

2011-2012 North Carolina Bar Association Mentorship Program General Overview

GOALS

The goals of the Mentorship Program are to (1) allow experienced practitioners to provide assistance to mentees as they enter the profession, (2) guide mentees in traversing the realities of the practice of law, in general, and (3) communicate the importance of being a citizen lawyer. The mentoring program is meant to be a part of a bridge between law school and the "real world" of legal practice. A successful mentoring program will help the legal profession as a whole by assisting young lawyers in developing good character, competence, and a deeper appreciation for the profession as a whole that they can take into their future years of practice.

A mentor is an advisor, trainer, and teacher. A good mentor is both a good person and a good lawyer. In the legal arena, the mentor is someone who is able to guide a new attorney in the practice of law, give him or her instructional advice about local laws and customs, and help the mentee to grow personally, as well as professionally.

The Mentorship Program administered by the North Carolina Bar Association (NCBA) offers two types of mentoring opportunities for mentees and mentors. The first is the more traditional one-on-one mentoring relationship, in which a new lawyer and a more experienced lawyer are paired with the expectation that they will establish an ongoing relationship. Examples of topics for discussion between mentees and mentors in a traditional relationship are issues of current concern of the profession, the mentors' approaches to ethical and professionalism dilemmas, career goals, types of legal practice, law practice management issues, and quality of life issues. However, the topics covered are only limited by what the mentor and mentee desire to cover. Conversations between mentors and mentees should be kept confidential.

In addition to the traditional one-on-one mentoring option, the NCBA now offers a mentoring opportunity that will be based on the situational needs of new lawyers. Seasoned lawyers who would like to provide mentoring services but are not in a position to participate as a traditional mentor can now register to be available for single topic telephone conversations with new lawyers. The seasoned lawyer will identify the topics for which he or she would be willing to talk with a new lawyer and how often he or she would be available. When a new lawyer has an issue arise for which they need some guidance, he or she can contact the NCBA and be referred to an experienced attorney willing to assist on that topic. The goal of this new program component is to allow more experienced lawyers to participate as mentors and to provide immediate, focused assistance to new lawyers who may be in more rural areas of the state or who need guidance on a limited topic. As with the traditional relationship, conversations between mentors and mentees should be kept confidential.

CRITERIA FOR MENTOR

1. A minimum of five consecutive years of active practice as a lawyer or, alternatively, a total of ten years of experience in the practice of law.
2. No record of disciplinary action on file with the N.C. State Bar.
3. For mentors participating exclusively as a resource by phone, a willingness to commit at least an hour of time per month for one year to responding to calls from new lawyers.
4. For mentors participating in a more traditional mentoring relationship, a willingness to devote whatever time the mentor and mentee determine to be appropriate to accomplish whatever goals they seek to achieve.

CRITERIA FOR MENTEE

1. Be an active member in good standing with the N.C. State Bar, with priority given to members of the North Carolina Bar Association.
2. Be a practitioner of law for no more than four years.

ESTABLISHING THE RELATIONSHIP

Where a pairing is made for a traditional one-on-one mentoring relationship, the mentee is expected to initiate contact with the mentor within fourteen days of the date of the correspondence notifying the mentee of the identity of the mentor. Matches of mentors and mentees are made on the basis of common interests, location, and other factors indicated on the application form. While mentors may be asked for guidance as to locations and types of practice, the Mentoring Program is not meant to serve recruitment or placement needs.

Mentees and mentors who desire a more comprehensive and traditional mentoring relationship are encouraged to meet informally for breakfast, lunch, or dinner at the mentor's office or anywhere else that is mutually convenient. In addition, such mentors and mentees are free to structure the relationship to meet the needs of both the mentors and mentees availability. Such mentors are encouraged to invite mentees to attend hearings, meetings, lectures, or any special law-related event when appropriate. They are also encouraged to communicate by telephone rather than e-mail in order to establish a more personal relationship. Both mentors and mentees in the traditional relationships often have busy and unpredictable schedules, so mentees are thus urged to recognize that mentors are taking time away from work and other responsibilities to share time, wisdom,

and experience. Please remember that it is the quality of the relationship and information shared, not the quantity of time spent, that determines the success of the mentoring relationship.

Where a mentee is seeking assistance with a single topic or issue and requests telephone assistance from a mentor volunteer, a NCBA staff member will identify an available mentor volunteer with expertise in that area and provide the mentee's contact information to the mentor. The mentor should contact the mentee within 48 hours of receiving the contact information. If a mentor cannot commit to contacting the mentee within that time period, he or she should inform the NCBA staff member of that fact and the mentee will be assigned to a different mentor. Should a mentor and mentee participating in a situational pairing agree that they would like to continue in a mentoring relationship, the pairing can be changed to a traditional one-on-one pairing and the mentor will be removed from the situational rotation.

LIMITATIONS

It is not necessary that a mentor practice law in the same area(s) of law as his or her mentee. A mentor is not a tutor. In a traditional pairing, a mentor's focus with his or her mentee should be imparting his or her knowledge and experience about such matters as professionalism, civility, dealings with opposing counsel and judges, dealings with clients and office staff, and balancing professional demands with personal, family, and civic obligations. Many of these same issues may arise in situational pairings, but the interaction typically will be a focused conversation on a single topic.

In responding to a specific legal question from a mentee, a mentor should not be concerned about saying, "I don't know." However, the mentor should discuss how the mentee might find the answer to the question. The mentor should avoid discussions of actual cases or clients and should avoid providing specific substantive legal advice. The mentor may be asked questions relating to general substantive legal issues, and in such instances, should attempt to provide the mentee with appropriate resources and should use reasonable judgment in the information provided. Mentors should direct the new lawyer to the North Carolina State Bar for resolution of difficult ethical issues.

This program is designed to supplement, not replace, similar programs which may be in place at law firms or sponsored by local or other bar associations.