

Paying It Forward Through Mentorship

Mentoring is an expression of faith and trust in our profession's future. I encourage new lawyers to reach out to potential mentors, and older, experienced lawyers to consider providing mentorship. There is much to learn from one another.

BY DAN D. GARTZKE

We've all been through law school, and we know what they taught us there. Some of it was certainly helpful. Some of it was probably irrelevant. But we all know it was not everything. So, despite law schools' best efforts, new lawyers are sent out with a lot to learn.

They say that good judgment comes from experience, and experience comes from bad judgment; in other words, we learn from our mistakes.

We don't have time to make all the mistakes ourselves, so finding shortcuts – through mentors who have already made those mistakes – is a good solution.

Mentoring is an expression of faith and trust in our profession's future. Those who mentor new lawyers are working to improve our profession. New lawyers who accept mentorship are seeking to enhance their training and experience in the early stages of their careers.

There are programs to aid in mentoring. The Association of Women Lawyers in Milwaukee has an excellent mentoring program with an annual recognition dinner.

The Dane County Bar Association has long cultivated a mentoring program. And the State Bar's mentoring program, Ready.Set.Practice., matches new lawyers with experienced mentors to assist with law practice management, effective client representation, and career development. Enrollment starts every fall.

More importantly, lawyers almost daily run into opportunities to incorporate mentoring in our daily practice. This can be formal, regular

contact or just sua sponte lessons on the fly. A good mentoring exchange always benefits both sides.

The mentor puts thought and reflection into what they have learned and, if they listen, will pick up on the newer lawyer's concerns.

My father, who practiced law from 1952 until he retired in 1996, was grateful for his mentor, law firm colleague Adolph Bieberstein. He called Bieberstein his "father-in-the-law." He wrote glowingly of the advice and guidance "Bieb" had given him over the years, helping cultivate his sense of judgment.

And he knew that Bieberstein, who practiced from 1927 until his death in the early 1980s, also had the benefit of his own practice mentor in Benjamin Bull. He speculated that Benjamin Bull probably had his own mentor sometime in the earlier parts of the last century.

After 40 years of practice, I know I'm not done making my own mistakes or taking the wrong position. I am, however, willing to share my experience with new lawyers.

I encourage the new lawyers out there to reach out to potential mentors, and for older, experienced lawyers to consider providing mentorship, for the good of our profession. **WL**



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