serve on a committee or seek out an assignment that will allow you to work with a potential mentor as a way to establish a working relationship.

Try to spot people who seem particularly disposed to invest in a mentoring relationship. When people express genuine interest in you and your career, consider taking them up on it.

Different Functions for Different Board Members

New attorneys need a mentor within their organization who can help them learn about its culture. This mentor can provide tips on who is powerful, who the key players and decision makers are, whom to seek out, and whom not to cross. A more senior lawyer in your firm can help you learn the protocol; she can facilitate your socialization and integration into the firm. Colleagues with whom you forge alliances within your organization can assist you in learning the skills required for advancement.

It is extremely useful to find a mentor who does the same kind of work as you. A senior and successful attorney in your practice area who can provide candid and constructive criticism of your work—and who is not writing your formal evaluation—is an invaluable resource.

It is helpful for women attorneys to form alliances with other women who share their values concerning work-life conflict. It is even better if you admire how this person has handled the issues in her own life.

It is also advantageous to build alliances with people outside of your workplace. These may be individuals with expertise in areas where you have knowledge gaps, people you genuinely admire and believe can teach you a lot, and attorneys who are particularly supportive and whose perspective on the profession is of value to you. Your personal board of advisors may also include people in other professions, perhaps in the industry you serve. You might want to include a professional career/executive coach on your board.

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Sponsors and Champions

Mentors may serve many different functions. They can enhance your career prospects by increasing your human capital, helping you to develop job-related knowledge, skills, and abilities. Mentoring can also help integrate you into the workplace. A mentor who “shows you the ropes” helps you negotiate the organization and provides insider information about organizational politics. Mentors may provide emotional support and modeling. However, studies of mentoring in law firms indicate that this is insufficient to enable a woman attorney to reach the highest levels of law firm leadership.

Another mentoring function is that of increasing the protégé’s social capital. A mentee’s career benefits when her mentor provides her with access to his network, facilitates her participation in collaborative projects, promotes her to others thereby augmenting her visibility and credibility, protects and champions her behind the scenes, provides challenging and highly noticeable work assignments, brings her along on client meetings and ensures that she plays an active role, and by association, signals her legitimacy to decision makers. A mentor like this functions as a sponsor or champion.

The sponsor on your board can make all the difference in enabling you to advance to the highest level of the profession. Research on the relationship between mentoring and the career success of women suggests that often a male attorney is most effective in filling this seat on your board. This is not surprising, given that the overwhelming majority of leaders in the legal profession are men. However, the gendered culture of law firms also influences the differential effects of male vs. female mentors for the careers of women attorneys. Success in most firms requires the ability to thrive in a highly competitive, aggressive, individualistic, heroic culture. These attributes, stereotypically associated with masculine behavior, are viewed as indicators of potential and fitness. Decision makers always have incomplete information about candidates for advancement. In the absence of sufficient, objective information to allow for a rational means of discriminating among aspiring attorneys, having a powerful male mentor signals to the predominantly male leadership that a woman lawyer has what it takes. In other words, a male mentor/champion may help you overcome unintended bias based upon gender stereotypes.

A woman lawyer without such an advocate is at a disadvantage. Research indicates that women with senior male mentors are more likely to advance and to receive higher compensation. In addition, formal mentoring programs are unlikely to help you reap the benefits of sponsorship. Instead, the voluntary selection of a protégé by a senior male signals to other firm leaders that you possess those qualities believed to be requirements for success.

Assuming a Leader’s Identity

While the sponsorship of a powerful senior male attorney is likely to facilitate attaining promotions, it does not appear to prepare women well for assuming the role and identity of

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partner or leader; nor does it inspire the confidence and satisfaction it is supposed to bring. The lack of women at the highest levels leaves many new women partners without a clear picture of how to act the part. Without such models, women can become less confident and more anxious. In addition, male mentors typically fail to provide other essential mentoring functions: social and emotional support, or advice concerning role ambiguity and work-family conflict. Research indicates that these functions are better served by women mentors.

Cultivating Relationships with Your Personal Advisory Board

The alliances you form with members of your board are substantive, strategically important business relationships. These are genuine, meaningful, and productive relationships with people at all levels of experience who can provide career enhancement and self-development.

Relationships with members of your board depend upon personal chemistry and often occur serendipitously. They evolve in a natural and authentic way. But you can influence serendipity by volunteering for committees or working on assignments that allow collaborative relationships to develop. This also allows both parties to evaluate the benefits of the working relationship.

Knowledge and assistance are privileges, not rights. It is important to clarify each person's expectations of the relationship. Negotiate how long you expect the alliance to proceed in this form; at a later date you can always arrange to continue the relationship.

Try to gain an understanding of what each mentor needs for the relationship to be mutually rewarding. For some board members, helping another attorney succeed will be sufficient. Others may feel rewarded by your offers to assist them in writing articles or introducing them to other people in your network.

It is important not to abuse your relationships with the members of your personal advisory board. Be clear about each individual's willingness to be available and helpful, and structure your requests accordingly. Treat these relationships with great care, show appropriate gratitude, and give proper credit for contributions. Never waste your advisors' time. When you seek their expertise, prepare your questions well and summarize the efforts you've already made to solve the problem.

Lay the Groundwork In Advance

The worst time to be constructing your personal board of advisors is when you need it to work for you. It's essential to be proactive and to find ways to build these relationships before you need to call on them for assistance. The kind of social capital provided by your relationships with mentors doesn't typically produce quick dividends. The benefits of social capital take time to accrue. In fact, social capital is the by-product of your efforts to contribute to the success of others.

