

Guidelines for Mentors

Basic Mentoring Concepts

Teaching: The mentor should share with the mentee the specific skills and knowledge necessary for successful job performance on the bench. The method of instruction can be formal or informal, direct or subtle.

Assessing: The mentor should assist the mentee to honestly assess his or her (a) motivations for seeking a judicial career and (b) qualifications for becoming a bench officer.

Guiding: The mentor should orient the mentee to the “unwritten rules” and traditions of the judicial profession.

Advising: Teaching and guiding are mentoring behaviors usually initiated by the mentor, whereas advising often occurs in response to a request by the mentee.

Counseling: The mentor should listen to the mentee’s concerns about pursuing a career on the bench and communicate an empathic understanding of those concerns. In addition, the mentor should help the mentee develop plans of action to achieve the mentee’s goals.

Role modeling: The mentor serves as a person who the mentee can emulate. Role modeling usually occurs subtly as an outcome of the relationship rather than by conscious design by either mentor or mentee. The mentor’s traits and behaviors become a blueprint that the mentee unconsciously uses to pattern his or her own manner.

Validating: The mentor should evaluate, possibly modify, and finally endorse the mentee’s goals and aspirations. Validating involves helping mentees believe in their goals.

Motivating: The mentor should provide the encouragement and impetus for the mentee to act toward achievement of his or her goals. Whether that is done through a “wake-up call” or a “pat on the back,” the end result is action.

Communicating: The mentor must establish open lines of communication through which concerns can be discussed clearly and effectively. Expertise means little if it cannot be communicated.

Committing Time: Mentoring requires a certain time commitment, and the mentor should be prepared for that. At a minimum, the mentor must commit to meet with the mentee at least four times per year.

What to Do

Introduction: Once a mentee contacts you, be sure to discuss the time you are able to commit to the mentoring relationship. You may also wish to set up your first meeting.

Specifics: Establishing guidelines in the beginning will be helpful to both the busy mentor and to the busy mentee. Let your mentee know the best time to reach you. To ensure follow-up, keep a note in your calendar to contact your mentee.

Discussion: Mentors should assist the mentee with general issues related to applying for a position on the bench or to running for election to the bench. Pay particular attention to ethics and professionalism questions, the value of reputations, and situational advice about how to be successful.

Experiences: Share your experiences; “war stories” are often the most effective illustrations or teaching tools.

Professionalism: The role of the mentor is a professional one. Encourage open communication with your mentee, but remember that a mentor is a resource, not necessarily a friend.

Confidentiality: Discussions between mentors and mentees should remain confidential. This ground rule will ensure that mentees feel comfortable candidly discussing various aspects of and issues related to applying for judgeship.