



Marketing *and the* Art of Mentorship

By Terrie S. Wheeler, MBC

There are myriad law firm recruiting pages that offer prospective associates the opportunity to participate in firmwide mentorship programs. Associates are to be paired with a partner who cares deeply about their success in private practice, and will do anything possible to help mold said associates into excellent practitioners and future rainmakers at the firm. This is a good point to mention there are two distinct types of mentorship: training lawyers on the intricacies of how to practice law, write briefs, develop case strategy, conduct due diligence and the like; and, mentoring new lawyers in the area of marketing and new business development. This article focuses on marketing mentorship. The kind that involves connecting junior lawyers with senior partners who are willing to show their mentees how to develop into rainmaking, revenue-generating superstars. The author also acknowledges the importance of the first type – legal skills training – because without a base of legal expertise, the associate ultimately has little to market.

In a perfect world, the goals of mentorship programs will include:

- To impart the business development wisdom and experience gained over many years as a partner, into the hearts and minds of the associates.
- To ensure the transition from the theoretical experience of law school into the pragmatic, in-the-trenches approach to the private practice of law: real problems, real clients, solid solutions.
- To support and encourage associates as they embark on the years-long process of professional development and building a lucrative book of business.
- To lead by example, inviting mentees to participate in proposal initiatives, new business presentations, client interviews, and marketing lunches to see the partner(s) in action and gain the skills they will need to become positive, productive members of the firm.

The Reality

Many times mentoring good intentions do not translate into productive mentor/mentee relationships. Consider the following scenario:

- There is a lot of enthusiasm upfront as new associates are introduced to their mentor, a partner at the firm who will guide and usher them through the process of building a name for themselves in a highly competitive marketplace.
- The mentor takes the associate to lunch once or twice in the first couple of months; the relationship is off to a great start!
- The partner gets immersed in a complex litigation matter or an all-consuming business transaction (cue: the dramatic music).
- The mentee is put on the proverbial back burner to be re-engaged with when the partner “has time.” How often do lawyers actually have expendable time that is not being filled by their generally overcommitted personal and professional obligations? A rhetorical question of course.

What Should Happen?

The best marketing mentorship results do not always emanate from a planned, systematic formal marketing mentorship program. Rather, a marketing mentorship must be organically grown based upon mutual agreement that (1) the partner sincerely *wants* to help and support the new lawyer; and, (2) the associate and partner have a natural chemistry, mutual respect, and a desire to engage in a trusting mentor/mentee relationship. The best mentors can't be assigned. Rather, they need to germinate from a partner's genuine desire to serve as a role-model, and nurtured through an associate's desire to value, engage in and leverage the relationship. The pairing has to be the right match at various levels including

personality, strengths, goals for the relationship, and other common interests. While some assigned mentorships can prove valuable, for best results, the best matchmaking process will produce genuine relationships that will stand the test of time.

Associates: You are not off the Hook!

Mentorship is a two-way street. Don't leave your future to chance. Look at the experienced partners in your firm and select someone you would like to emulate as you continue to build your practice. Talk to them – express your desire to be mentored by them. Explain your goals, drive and motivation to learn from them. Make a commitment to the partner you select. Honor their time commitments and busy schedules. Figure out how to make the relationship work and don't give up if your mentor is extremely busy.

Partners: Basic Mentoring Tips

The good news is that serving as an associate's marketing mentor simply requires you to ask your mentee to participate in activities you would be doing anyway. Ask your mentee to join you at marketing lunches, client meetings or other growth opportunities for the associate to learn from. Have them participate in proposal initiatives, “beauty contests,” industry events, and interviews with prospective clients. Discuss how you identify your best clients, build relationships, and keep your sales pipeline full of qualified prospective clients. Remember that associates are the future of your law firm; in fact, they are your retirement plan.

In Conclusion

Partners, if you are not currently mentoring a high talent associate, consider doing so right away. Whether or not your firm has a formal mentoring program, giving back to the next generation of lawyers is the right thing to do. You have so much knowledge and expertise to offer them. It just has to be with the right associate.

Associates, if you are feeling that you have no real allies among the partners, seek out a marketing mentor. Partners are flattered when you approach them with the message of how much you respect them, want to learn from them, and hope to emulate the success they have had in marketing. It just has to be with the right partner.



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