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FROM THE SECTION OF LITIGATION WOMAN ADVOCATE COMMITTEE

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The principle of reciprocity creates social capital. Reciprocity begins with an act of generosity without the expectation of a return. Helping others without regard to how they will help you is the best way to make sure that you will benefit from the relationships you create. Working to understand the needs of others around you and doing your best to contribute generously to their success is the best way to plant the seeds for your own success. People whom you have helped will want to help you succeed. Consider potential contenders for seats on your personal advisory board and start planting those seeds.

Keywords: woman advocate, mentors, protégé, social capital, sponsors

[Ellen Ostrow, Ph.D., CMC](#), founding principal, Lawyers Life Coach LLC, Washington, D.C.

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Selecting Tomorrow's Leaders—and Ensuring Women Are Among Them

By Ida Abbott – February 27, 2012

Law firms need to get serious about finding new leaders. In Altman Weil's 2011 Survey of Law Firms in Transition, 47 percent of firms identified retirement and succession of baby boomers as the top issue in preparing firms for the changes that lie ahead. Yet very few law firms have succession planning processes in place. A few years ago many firms started leadership development programs, but when the economy collapsed in 2008 other initiatives took priority. More than three years later, the legal marketplace remains shaky, and firms understandably remain preoccupied with maintaining profitability. But they can no longer delay taking steps to identify and prepare new leaders. A turbulent and uncertain marketplace requires leaders who are equipped to handle its challenges—and the urgency is even greater in light of the pending retirement of current firm leaders. Nearly 70 percent of law firm partners are baby boomers, lawyers in their fifties and sixties who will retire over the next few years. Many boomers are deferring retirement for financial reasons, but when they start to leave in significant numbers, law firms will be under severe pressure to replace them with new leaders and rainmakers.

Firms should treat this situation with some urgency because succession planning, if done correctly, takes time. When current baby boomer leaders and rainmakers start to retire, firms will need new leaders who are prepped and ready to take over their responsibilities. This cannot be done overnight. Without a systematic, well-thought-out method, firms restrict their ability to find the leaders they need. They assume the same qualities that have made lawyers successful leaders until now will also make them effective leaders in the new world. While some firms may be lucky and select good leaders this way, others will make terrible choices.

Law firms cannot risk bad choices. They need systems for identifying and training leaders. They have to motivate people to become leaders, open paths to leadership, and help them prepare for leadership. And they must make sure that their new leaders include women.

Opening the Doors That Keep Women Out of Leadership

There are shockingly few women in law firm leadership. Women and men have started their careers in law firms in almost equal numbers for more than two decades, but firms have continued practices that prevent women from achieving their leadership potential. This has so discouraged women that the number of women in law firms has actually started to decline. Since 2006, the number of women in large law firms has decreased each year; in 2010, the number of women attorneys reached a five-year low.

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An even greater concern is that women's advancement into partnership and leadership has virtually stalled. Women in 2011 constitute almost one-third of lawyers but barely 15 percent of law firm equity partners. With such a small pool of partners, women also remain underrepresented in firm leadership. According to a 2011 survey by the National Association of Women Lawyers, most large firms have at most two women members on their highest governing committee, while a substantial number have either no women or only one woman on that committee, and only five percent of firms have women firm-wide managing partners—a percentage that has not changed since 2006.

These figures belie law firms' mythical belief that they are meritocracies. Women are prevented from moving into partnership and leadership not because they are not capable but because gender bias pervades the culture and decision-making systems of law firms. This bias is subtle and unintentional, but that neither excuses it nor makes it less harmful. There is a considerable body of research documenting the damaging effects of bias on women's career advancement. Here are just three recent examples:

- A 2011 study of associate evaluations in a Wall Street law firm found that gender bias made it three times more likely for men to be promoted to partner.
- Women in law firms make substantially less money than their male counterparts at every level of seniority, even when they outperform them.
- Firms that explicitly call themselves meritocratic more often fall prey to gender bias, with managers paying more bonus money to men than to women.

Women who do become partners and wish to be law firm leaders do not escape the harmful effects of bias. Numerous studies have shown that the traits associated with leadership are stereotypically male, which creates several dilemmas for women. Women leaders face higher standards and receive fewer rewards than men. Their behavior is judged as either "feminine," which makes them too soft and therefore less competent, or "unfeminine," which makes them unlikable and less effective. As a result, many women lawyers with extraordinary leadership potential are overlooked for leadership roles because they are not perceived or appreciated as leaders and their contributions tend to be less visible and less valued. Stereotypes also cause retiring partners, who are predominantly men, to transfer their (mostly male) clients to other men because they assume male clients will relate better to other men.

Other obstacles to women's advancement are due to law firm politics. Like other organizations, law firms are political. Lawyers advance in them through power and influence, not because of their legal skills or leadership abilities. To become a law firm leader requires being well connected to influential partners, having access to powerful networks, and having champions who give you "inside information," get you appointed to important positions and committees,

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and send you business and clients. But women don't fully appreciate the importance of law firm politics; they buy into the meritocracy myth. They think being a good lawyer will get them the recognition and rewards they deserve. They remain unaware of the "unwritten" rules by which partners constantly negotiate for favors, privileges, and special treatment. They fail to build up the political capital and connections needed to break into the circles of power, so they remain excluded from those inner circles where influential partners make key decisions behind the scenes. For more women to become leaders, firm decision making must become more transparent—but women also must be more strategic and politically savvy. They must be clear about what they want, let others know, elicit support from people who can help, and forge ahead with confidence and determination.

