

# Chicago Daily Law Bulletin®

Volume 160, No. 113

## As the law changes, mentoring does too, offering new ways to help

Lawyers generally agree that mentoring for new lawyers is more important than ever. Today's challenging job market, the ever-increasing complexity of every practice area and the greater speed with which we are asked to get things done all contribute to an increased need for sharing accumulated knowledge and experience with the newest members of our profession.

Some have suggested that our growing reliance on electronic communication has had a negative impact on the informal lawyer-to-lawyer training that previously happened naturally and automatically. Whatever the causes, members of the National Legal Mentoring Consortium are determined to address the need.

A professional group of administrators of mentoring programs sponsored by law schools, law firms, bar associations and state Supreme Courts, the NLMC holds a conference every other year to exchange ideas related to mentoring in the legal profession. Nearly 120 people gathered in Columbus, Ohio, earlier this month from all over the country, offering a rich mix of approaches to legal mentoring. Some of the trends and topics discussed this year might fit into your workplace.

### Episodic or micro-mentoring

An idea that may have appeal for those short on resources to implement a mentoring program, episodic mentoring involves matching a pair for only brief (typically one hour or less) meetings on various topics. This program involves a short time commitment from mentor-experts and avoids some of the challenges that can arise from an oil-and-water pairing in a traditional (typically, yearlong) program.

Amy Timmer, associate dean of students and professionalism at Thomas M. Cooley Law School, who wrote a book on the topic, "Innovative Mentoring for Lawyers and Law Students" (Thomson Reuters, 2012),

explained that millennials are comfortable accessing information through multiple family members and social media and prefer having many advisers, rather than being linked to a single mentor with a specific practice focus.

Timmer noted that episodic mentoring can offer a wonderful opportunity for "masters" sections of bar associations — senior lawyers want to give back but may not be able to offer mentoring in all skills.

### Mentoring minorities

Many legal employers and law schools have over the years implemented mentoring programs designed to support underrepresented attorneys. Brad Morgan, access to justice coordinator at the University of Tennessee College of Law, shared the results of a recent study measuring the impact of their mentoring program.

Following up on an earlier survey showing that law school has a negative effect on the mental health of students (Kennon M. Sheldon and Lawrence S. Krieger, "Does Legal Education Have Undermining Effects on Law Students?" 22 BEHAV. SC. & L. 261 (2004)), Morgan replicated the study's overall results in the law school population, but then measured the impact of participation in the school-sponsored mentoring program for both minority and non-minority students.

The results suggested mentoring provided significantly greater benefits for minority law students.

### Mentoring circles

Mentoring circles offer a structure for experienced attorneys to mentor newer attorneys in a small group setting. Martha Harris shared information on the New York Bar Association's mentoring circles, which are aimed at providing support for solo and small practices. The circles, made up of approximately 30 newer and more experienced attorneys, are formed around specific practice areas such as family law or immigration law.



*Katherine A. Erwin is special projects director at the Illinois Supreme Court Commission on Professionalism. She manages the commission's statewide lawyer-to-lawyer mentoring program. Prior to joining the commission, she practiced corporate and securities law in Chicago at a firm and in-house.*

Each circle meets once a month and is led by two experienced practitioners who set up speakers and select topics and events of interest to the group. To encourage broad networking, time is reserved at the end of the separate circle meetings for members of all the circles to network together.

Harris noted that while the circles offer obvious benefits to newer attorneys, more experienced attorneys also benefit through interacting with newer solos, including opportunities for getting assistance and making referrals. Other organizations (including The Chicago Bar Association's Alliance for Women) have successfully run similar mentoring circles.

A variation on this theme was the Catalyst micro-mentoring program at the University of Cincinnati College of Law. As explained by Assistant Dean Mina Jones Jefferson, the eight-week program is designed to foster career exploration. Groups of two or three 1L and 2L students are paired with two practicing attorneys who serve as their "catalysts" for professional development.

The senior attorneys are encouraged to include students in their professional lives, individually or together; by having them spend a shadow day in their office or taking them to bar association or civic events.

### Mentoring senior attorneys

A recurring theme was the need for different types of mentoring at various career stages and the role younger lawyers can play in teaching their elders. A breakout session, led by my commission colleague, Jayne Rizzo Reardon, focused on identifying and using the unique contributions of younger attorneys to make our profession stronger.

Newer attorneys can bring fresh perspectives, familiarity with technology and energy to the practice of a more senior lawyer. There was also discussion of unique approaches to pairing newer attorneys with those willing to mentor them as a predicate to turning over the practice and retiring.

A "reverse mentoring" component of the mentoring program recently launched by the Illinois Association of Defense Trial Counsel (and noted in the Jan. 21 issue of Daily Law Bulletin) includes discussing issues such as tech tool "must-haves," what employee benefits young attorneys find most beneficial and how to market via social media.

### Mentoring disabled attorneys

Jared Hager, senior attorney at Perkins, Coie LLP in Seattle, addressed the specific needs of disabled attorneys and shared information about the mentoring program developed by the ABA Commission on Disability Rights, a nationwide program implemented in 2000 to meet the needs of law students and new lawyers with disabilities.

Hager noted that although 20 percent of Americans self-identify as having a disability, only 0.25 percent of attorneys do. He made several practical suggestions to help ensure that mentoring programs and legal practice settings enable and promote full participation by disabled individuals including organizing affinity groups to promote hiring and retention and embracing technology and flexible schedules to allow disabled attorneys to succeed.