



UNBIASED ADVICE
SUPPORTED BY A WEALTH
OF EXPERIENCE IS A
VALUABLE RESOURCE
FOR YOUNG LAWYERS

A life in the law can be fulfilling and rewarding, but also challenging and sometimes filled with uncertainties for younger practitioners. These challenges can seem insurmountable when faced alone. The value of a mentor to a student, graduate or young lawyer’s personal and professional development can be enormous.

Although the value, and indeed necessity, of mentoring is now widely recognised,

it remains a vague concept for many. Oddly enough, within the legal profession, even with its respect for language and codification, there is no strict definition of what the role of a mentor entails.

Essentially, the cornerstone of the relationship is the sharing of experience and wisdom, and the provision of guidance and advice from a more senior practitioner to a more junior one. How this sharing occurs, and through what arrangements, is largely up to mentor and mentee. The relationship can be as formal as a regimented partner-trainee arrangement within a firm, or as simple as having coffee with your venerable sounding board once a month.

Awarded an LIV Certificate of Service (2002) and shortlisted for the LIV Mentor of the Year Award (2013), Garry Mann compares the mentor relationship with that of a grandparent. “The most valuable thing

that a child can have in their life is a good grandparent. Your time has passed, there’s not really any competition, and you can give more selflessly.”

Who benefits?

There can be no doubting the labours a legal career demands. Years of intense study. Highly competitive and arduous recruitment processes. Longer work hours. The pressures of deadlines and billable targets. The list goes on.

Given this, it seems only logical that aspiring and fledgling lawyers alike look for support and guidance in every avenue available to them. Enter the mentor: a guiding voice of calm reason, seasoned wisdom and practical and technical skill, simultaneously a good friend and a valuable asset.

But is having a mentor essential for success?

A mentor's advice

A veteran's advice to students and graduates: "A few important things," mentor Garry Mann says. "First, don't panic about getting a job – you'll get one, the only issue is when. If your friend or colleague gets a job, don't think there's something wrong with you. Be happy for them. You probably didn't want that job anyway. If you focus on what others are doing instead of your own life, you'll go crazy. Also, while you should love being a lawyer, make sure you find things outside the law that you're passionate about. Maintain a work/life balance, because it's therapeutic to exercise your passions. You also want to create this impression with clients, you want them to view you as a well rounded human being, and not just as their lawyer. Finally, listen to your heart more than your head – you'll usually find that you're right."

you. You can have several mentors, and there's great value in that, as long as you're not allowing one mentor's opinion to undermine another, but what's very important is the fact that you get along well with them. A mentor is like a true friend, in the sense that they'll tell you when you've made mistakes, and similarly they're approachable enough that you can spill your guts to them. If you're going to do that, you have to have faith in the person. It's important that a mentor doesn't prescribe a path – they give you scenarios and discuss options, because in the end, it's not about them, it's about you."

All paths lead to Rome

Many organisations will often have their own internal programs in which juniors are paired with more senior practitioners, and these mentors or "buddies" guide them through their first few months or years.

However, the workplace is not the only opportunity that exists for forging great mentor relationships. The LIV Mentoring program for young lawyers links experienced lawyers with lawyers seeking professional development, support, assistance and career guidance. Similarly, the Melbourne Law School runs a mentor program which supports students' formal academic training by providing a link to the profession and exposure to the practical realities of working in the law.

One should also not overlook the value of networking. Take the time to familiarise yourself with your professional associations and their expertise. Make inquiries, then make contact. If there is someone whom you have high regard for, and you believe could offer great advice, why not get in touch? Tell them that you greatly admire and respect their work and achievements, and ask if you could be so lucky as to pick their brain, even if only over an informal coffee one day. At the very least they'll be impressed by your initiative and drive, and will also likely feel honoured that you asked them. What you then ask is limited only by your imagination.

As I go into my second year and reflect on my own experiences as a young graduate who was lucky enough to have several great mentors who guided me through difficult and uncertain times, I strongly recommend exploring these relationships. My mentors taught and enriched me, both as a lawyer and as a human being, and I'm now lucky enough to call them trusted friends and advisers. ■

RADU CATRINA is an enforcement officer at ASIC.



You're far better off having a mentor, Mr Mann said. "It makes life far easier. When you have an issue, you have somewhere to turn to, and I think people who don't have mentors, particular in the law, run risks of making all sorts of mistakes which they could have had guidance on. That's the most valuable thing a mentor can offer: basically unbiased advice that is supported by a wealth of experience."

This raises the question as to what qualities define a great mentor, and how a prospective mentee can identify the right mentor for them.

"A great mentor is always available, and they're not there to judge. They have to remember they were once in that position themselves," Mr Mann said.

Going back to the general nature of a mentor's role, and their relationship with the mentee, he said: "You choose your mentor as much as your mentor chooses