Leadership Systems and Succession Planning

Leadership development and succession planning can ensure a smooth and seamless transition to new leadership when current leaders retire, step down, or leave. Succession planning requires a firm to define the attributes and competencies of leadership thoughtfully and objectively within both the current context and anticipated future trends and changes. It also requires the firm to consider and assess all firm lawyers to determine which ones demonstrate the propensity, motivation, and aptitude for leadership.

By emphasizing objective criteria and reducing political forces, firms can also remove many of the obstacles that thwart women's ambitions. In the process of examining the facts and assessing lawyers as individuals, they can move beyond the assumptions or stereotypes that keep women out of consideration for important leadership roles. At a time when law firms need to find more than a few strong and diverse leaders, this process will also greatly enlarge the pool of talented prospects.

Succession planning should begin by defining the competencies of leadership required by the firm. Decisions about which competencies are most desirable should be made within the context of the firm's core values and its current culture and business goals. But those involved in the decision making must resist the temptation to create clones. They should not assume that their own characteristics and abilities are the most advantageous ones for future leaders. Leaders-in-training will take the helm at some later time and will be responsible for carrying out the firm's long-term plans in a rapidly changing legal marketplace. It is therefore important to anticipate the diverse competencies that will be necessary to sustain the firm's well-being and meet the new challenges the firm will encounter down the road.

Related to succession planning is the preparation of emerging leaders to take charge of client relationships. The client transfer process must be carefully planned well in advance of a partner's retirement, as it may take some time for the client to develop trust and confidence in the new

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lawyer. It may also take time for the junior lawyer to transition into the client leadership role. The retiring partner can serve as a valuable mentor and facilitator during the transition period.

Succession Planning and Women

Repeated research has shown a strong positive correlation between having more women in top leadership and higher corporate profits. In addition to their cognitive skills and professional accomplishments, women possess the relational, collaborative, empowering, and emotional intelligence attributes that new leaders need. Law firms cannot afford to continue squandering valuable resources by keeping women out of leadership.

To increase the presence of women in leadership, firms should implement processes and protections that ensure leadership development and client transitions are carried out fairly, and that women are considered at every level. This is not an easy sell because the men who control and benefit from the current system have little incentive to change. After all, men hold 85 percent of equity partnerships and 95 percent of top leadership positions and therefore almost all the power in law firms. But men must open the door so that more women can enter. Women have leadership attributes that are indispensable in the new marketplace; clients know it and expect gender diversity from outside counsel. Studies have shown that having more women in corporate leadership brings better financial results; law firms could benefit in the same way. Men who care about the future of their firm must recognize that its future success depends on having more women leaders.

Firms may also have to persuade women that leadership is worthwhile. Being in the minority places women leaders at substantial risk. Their accomplishments are underappreciated and their mistakes are magnified. While some women may see the scarcity of women in leadership as an opportunity and be eager to step up, others may see it as discouraging and be deterred from seeking to lead.

It is imperative that women see themselves as leaders and move into roles where others see them as leaders as well. Many women will need to be inspired and actively encouraged to lead key committees, practice groups, and firm management. Show them how leadership will give them:

- greater control over their career;
- power to achieve desired results for themselves, their teams, and the firm;
- more client opportunities;
- new outlets for creativity;
- greater effectiveness as change agents;
- new ways to make an impact;
- financial rewards;
- ability to help other women advance;

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- added meaning to their work; and
- expanded visibility in the community and profession.

The time to act is now. If your firm does not have a succession planning process under way, it should start without delay. As part of the planning process, create systems that ensure that women are encouraged, groomed, and sponsored for firm and client leadership. Here are some key steps:

- Make it a strategic business priority to increase the gender diversity on key decision-making committees and in leadership positions.
- Establish fair, objective, and transparent criteria and systems for selecting leaders and transitioning clients.
- Create processes to ensure that women are considered for all leadership positions and client transitions.
- Track and compare by gender the partners considered and selected to chair and serve on top management committees, assume key leadership positions, and take over important client relationships.
- Create policies and guidelines for all partners, especially current leaders and rainmakers, setting out expectations that they will groom and sponsor women for leadership and important client roles.
- Hold partners accountable for adhering to these systems and policies.

The impending retirements of baby boomers will create many vacancies, affording ample opportunities to bring fresh faces into firm governance and client relationship management. Firms will need the best leaders to step into those roles, and many of those leaders must be women. Those firms that start today to prepare the leaders of tomorrow will have a competitive advantage when that time comes.

Keywords: woman advocate, litigation, leadership planning, succession planning

[Ida Abbott](#), president of Ida Abbott Consulting LLC.

Where Mentoring Ends and Sponsorship Begins

By Susan Letterman White, JD, MS – February 27, 2012

Mentoring is an important element in advancing a lawyer's career. A mentor often plays two chief roles, acting as both a mirror for seeing yourself more clearly and a prism for seeing organizations and systems more clearly.

Mentors can tell you about the culture of an organization or system—i.e., the hidden rules of the game for advancing your agenda or objectives. Mentors can reveal the implicit biases that make it harder for women and other lawyers of less social identity privilege to advance their careers. They can tell you who in your organization or system has the real decision-making power, and what you will need to do before those people will exert their decision-making power on your behalf. Mentors also can offer insight and advice about how to leverage your strengths for maximum benefit. Specifically, mentors can tell you what you need to do more or less of to build your own power bases. Power bases, which are a person's individual sources of energy available to use in any strategy to attain goals, can arise from:

- controlling resources, the most important of which in a law firm is a significant book of business;
- increasing your network power base of relationships;
- improving your standing as an expert in your field;
- formal authority; and
- improving your referent power or likeability.

