

THE MENTORING PROGRAM

Supporting the Practice of Law

LAWYERS' INSURANCE
ASSOCIATION OF NOVA SCOTIA

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INTRODUCTION

Many organizations now recognize that mentoring is key to maintaining and enhancing professionalism and lawyering skills. Mentoring can help improve relationships among lawyers, promote camaraderie, and help address issues of stress and isolation faced by many lawyers.

WHAT IS MENTORING?

Mentoring is a relationship between a person (the mentor) with certain knowledge, skills and connections, and a person (the mentee) who wants to acquire those skills, knowledge, and connections to further their own personal and professional growth. The relationship can benefit both parties. The mentor receives the satisfaction of helping someone grow and succeed in the practice of law, while the mentee benefits from the opportunity to receive regular encouragement and support, explore new ideas and alternatives, and develop new contacts and networking opportunities.

Caring and trust are at the core of the mentoring relationship. A mentor can help – whether the mentee works in a large or small firm, as a sole practitioner, in government, or as in-house counsel.

Informal mentoring has always existed. In the past, more experienced lawyers took it upon themselves to take a new lawyer in their community “under their wing.” Sole practitioners often had lunch together or met at courthouses to “talk over” issues and help each other. This kind of informal mentoring may now happen less often, given the many demands on today’s lawyers. The Mentorship Program is designed to help fill any gaps that may exist.

HOW THE PROGRAM WORKS

The program matches individual mentors and mentees. Every effort is made to match lawyers with similar interests, practice areas, sizes of practice, special abilities, geographic location, ethnicity and other factors. Realizing that the legal community is small, it is important that the mentee is comfortable with the potential mentor, and vice versa. In light of this, prior to setting the match, the mentee will be told of the possible mentor. This will provide the mentee with the opportunity to confidentially decline the intended mentor. This opportunity will also be provided to the mentor.

At their first meeting, mentors and mentees should develop their mentoring plan to include:

- scheduling future meetings;
- the topics – both professional and personal – that they wish to discuss;
- confidentiality requirements, including ethical considerations
- procedures to use when contacting each other.

A frank discussion around what each party is expecting from the relationship, including any limitations on the relationship, is the single most important factor in making the relationship a success.

Some of the topics mentors and mentees may discuss over the course of their relationship include:

- the mentee's short-term and long-term career development plans;
- personal qualities needed for the types of law they practice;
- how to get started in the legal profession or in a particular practice area;
- other jobs the mentor has had and how they relate to the mentor's present job;
- skills the mentor has learned for the specific work they do, and how the mentee might acquire those skills;
- what they like and don't like about their jobs;
- interpersonal skills that are important in their practice;
- obstacles or barriers the mentor has had to overcome in the practice of law;
- opportunities for special training or education in a particular area of practice;
- legal issues the mentee is exploring;
- the challenges of integrating personal/family life with career objectives;
- health, diet, exercise;
- how to deal with stress, tension and burnout;
- challenges and opportunities in the profession.

Occasionally mentoring relationships do not work. If the mentoring relationship is not working, for whatever reason, either party can discuss their concerns with LIANS Counsel, who will assist them in determining whether their concerns can be addressed. If not, there is no obligation to continue a mentoring relationship. It can be dissolved and the parties can be rematched, if they so wish.

THE ROLE OF LIANS

The role of the Lawyers' Insurance Association of Nova Scotia (LIANS) is to:

- maintain a list of mentors and mentees who wish to participate in the program;
- match mentors and mentees according to their requests;
- listen to confidential airings of concerns or grievances by either mentors or mentees;
- administer evaluation forms to mentors and mentees;
- schedule an annual event and quarterly lunch hour sessions.

THE MENTOR'S ROLE

The mentor is expected to:

- meet with the mentee on a regular basis and keep in contact by telephone or email
- set specific times to meet and ensure that the schedule is kept
- be willing to share their experiences, successes and failures, and their observations regarding the work place, the community and life in general
- be willing to give constructive criticism as well as praise
- be courteous and give sufficient notice before changing meetings
- respond to emails and telephone calls promptly
- be honest about the relationship and let the mentee know if the relationship has to changes due to changes in needs, pressures on available time, etc.

During the mentoring relationship, the mentor may be called upon to:

Coach – sharing with the mentee some of the specific skills and knowledge necessary for successful legal practice;

Guide – assisting the mentee to learn the ins and outs of the legal profession;
Support – listening to and understanding the mentee's concerns about personal and professional issues arising in the practice of law;

Validate – evaluating, modifying, and endorsing the mentee’s experiences, goals, and aspirations;

Advise – offering general information on the practice of law;

Motivate – providing encouragement and incentive for the achievement of the mentee’s goals;

Communicate – establishing open lines of communication so that concerns can be discussed clearly and effectively;

Act as a role model – serving as an example of a successful lawyer.

Please keep these guidelines in mind during the mentorship relationship:

- Confidentiality will often be very important to a mentee. Segments of the legal profession may be critical of mentoring relationships, seeing them as a threat to firm solidarity or a sign of weakness. The mentor may therefore be relied upon by the mentee to keep the relationship confidential.
- Mentors may have to help focus the questions and concerns of mentees.
- Rather than lecturing, mentors should exchange ideas and knowledge with mentees.
- Mentors should share their personal experiences with mentees and allow them to learn from the mentor’s good and bad experiences.
- Mentors should consult with colleagues or LIANS if they are unsure about any aspect of their advice.
- Mentors are not required to perform any research as a result of an inquiry from a mentee, but may be requested to review the work.
- Throughout the mentoring relationship, the NSBS Legal Ethics Handbook applies to both the mentor and mentee. You should therefore be mindful of client confidentiality and conflict of interest guidelines at all times.

If there are any questions, concerns or other issues not covered by this brochure, please do not hesitate to contact the LIANS Counsel.

THE MENTEE'S ROLE

The mentee is expected to:

- meet with the mentor on a regular basis and keep in contact by telephone or email;
- set specific times to meet and ensure that the schedule is kept (if you need to reschedule, give your mentor plenty of advance notice – at least 24 hours);
- be willing to share their experiences, successes and failures, and observations regarding the workplace, the community, and life in general;
- be willing to accept constructive criticism as well as praise;
- be courteous;
- respond to emails and telephone calls promptly;
- not be afraid to ask for the specific type of support the mentee wants in different situations – eg. advice, a sympathetic ear or help with problem solving.
- have realistic expectations;
- be critical of feedback and advice – get a second opinion if you do not agree, or discuss other options with your mentor;
- realize that relationships are dynamic and may change over time;
- be honest about the relationship and let the mentor know if the relationship has to change due to changes in needs, pressures on available time, etc.

Please keep these guidelines in mind during the mentorship relationship:

- Establish with your mentor the degree to which you would like the mentoring relationship, discussions and advice to be kept confidential.
- