ARTICLES
The Importance of Mentors
By: Colin G. Andries

Every new attorney should have a mentor, but for new attorneys beginning their careers as solo practitioners, this “should” becomes a “must.” You can find your mentor in a variety of ways and places. They will be your colleagues, guides and friends that will help you throughout your career.

Where to Find Mentors

Some state bar organizations (like Oregon and Utah) have mandatory mentor programs that are part of a new attorney’s first year CLE requirements. If your state doesn’t have a mandatory program, it’s likely it has a formal program, where you can volunteer to be matched with a mentor. Formal programs are great resources, as the experienced attorneys involved have already volunteered to help.

If your region lacks a formal program, or even if you are in a formal program (you can never have too many mentors), you are not out of luck: there are a number of other places to look. A couple of great locations include:

- Practice area sections or divisions – These offer an invaluable collection of experienced practitioners. Becoming active (not just joining) in a section allows you to get to know and work with incredibly talented attorneys in your field.
The courthouse – Especially in a litigation based practice, the other attorneys you routinely see at the courthouse can and generally want to help answer questions and point you in the right direction.

Your friends’ law firms – Visiting your friends’ offices for events and getting to know their bosses and partners can develop wonderful relationships. Many attorneys at larger firms admire and want to help small and solo practitioners. Because you are from outside the firm, there is less office related pressure or politics on the potential mentor and instead they can focus on helping because they want to.

Remember a good mentor doesn’t need 30 or 40 years of experience (though it never hurts if he or she does), but this person can be anybody with experience that you trust who is willing to donate time. Beginning that relationship, doesn’t require a formal ask if they will be your mentor, but can start with a simple question that you need help with.

How to Use

Good mentors provide more than just answers to specific legal questions. They can provide information, advice and life guidance in a variety of subjects. On work related projects they can help with the unwritten rules not easily found through normal research. For job interviews, they can provide background information and research on the firm you are looking at.

However, in order to get help, you must ask for help. Don’t be afraid to ask questions and seek help, but make sure to have done your own research before calling. Mentors will appreciate if you come to them with an understanding of the subject. Likewise, they will become frustrated over time if the answers to your questions are routinely easy to find and it is clear you have not done your own work. One benefit to having multiple mentors is you can rotate your questions between the mentors so that you don’t wear out your welcome with anyone in particular.

Finally, as with all things in life, remember to say thank you. A simple, but nicely written thank you card means a lot. If your mentor has been very helpful or meaningful, a small gift for their birthday or the holidays is also appreciated. It is very difficult to quantify the value of the mentor/mentee relationship, but a sincere thank you is usually all a mentor wants.

* Colin G. Andries of Andries Law Offices, LLC is a solo practitioner in Portland, Oregon. His practice includes DUII Criminal Defense, Landlord-Tenant issues and Civil Litigation. He has had many wonderful mentors help him during his career and he continues to seek their advice.

NEWS AND ANNOUNCEMENTS

2013 Fall YLD Conference in Phoenix, Arizona

On October 10th - 12th the ABA YLD held its Fall Conference in conjunction with the Law Practice Division at the Arizona Biltmore in Phoenix, Arizona. In addition to a number of great CLE’s presented during the conference, attendees had the opportunity to learn about YLD Chair Mario Sullivan’s initiative to “Bullyproof” our communities. After hearing a great presentation on bullying, attendees were able to visit a local school to discuss bullying with local students.
For more information on “Bullyproof – Young Lawyers Educating and Empowering to End Bullying” please visit the following website:
http://www.americanbar.org/groups/young_lawyers/initiatives/anti_bullying_initiative.html

2014 ABA Midyear Meeting in Chicago, Illinois

The 2014 ABA Midyear Meeting will be held February 5-11th at the Hyatt Regency in Chicago, Illinois. This is another great opportunity to meet attorneys from around the country as well as become more involved in the ABA. Registration is available online here:
http://www.americanbar.org/calendar/midyear.html