In essence, mentors can share practice tips that will help you improve your competence in the hard and soft skills that make lawyers successful as rainmakers, experts within the profession, and as complementary members of organizations.

A successful lawyer often has multiple mentors through her life and each will be helpful in a different way. Look for mentors in your social identity group as well as outside of it. Each brings a different perspective, set of knowledge, and insights. However, not all mentors are sponsors—people who have the power to affect the decision making that matters to your career success and who will exercise it on your behalf by serving as your champions.

Sponsors influence the decisions about disseminating career-making opportunities. They connect others with those opportunities and advocate for the success of those special others whom they sponsor. In law firms, career-making opportunities include working on significant projects for key clients and developing relationships with the people who decide compensation, promotions,

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and work assignments. Sponsors outside of your law firm are the people who connect you with business opportunities. They are members of the empowered group controlling the decision-making power, or they are trusted advisors to those who control the decision-making power in the organizations that matter to you (i.e., your employer or your client organizations).

Despite what many of us were taught, professional success depends as much upon sponsor relationships as competence. In fact, whether and to what degree any of us is perceived as competent, depends on the perceiver. Referent power, the power of being likeable and trusted by others, affects every decision others make about us. If someone perceives us as likeable, they are more likely to notice us in a positive way, listen to us, and make decisions in our favor. We have a natural tendency to like people we perceive as being like us or fitting a stereotype of likeable and trustworthy in a particular situation. Who will the empowered decision makers in your organization perceive as naturally likeable lawyers?

If the decision makers are significantly different from the person whose competence they are judging, the natural biases of the decision makers kick in. One role of a sponsor is to advocate in the face of implicit bias. The most effective sponsors are going to be liked by those whose decisions they are trying to influence. Sponsor relationships tend to form within social identity groups based on race, gender, ethnicity, etc., bestowing benefits, called “unearned privileges,” on members of the highly empowered social identity groups and inadvertently denying the same privileges to those in the less empowered groups. (Think—Good Ol’ Boys Club.) Ally relationships, on the other hand, tend to form between sponsors and individuals who are members of less empowered social identity groups. If the people with the decision-making power that matters to your career goals are within a different social identity group from you, then you need allies. Women need men, for example, because they hold most of the formal power in many organizations.

Each of us is responsible for choosing our goals. Attaining those goals, however, depends on the decisions that others make about us. Although each of us has unique and personal sources of power; others, like law firm executive committees, make decisions about whether we are perceived as influential, likeable, confident, trustworthy, competent, and deserving of career-advancing opportunities. Read any of the myriad survey results about the statistics of women and lawyers of less social identity privilege at the highest organization levels and the inevitable conclusion is that the absence of diversity on the organization’s formally empowered committees affects the decisions of those groups. The decisions are driven by the empowered group’s shared and hidden mindsets, values, worldviews, and personal beliefs. Members of less empowered, less privileged, social identity groups are less likely to participate fully in important decision making and minimize the effects of the more empowered group’s implicit biases. Lawyers who are members of less empowered social identity groups are repeatedly being judged as less worthy of

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the career-making opportunities necessary for elevation to positions of formal power by the empowered groups. Implicitly, they are being judged less worthy of formal authority.

Mentors, sponsors, and allies help expand one's power through relationships. If you need to find out the hidden rules for success in your organization or industry, develop a mentoring relationship. If you need someone to advocate for your success when you are not in the room, develop sponsor and ally relationships. If you need to develop your skills for effectively designing and implementing a career success strategy, hire a coach. Every successful lawyer has been helped by a mentor and sponsor, if not multiple mentors and sponsors. Someone told them the rules of the game and someone advocated on their behalf.

It is important to give some thought to what type of relationship would be most helpful to you in light of the challenges you are currently facing. If you are mystified by why some people in your organization are successful and others are not, you may be unaware of the culture and the hidden rules of the success game in your organization. You need a mentor. If you know the hidden rules of the game and the actions you need to take to play by those rules, and you have concluded that one of those rules requires advocacy on your behalf, you need a sponsor or ally.

If your goal is to advance from a junior position to a senior position within your employer organization, identify who in your organization has the decision-making power and then decide who could serve as a sponsor or ally to effectively influence the decision making. In contrast, if your goal is to bring a client matter into your law firm, identify who in the target organization has the decision-making power to distribute the work. The first action step is always to clearly identify and frame your goal in a way that makes it possible to take relationship-building action steps to improve the odds that the decisions in support of your attaining that goal will result in favorable outcomes for you.

Design, implement, review, adjust, and re-implement your action plan to develop sponsor, ally, or mentor relationships. Success depends on using an iterative process and being resilient and tenacious when success is not immediate. After identifying a goal, identify appropriate sponsors and allies by asking these questions: Which individuals or groups have decision-making authority for the decisions that matter to your success? Who are the individuals who may influence their decision making?

After identifying a person as a potential sponsor or ally, identify the steps to build a mutually beneficial relationship with that person. How will you get to know this person? What are her interests? What are her needs, wants, and expectations? Why should this person want to help you? Rely on your listening and communication skills to build this relationship. If you need to hone these skills, do so by working with a coach or attending a strategic communication workshop. If your action plan is not successful and you have not developed a relationship with a

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sponsor or ally, analyze the outcome with the help of a coach and identify opportunities to adjust your plan or build your supporting skills set. If your plan has resulted in a sponsor or ally, evaluate the relationship's effectiveness periodically to ensure your needs are being met and the relationship is moving you closer to your goals. Don't stop there! Consider whether the relationship is mutually beneficial. Nobody likes a one-sided relationship.

