How to Create and Implement a Successful Mentor Program

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Does this describe you?

Mentors are people that have navigated their careers to a point where they can reach back and help others.
Every firm no matter how large or small should have a mentoring plan in place.

Developing a mentoring plan

Step One

Mission and Vision

- Mission Statement
- What is the vision for the firm
  - 5 year plan
  - 10 year plan
  - Succession plan
Step Two

**What goes into developing a plan**

- What are the goals the firm is trying to achieve?
- Practices, procedures and business etiquette
- Skill development
- Origination and networking
- Shadowing
- Second chair exposure

Step Three

**How much formal time will be set aside for this program?**

- 2-3 hours per week
- Other (lunch meetings, introducing clients, socials, marketing, etc.)

**Will there be compensation consideration for the mentor/mentee?**

- Credit for time spent
- Origination consideration and sharing
Step Four

How will the program be evaluated and measured?

- Evaluation and re-evaluation
- Origination generated
- Hours tracked
- Face to face intake

Knowing what’s Expected

“Put it in writing!”

A good mentoring plan should be written with clear concise vision that meets the firm’s goals

- You cannot mentor without a directive
- A team of attorneys senior & junior and executive/administrative staff should be involved
- Marketing department may also be involved depending on the goals
# Retention and Development

Staying engaged will greatly impact your mentoring program.

Thriving on development and a sense of belonging is the key to retention. Everyone wants to know how much you care about their success.

- Retention is key to preserving the mentoring efforts
- Repeating the success of the mentor (skills, ethics, organization and likeability)
- A 5-7 year partner track program with specific benchmarks is invaluable
- Develop your next generation of mentors

# Setting and Achieving Goals

Goals setting will give clarity.

Understanding what it will take to achieve the goals will give purpose.

Crossing the finish line will bring success to the mentor and the mentee.

Succession planning with a clear vision and purpose will guarantee the longevity of the firm.

- The mentoring program goals should be attainable
- Realistic, precise and in writing – accessible to everyone
- The goals should be aligned with the mission statement/vision statement of the firm
- 0-3 year vision-Where will the firm be, what will the client profile look like
- 4-7 year vision- Who will be eligible for partnership/mentoring
- 7-15 year vision- When and how will a succession plan be expedited
Tracking milestones

All progress can be measured

Have systems in place to celebrate milestones and goal completion

If outcomes are not on track or it’s taking longer than expected, re-evaluate

Knowing the goals, and having a measurable system in place will allow success

Annual and semi-annual formal reviews

Open door policy to discuss modifications, trends and staying on track and focused

Re-evaluate the program, and update the program to conform with the direction of the firm periodically

MENTORING PROGRAM

Mentor

Willing to listen
Offer guidance
Create a comfort zone
Share what they have done
Share failures
Share success

INSPIRE
SUPPORT
ENCOURAGE
WISDOM

Chemistry
Trustworthy
Open and Willing

Willing to give of their time
Open to receiving as well as giving
PATIENCE

Successful written plan

Invested in personal growth
Willing to share what they have learned
PATIENCE

Mentee

Coachable
Recognizes the need to learn and mature
Willing to clearly articulate their expectations on what they hope to gain

GOOD LISTENER
WILLING TO PUT WHAT THEY HAVE LEARNED INTO PRACTICE
NOT AFRAID OF NOT KNOWING WILL SEEK ADVISE

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Questions

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There are 10 traits that law firms should consider when identifying and offering an associate the partner track.

1- **Honesty**
   We would hope that all attorneys are honest however even stretching the truth when keeping timesheets is an act of dishonesty. Missing deadlines and making excuses perhaps is an oversite or an exaggeration, however it lowers the trust factor. Clients need to feel they are always in honest and trustworthy hands.

2- **Committed**
   Willing to accomplish any task without conditions. An attorney will spend about 25% (7-12 years) of their working life as an associate developing and crafting their skills, building trust, developing customer service habits, and creating confidence with the firm, partners and clients. The remainder of their career should be seeking and obtaining a partner/ownership role within the firm.

3- **Enjoy the job and be enthusiastic**
   Every day is an experience. Enjoying the environment, co-workers, clients and the work performed is part of it. Having and bringing the best attitude each day to the office along with a smile and a kind word will help to achieve a robust and enthusiastic journey. Become the client’s most dependable advisor and provide great ethical service.

4- **Treats everyone they encounter with respect and dignity**
   This is key to being noticed and recognized as a great leader. Off-colored remarks, bad behavior, and a condescending attitude will get noticed for all the wrong reasons. Treat your firm, clients, advocates and adversaries with the greatest respect and dignity regardless of their behavior. Learn how to control your emotions, walk away from a bad situation. Stand out from the rest. Ethical behavior always.

5- **Looks for a mentor and doesn’t wait for a mentor**
   Stepping up and seeking a mentor you admire without being invited is a mark of a true leader. Being a partner means being an owner. It comes with great responsibility. Be mindful of the time the partner will be investing if they accept the invitation. Set up early morning or late day meetings at least 3 times a week as to not interfere with the work schedule. If a partner is willing to stretch themselves to be a mentor it is because they have checked off 8 out of 10 traits making for a good mentee. A partner generously giving back with their knowledge, fortitude and experience is the secret allowing an associate to flourish and move towards the partner track.
6- **Confident – Always in control**
Always in control does not mean “controlling.” Knowing the answers when asked the question is a result of investing time and perfecting the craft. Having done the research and presenting the information on point and eloquently will exude confidence. Practice good sound judgement. Take ownership. Being prepared in all areas of one’s career and life will build confidence. Confidence and self-control will contribute to positive results.

7- **Build an excellent reputation and protect it**
“Say what you mean and mean what you say!” Be prepared. Understand the abilities, limitations and outstanding qualities fostered within will help build reputation. Want to be the very best. Concentrate on building your reputation. Protect it at all cost. In life we own our integrity, honesty and reputation. Never compromise any of these traits.

8- **Work hard and always be available**
Stand out from the rest. Hard work does pay-off. Exceed working requirements. Consistently working hard is the key. Not for a time but throughout one’s career. Partners will concur that hard work is the end to the means. Not saying work longer-work smarter. With the help of technology much can be achieved. Know the firm’s culture. Life and work balance is important however as I stated before only 25% of an associate’s working career should be spent getting to partnership. A small investment resulting in the reward of ownership. Be available when needed. An important characteristic of an owner.

9- **Keep busy**
Purposely keep busy. Challenge yourself. Have goals and a plan in place. Keeping a full plate of work; asking for additional work; helping others within the firm; willing to take on administrative responsibilities to assist the partner; networking and marketing with a purpose, volunteering, pro bono opportunities, and community involvement.

10- **Always learn and improve**
Developing skills in a specific practice area and mastering that area of practice can directly contribute to the firm’s growth. Become certified in that area of practice. Keep-up with continuing education. Read periodicals related to areas of practice, new areas of practice and emerging technology. Read for pleasure. Include books on history and the law. Enroll in management and business courses to strengthen leadership skills. Never stop learning and evolving.

*Note:* This document is a useful tool and can be used as the foundation for associates to follow a partner track. Add additional traits that are unique to your firm. Knowing what is expected is the first step in achieving the goals to become a partner/owner of a firm. Knowledge is power.