

ASSEMBLING YOUR PERSONAL BOARD OF MENTORS

By Jill K. Bigler

You've heard it over and over during law school and as a young lawyer – find a mentor. We all know mentors are instrumental in helping young lawyers find their footing in the legal world and are crucial for success. But I suggest to you to do more than that. Assemble your own board of mentors.

Everyone knows the phrase, “It takes a village to raise a child.” The same is true for young lawyers. It takes more than one mentor to build a successful legal career. In today's world, one mentor is no longer enough. No one person will possess all of the skills and expertise a young lawyer needs to develop and succeed. And let's be honest, no matter what stage of our career we're in, we all could benefit from having our own personal board of mentors to give us advice, impart knowledge, help us navigate challenging situations, solve problems, open doors, motivate us, be brutally honest and sometimes, just listen.

Throughout my career, I have been blessed with my own board of mentors. People I admire and trust and who want to see me succeed. While the composition of my board has changed over time, each mentor has guided, supported and helped me at different times and in different ways.

In assembling your own board of mentors, think about your goals, what areas or skills you could use help with and what you want to accomplish. Next, look for mentors who can help you fill in those gaps and guide you toward success. Like any good board, the people you choose should each be able to contribute something different to your development and mentor you in different areas of your life. Think about people whose opinions you value. People who inspire you, motivate you and challenge you. And while everyone's board will look a bit different, the following types of mentors should be in the mix.

The Veteran

The Veteran is a successful, seasoned lawyer who has “been there and done

that.” They are well-respected in the community and have incredible knowledge and mastery of their craft. These lawyers are not only experts in their practice area and are usually very willing to impart their wisdom on young lawyers, but they are able to provide a “big picture” perspective that can help shape your career path.

The Inspiration

The Inspiration is, ideally, the person you aspire to be in five to 10 years. This person may be inside or outside of your organization, but either way, has successfully navigated their career path to the place you want to be. They can give you first-hand advice on how to advance your career, what challenges you may face along the way and what skills you need to be successful.

The Challenger

The Challenger is a person who is always encouraging you to improve. They challenge your thinking, ask tough questions and push you to step outside of your comfort zone. You can count on these people to call it like they see it and give you honest, constructive feedback when you need it most.

The Peer

The Peer is someone who is generally at the same stage in their career as you, though they may be younger or older in age. They are people you would naturally connect with and learn from based on shared experiences. The Peer can offer you practical advice for challenges you may be facing because they have probably gone through the same thing. Peers are great sounding boards and can give you the motivation and encouragement you need to persevere through difficult situations.

The Networker

Networking is a critical part of the practice of law and while it comes naturally to some, it can be incredibly

intimidating to others. The Networker is someone who is successful at making and maintaining relationships. They are the ones that seem to know everybody worth knowing and have their finger on the pulse of the industry. They enjoy connecting people who may not have otherwise met and can help you expand your network.

The Non-Lawyer

In general, lawyers tend to surround themselves with other lawyers. One great piece of advice one of my mentors gave me as a young associate was to never define myself too narrowly. The same is true for mentors. It's important to build relationships with people outside the practice of law to keep your board and your perspective diverse. While the Non-Lawyer may not be able to show you how to take a deposition, they may be great at public speaking or know a lot about a particular industry or business.

Whatever combination of mentors you choose to surround yourself with, remember that assembling your board and building these relationships takes time. Don't force the connection. Be patient. The best mentoring relationships often develop organically and evolve over time. Focus on developing genuine, meaningful relationships with people you respect and admire, and the mentoring relationship will follow.



Jill K. Bigler, Esq.
Bricker & Eckler
jbigler@bricker.com