Sponsors, mentors, and coaches fill different and equally valuable roles in one's professional and personal life. It is not uncommon for successful people to have multiple mentors, sponsors, and coaches throughout life—and to serve in those capacities for others. Who would like to be your mentor, sponsor, or coach? Now, make it so.

Keywords: woman advocate, litigation, mentoring, sponsorship, bias, social identity groups

[Susan Letterman White, J.D., M.S.](#), founder of Letterman White consulting.

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Women Seeking Men?—Finding the Right Mentor for Your Legal Practice

By Desiree Moore – February 27, 2012

All young lawyers are encouraged to find mentors. Particularly in law firms, mentorship is integral to a successful legal career. Studies indicate that success in a law firm—or any business, for that matter—can be traced, among other things, to securing strong mentoring relationships early on.

Young women lawyers are often encouraged to seek out other women specifically to act as their mentors. This stems from the notion that successful, well-established women lawyers have forged the way and thus are in a unique position to guide and mentor up-and-coming young women lawyers.

In many instances, this may certainly be the case. Undoubtedly, there is value in the unique insight that is gained from achieving success in a male-dominated profession. And only women who have actually accomplished this can impart that insight.

But the goal of mentorship is bigger than simply understanding the experience of any one woman, and young women lawyers should consider all their options, seeking multiple mentors in furtherance of a long and successful legal career. Specifically, women should seek to establish mentoring relationships with men—in addition to any mentoring relationships with women—to ensure they are maximizing their understanding of, and success in, the legal profession.

There are several compelling reasons for women to consider men as mentors. First, as Joanna Krotz noted in an article on women entrepreneurs and mentorship in [Microsoft Business Online](#), “[T]he sexes do not experience the business world in the same ways” See “How Women Entrepreneurs Benefit From Using A Mentor.” In this regard, young women lawyers are well served to learn from male mentors exactly how male lawyers experience the business world. Without this insight, achieving success in our male-dominated profession presents a distinct challenge.

There is also value in assimilation. Law firms, like all corporate entities, would be well served in many instances by making social progress and meaningful changes to the longstanding status quo—and women can be at the forefront of these changes. First, however, we have to be inside. We have to be familiar with that status quo. Only then will we be in a position to be heard.

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What's more, as success for women in law firms is a recent advent, there are far fewer women partners than male partners. Thus, the pool for potential legal practice mentors is deeper—and likely stronger—when men are included.

Finally, in professional settings women are sometimes said to harbor competitive or other negative feelings toward other women. To the extent there is some merit to this, even if only in some instances, young women lawyers should be cautious—such feelings would certainly interfere with a healthy mentoring relationship.

Without delving too far into the tensions that may exist among some women in law firm and other corporate environments, it is interesting to note that Ms. JD, an organization seeking to “support and improve the experiences of women law students and lawyers,” has adopted the following pledge in its ethics code:

Given the choice of being a mentor or a tormentor to a younger, less experienced female attorney, I actively choose to be a mentor. When a younger, less experienced female attorney comes to me with a question or for advice, I will not revel in how much more I know than she; I will share that knowledge and experience.

See Ms-JD.org [Ethics Code](#).

This ethics credo raises two interesting ideas: first, negative undertones may in fact exist (the precise word choice here—“tormentor,” for example—further supports this); second, we can choose to make any negative dynamics among women a thing of the past. Hostile or strained relationships will not further our collective purpose as women in the legal industry and we should move past these without delay.

To take a step back, the subject of mentorship for women lawyers cannot be viewed lightly. A recent National Law Journal Article noted that opportunities are diminishing for women in large law firms. Moore's recent list of top ten careers for women, unsurprisingly, did not include lawyering. And recent studies also indicate that women are feeling less ambitious about their legal careers than ever. In view of this, mentorship is even more critical as a positive, driving force. Young women lawyers simply cannot make a go of this alone.

And to be clear, there are certainly complexities between men and women in legal practice environments. But to discard the notion of seeking mentorship from men outright would be in error. To reject the idea that men can provide career-changing guidance and insight to women—or to believe that men should only mentor men—is shortsighted. This will only serve to perpetuate the gender divide that is already so pronounced in the law.

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Woman Advocate

FROM THE SECTION OF LITIGATION WOMAN ADVOCATE COMMITTEE

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In the end, young women lawyers have to decide on an individual basis what type of mentor is best for their careers. In all instances, when it comes to choosing a mentor or not, young women lawyers should absolutely and unequivocally choose a mentor. In fact, they should choose many mentors, including men. This will ensure greater exposure to various perspectives, ideas, and insights and, ultimately, it will ensure a long and rewarding legal career.

Keywords: woman advocate, litigation, mentor, legal practice

[Desiree Moore](#), founder and president of Greenhorn Legal, LLC.

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Who Makes the Best Mentors for Female Associates?

By Holly J. Clemente – February 27, 2012

Lawyers face a myriad of difficulties when starting their careers—learning the many differences between law school and a law firm, juggling new clients, working with a secretary. Juggling all this while simultaneously learning to deal with office politics can be overwhelming; and while the process can be a struggle for any fresh associate, it can prove especially difficult for young women just entering the firm environment.

It may be possible to climb the corporate ladder on your own but having the support and the ear of a mentor, someone who is already where you wish to be, can make all the difference. According to Susan Black, vice president of Catalyst in Canada, “A mentor can be the person who helps you figure out how to get what you want, whether that is a strategy to go after the right assignments that will lead to a promotion or negotiating a flexible schedule.” Choosing the right mentors and convincing them to choose you is vital to your career. A good mentor can point you in the right direction, show you the big picture, point out where you could stand to improve, and highlight the areas where you are doing well.

