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Planting the Seeds of Greatness

“We all carry the seeds of greatness within us, but we need an image as a point of focus in order that they may sprout.”

By Aidan R. Welsh

A few months back I received a beautiful notecard in the mail. The sender was one of my partners at the firm. I wasn't expecting a personal card from my partner given that our offices are only a few steps away from each other and we are constantly talking to and e-mailing with one another. However, I was surprised to receive one of the warmest and most touching cards I had ever received from a friend or colleague. My partner thanked me for being there for her professionally and personally and reminded me of my own attributes that she admires. My partner has always been my mentor and a guiding force but now hearing her say that I am just as important to her as she is to me, I quickly realized that this is what a truly great mentor-mentee relationship is all about. A mentor is someone who guides you professionally, supports you, teaches you, inspires you, encourages you, and pushes you to be the best version of yourself.

I have been blessed during my career thus far to have had the benefit of several mentors. I must give a special thank you to Cynthia C. George, Jill H. Blomberg, the Honorable Thomas D. Colin, and many more. I can

truly say that I would not be in the position I am today without these mentors. Now as I enter the next phase of my career and form my own relationships with mentees, I can only hope that I pass on what I have learned and make a difference to other young lawyers as my mentors have done for me.

As I transform into this new role as a mentor, I wanted to share some insights I have learned about the mentor-mentee relationship in the hopes that many young and experienced professionals will be fortunate to form such a bond during their careers.

Seek Out Mentorship

Our law firm was built on the model that young lawyers' careers are developed by the more experienced lawyers giving them opportunities to be involved in all aspects of cases under the guidance of the more experienced lawyer. If you find yourself in a similar firm or company, then learn everything you can from those who have paved the way before you. Ask questions, run scenarios with them, and actively listen as they advise clients and negotiate. Seek out opportunities to hone your new skills, even if you are nervous or anxious to do so. With a supportive mentor, they will not want you

to fail, so they will give you the ammunition necessary to succeed by teaching, encouraging, and building your confidence. Every young lawyer doubts themselves from time to time (and sometimes more often than not), but when you have someone who believes in you, take chances because you will succeed with their guidance. When you try your new skills, follow up with your mentor about how you did, improvements you can make, and ask for feedback on what you did well. Not all mentor-mentee relationships are the same, so build the relationship you want.

Not all firms provide opportunities for mentorship in the same manner. If that is the case for you, then seek out a mentor either within your company or at another similar company. There is always someone who loves what they do who would be more than willing to share with you tips about their experiences and teach you what they know. A good mentor will understand that the benefits to them are just as great as the benefits to you, so hopefully you can create this type of relationship with them. This leads me to my next point...

Give as Much as You Get

A solid and effective mentor-mentee relationship is a two-way street. The mentee receives the guidance, support, and direction from the mentor. However, the mentee can provide the mentor with significant benefits as well. By teaching skills to a mentee, the mentor can better hone their own skills and increase their own confidence. In addition, by giving back and helping someone else move forward in their career, a mentor can experience a growth in their own self-worth. By working hard and learning from your mentor, your mentor may be able to achieve goals they would not have otherwise achieved without your assistance and support. Many mentors are extremely busy and over-worked at times, but by providing mentorship to a younger colleague, that younger colleague can lighten the load and make the mentor more prepared and organized in their presentations to clients, courts, and other professionals. Give as much as you get. This will make you

invaluable to your mentor and lead to further successes in your career.

Never Miss an Opportunity to Learn or to Teach

Every conversation with a client or opposing counsel, negotiation, mediation, and legal argument presents an opportunity to learn and teach. Sometimes, as lawyers, we are moving at a rapid pace and it is hard to catch up for a young lawyer. If you are the mentor, slow down and explain to your mentee *why* you are doing what you are doing. By explaining to your mentee the reasons behind your actions, you as the mentor are forced to slow down, strategize, and refocus your own thought process for the benefit of your mentee. As the mentee, running from project to project without understanding why you are being asked to perform certain tasks only stunts your learning process, so make sure you understand why you are doing each and every task. Ask if you need to, but make sure you know.

Don't let the Socratic Method die with law school—mentors ask your mentees questions in such a way to ensure that they understood the strategy of your case and the goals of the project they are working. The encouragement of independent think-

ing fosters growth and development for a young lawyer.

Your Mentor/Mentee Can Be Your Biggest Fan

Remember that your mentor and/or mentee can be your biggest fan. When you doubt yourself, have a bad day, or just need someone to pump you up—your mentor/mentee is just a phone call or e-mail away. When you had a stellar day in court, got a great deal for your client, or brought in a new big client, there is one person who will always be the first to recognize your accomplishments.

If you are a young lawyer and you do not have a professional in your career that you instantly thought about when reading this article, then I highly recommend seeking out a mentor right away. The benefits are limitless. If you are an experienced lawyer and a young professional did not come to mind as someone you mentor, offer your expertise to someone starting out. There is nothing more beneficial than forming a mentor-mentee relationship. Having someone say that their career would not be what it is without you in their life is such an amazing and worthwhile feeling, whether you are the mentor or the mentee. **CL**

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