A new associate can also tap into her mentor’s already-established network. The mentor can provide a protégé with the kind of work assignments that get noticed; assignments that a new associate might not otherwise get a chance to undertake. Former ABA President Robert J. Grey (2004–2005) noted that the most crucial ingredient for career advancement is social capital, something that having the right mentor can increase considerably.

But having a mentor is not only about what you can gain it is also about what you can provide. As in any healthy association, both parties must feel as if they are benefiting from the relationship. If you think that you may be demanding too much from your mentor, try to find ways you can contribute to the relationship. It does not have to be much, but it needs to be meaningful. Perhaps you can share your network with your mentor. If this leads to a paying client, your mentor is likely to remember it and will be much more eager to assist the next time you have a problem. Or perhaps you pride yourself on staying abreast of the newest technology. If you are a good deal younger than your mentor and more familiar with all the latest gizmos, your mentor may really appreciate your insights into the newest functions of these devices—especially if they can simplify life in some way.

Do your best to refrain from intruding too often on your mentor’s time. Remember that you sought out your mentor largely because he or she is successful, which likely means that your

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mentor is busy. You do not want to be thought of as a burden. Many mentors have set times when they will work with mentees, while others tend to enjoy a more relaxed approach. Find out your mentor's preferences and abide by them.

I should say something here on the topic of confidentiality. The importance of keeping quiet cannot be overstressed. If you are going to work in a law firm, it is mandatory to learn that there are things you discuss with others and things you do not. If your mentor believes you have a big mouth, then he or she is not going to share things with you, and the relationship will suffer significantly. Likewise, if you are unable to trust your mentor to refrain from telling the whole office every time you voice a concern, the relationship will not endure. Any uncertainties you may have regarding what is open to discussion and what is off limits should be discussed with your mentor before any problems arise.

Mentors are of particular importance for female associates. Despite advances in reducing workplace gender discrimination over the last few decades, there remains an unfortunate discrepancy between men and women in partnership positions at law firms across the nation. Although law schools are graduating classes that are nearly perfectly split between men and women, something is happening to the female graduates as they begin their climb into the upper tiers of the profession. While women make up 45 percent of associates, the number drops significantly when they reach partners—fewer than 20 percent of partners are women. Within five years of entering a firm, 75 percent of associates make the decision to leave. Of those who leave, women are twice as likely to leave than men. The same problem can be seen in law schools. While 66 percent of assistant deans are female, only 20 percent of deans are female. What is causing women to leave the law at such alarming rates? And for those who remain, why are they not reaching partnership on an equal pace as their male peers? According to the statistics, many women are leaving right around the time they are approaching partnership consideration, which is also the time that a firm's investment in them is beginning to pay off.

Why are so many women leaving the profession? While many certainly leave to spend more time with their families, far too many claim that they felt pushed into leaving. Many women would prefer to keep their careers and family but believe the current structure of law firms does not support this decision. Only a small number of female associates leave to start families. Most women leave for other careers or to practice law in a different way—starting a solo practice, for example.

A good mentor can provide a necessary boost to a young woman's career and no doubt help reverse this disturbing trend, but it is also important that new female associates take an active role in seeking out other women to mentor them. Social Identity Theory tells us that people tend to feel connected to those who share certain common traits with them. In other words, men will



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generally be more comfortable around other men, and women around other women. Female associates should be mindful of this when choosing a mentor.

Few question that the law remains a “man’s world.” It may be difficult for male attorneys to truly appreciate the hurdles their female coworkers face on a daily basis. Having another woman whom you can confide in—one who has very likely already faced and overcome many of the same challenges and concerns you currently face—has enormous potential to simplify your life.

Another benefit of same-gendered mentors is the all-important “off-time” that you are able to spend together. A man may fear that his coworkers will get the wrong impression, and he may be uncomfortable spending time after work on the golf course or at a bar with a young female associate; but a female mentor may feel less pressure in such scenarios.

Many female associates believe they should have a male mentor because he will be in a better position to facilitate their career objectives. This argument may have some force, but if a strong relationship between the mentor and mentee is lacking there will be limited benefit to the relationship, regardless of their genders.

A mentor can be helpful to your career and female mentors in particular may be able to provide insights that a male mentor can not. Put a little effort into choosing your mentor and remember that the first person who comes to mind might not necessarily be your best choice. The results can make all the difference in your new career.

Keywords: woman advocate, litigation, mentors, female associates

[Holly J. Clemente](#), Perkins Law Group in Birmingham, Alabama

The Recipe for a Successful Mentoring Relationship

By Sabrina C. Beavens – February 27, 2012

I met my mentors during my second year of law school. I was a student member in the local Inn of Court and had been assigned to Camille J. Iurillo and Judge Pamela A.M. Campbell's group. At the time, Judge Campbell and Ms. Iurillo were partners in a law firm in downtown St. Petersburg, Florida. A few meetings into the Inn year, I stood at the salad bar and became aware that Ms. Iurillo and Judge Campbell were not so discreetly whispering to one another and looking in my direction. As we moved down to the rolls, I found myself in the middle of an interview for a summer clerking position. While we were selecting desserts, I was essentially hired and, by the end of the buffet, I was awaiting only the formality of an actual office interview. Soon after the summer clerkship began several months later, the firm began a transition, including the departure of Judge Campbell and Ms. Iurillo to separate firms. Indeed, I consider this their first mentoring lesson: how to weather a law firm shakeup.

Judge Campbell and Ms. Iurillo are extraordinary mentors. Admittedly, they "rescued" me after they were settled in their respective new firms and I divided my time during the remainder of law school clerking for both of them. Both offered me an associate position, and I chose to pursue a bankruptcy and litigation practice with Ms. Iurillo. My mentoring relationship with Judge Campbell did not change, although to this day she does not fail to remind me of my choice. After working with Ms. Iurillo for four years as an associate, I resigned to move out of state; however, two years later I was rehired. Considering the success of our mentoring relationship, I asked each of them to share their mentoring wisdom.

Q: What is the most valuable advice or lesson you gained from your mentor(s)?

JC: I have been fortunate to have many mentors. First, let me give my definition of a mentor: people who have taken an interest in my professional well-being, those who I have trusted and valued their advice and outlook, and those who have influenced and shaped my career. You can see the basic components require a relationship of two people who are willing to spend some time together listening or observing each other and where trust and respect are critical elements of the bond. For whatever reason, the mentor is willing to listen and offer their advice, and the mentee is willing to listen and consider the advice. Some of my mentors have been long in duration and others have just been for a particular chapter.

My longest and still present mentor has offered many pearls of wisdom—probably one of the earliest was to continue my education and always give whatever project I was working on my

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very best. You don't have to be the smartest to reach your goals, but with enthusiasm, energy, and dedication you can be the best prepared and successful. Never lose sight of the goal.

CI: Gale Bobenhausen, an attorney practicing law in Clearwater, Florida, was one of my great mentors. What I learned most from her is the fact that I really did know more than what I thought I knew and confidence in your ability is key. In addition, I learned that one of the most important aspects of practicing law is the ability to clearly and concisely communicate with your clients so they truly understand what their alternatives are. The same applies when presenting arguments to the court.

The lesson learned: When speaking to your clients, always end with an explicit summary of their alternatives and the pros and cons of each. When presenting to the court, always begin with and end with the summary of what you are asking for and why your client is entitled to the relief sought.

Q: What are the important elements of a mentoring relationship?

JC: Trust and respect. Also, I have consistently found that the common personality traits of natural curiosity, zest for life, love of learning, and ability to hear and receive feedback are key elements for a successful mentor/mentee relationship.

CI: (1) Teaching by way of example and demonstration in the courtroom as well as drafting pleadings. (2) Let go and allow the mentee to do it on their own. (3) Observe and provide positive constructive criticism on how improvements can be made.

Q: How would you describe effective mentoring?

JC: Taking an interest in the professional well-being of the mentee and developing a relationship based on mutual benefit.

CI: The fundamentals to effective mentoring are to take the time to spend with your mentee, listen to your mentee, and communicate with your mentee. This cannot be done if you focus on the present bottom line. No doubt, the time that you spend with your mentee will go a long way to developing a successful lawyer in the future and an opportunity to make a difference in someone else's career.

Q: Why is it important for experienced attorneys to become mentors?



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JC: Mentoring younger attorneys is energizing for me. Especially now as a judge, I have more opportunities to work with younger law students and attorneys. To see the excitement and passion when things come together is very rewarding and stimulating.

CI: It is essential to the future success of the law firm and the future of our legal community. Mentoring also is a refreshing reminder of how far we have come in our own career and not to forget what it was like when we were first learning all the many aspects of the law.

Q: I recognize that I am not unlike many lawyers who are not always receptive to constructive criticism. As a mentor, how do you approach mentees who do not immediately appreciate your feedback?

JC: It depends upon my level of commitment to the mentee. For you Sabrina, I was devoted—I knew your potential for success and knew there would be some growing pains to reach the level I thought you would seek and were certainly able to achieve—and, I believed you would welcome the challenge and get through it even wiser. For others I have mentored, I did not have that same level of faith and belief that they would stand the test of time, so I let them go. Sometimes the challenge is the most interesting part of the journey. In ways, like a parent who knows what is best and may have to let the child fail to learn and achieve, the higher good will come.

CI: The crucial consideration here is to remind the mentee that the advice I am giving is a gift that I want to share and if you are reluctant to listen to the advice then I lose the opportunity to give that gift. I try to take the focus off the mentee and her perception of being wrong and focus instead on the mentor's desire to give. For example, sometimes when Sabrina asks me questions I can hear in her voice that she thinks she should know, but actually the question is valid and warrants brainstorming to resolve the issue. My comment usually is, "I am glad I'm needed."

Q: What is appropriate for a mentee to expect of her mentor?

JC: In my experience, the relationship grows (or not) based on the mutual benefit. All of my mentors and mentees have grown out of a natural progression of some professional experience—it could be through involvement with my local bar association or Inn or from some volunteer project I was working on. I have never had the awkward disappointment from a mentor. I have had disappointment in a mentee, but that is a different topic. If the mentee is having conflicting feelings that the mentor is not performing the task expected by the mentee, I would suggest that the mentee discuss it with the mentor—something like: *I was hoping we could establish a set time to review certain things*, or, *I was looking for some feedback on this*—then ask the mentor if they have the time and when. If the mentor does not want the challenge or does not have the time, perhaps suggest another time or reduce the expectations. One should take time to weigh the benefits and discomfort and make a decision to continue the relationship, or not.

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Q: Judge Campbell, has becoming a judge changed or expanded your thoughts on mentoring? How so?

A: In private practice, my exposure to mentees was more limited. However, as a judge, I have more opportunities and thus more experience as a mentor. It is such a bonus to see young professionals develop passion and love for the law—that deep-down appreciation for our constitution and form of government, especially when I may have provided or contributed to some spark in the beginning. As an attorney, I feel honored to be a part of our profession and our system of justice. I enjoy a sense of pride when I can help someone else share in this glory.

Q: Also, Judge Campbell, what have you gained by acting as a mentor?

A: I have gained even more of an appreciation for our profession. Working with younger attorneys has given me insight into the progression of the law, especially as it pertains to the impact of technology and mass media. They help to keep me current and motivated.

From my perspective, the fundamental component to both of my mentor relationships was Judge Campbell and Ms. Iurillo's willingness to get to know me as a person, not just as a lawyer, and vice versa. This was the foundation for building trust, respect, and an open and honest dialogue between us. For example, as a mentee you should expect feedback from a mentor that may be difficult to hear or understand at the time. Several years ago Judge Campbell said to me over lunch, "You need to get comfortable in your own skin." At the time, she was correct. In our private conversation, she was encouraging me to build self-esteem to mirror the confidence I projected but did not yet fully believe internally. I did not fully grasp her message right away. Nevertheless, I trusted and respected her observations and opinions—and I kept coming back to her message as I did my own self-evaluations.

Law school does not teach lawyers the unwritten politics of bar associations or how to chart a path to leadership positions. My mentors were active in local and state bar leadership and encouraged me to do the same. They provided me with a roadmap and opened doors for me in those organizations. Once involved, Judge Campbell and Ms. Iurillo both provided sound advice when I was frustrated with a particular committee or not sure how to handle a situation.

Whether you realize it or not, as a mentor you are a role model for your mentee. Mentoring provides a great opportunity to demonstrate professionalism. Over the past ten years, I have had the opportunity to observe my mentors in several situations that required professionalism and restraint. The situations ranged from dealing with staff, clients, and opposing counsel to advocating for unpopular or controversial issues in certain cases. Those moments had a greater impact on my own development because Judge Campbell and Ms. Iurillo candidly spoke to me

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behind closed doors about the situation, sharing what they were actually thinking and why it was important to react the way they did.

In sum, there is more than one way for mentoring relationships to grow and develop. I hope that by reading this account of one set of mentoring relationships, you will be inspired to pursue mentoring relationships of your own—even if the opening to your conversation is “Please pass the salad dressing.”

Keywords: woman advocate, litigation, Campbell, Iurillo, mentoring relationship

[Sabrina C. Beavens](#), Iurillo & Associates, PA, Portsmouth, NH.

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NEWS & DEVELOPMENTS

Most Part-Time Attorneys Are Female

According to a recent [study](#) [PDF] conducted by the National Association for Law Placement (NALP), more males are entering part-time work; however, female workers continue to comprise the overwhelming majority of part-time attorneys. Indeed, the study found that overall, women represent 70 percent of those employed part-time. The study was based on analysis of information concerning part-time use in 1,269 law offices and firms, and for more than 125,000 attorneys.

Although 98 percent of the law firms reviewed in 2011 allow part-time work, many individuals do not take advantage of the shorter, albeit still long, hours of part-time work. The study found that only 6.2 percent of all attorneys at big law firms work part-time. This percentage is a decrease from a high of 6.4 percent in 2010, but an increase from 2.4 percent in 1994 when NALP began collecting this data.

According to NALP, 13.4 percent of female attorneys work part-time compared to 2.7 percent of male attorneys. While the numbers are not staggering, the study did find an increase in the number of male attorneys employed part-time at the partnership level. Specifically, out of all partners working part-time, 66 percent are female and 34 percent are male. For male partners, this number reflects an increase of 6 percent from 2006.

The NALP study also found differences in the rate of part-time work based on location. For example, the study found that only 2.4 percent of attorneys in Birmingham, Alabama work part-time, and all are female. In contrast, in Washington D.C., 4.4 percent of the partners work part-time and 6.1 percent of associates work part-time.

Overall, the part-time field remains mostly populated by women, but with more male partners going part-time than ever before.

Keywords: woman advocate, litigation, part-time, NALP, career

—*Jocelyn Neudauer, Law Student, San Diego, CA*



Survey Reveals Disparities in the Outlooks of Male Vs. Female New Partners

The American Lawyer recently revealed the results of its first-ever survey of new partners. The survey represents responses from 296 partners promoted at Am Law 200 firms between 2008 and 2011, the majority of whom are from firms with 500 or more attorneys. The survey provides insight into how views between new male partners and new female partners diverge on issues such as client development, partnership grooming, money, and the future.

For example, new female partners reported a darker outlook on the partnership experience than did their male counterparts. Of the new female partners, 25 percent rated their partnership experience as being “more difficult than I expected,” compared to 15 percent of the men.

A higher percentage of new female partners see the development of their own book of business as the ticket to security. According to the survey, more than 81 percent of new women partners reported stepping up their business-development efforts, compared to fewer than 75 percent of the new male partners. Despite their early focus on business development, however, only 9 percent of new women partners surveyed reported being “very satisfied” with their business-development responsibilities, compared to more than 30 percent of new male partners. Moreover, 11 percent of the new women partners reported that they were “not at all satisfied” with their business-development responsibilities compared to only 3 percent of the new men partners.

Keywords: woman advocate, litigation, partners, business development, women, men

—[*Candace Duff*](#), *Greenberg Traurig, Miami, FL*.

ABA Section of Litigation Woman Advocate Committee

<http://apps.americanbar.org/litigation/committees/womanadvocate/home.html>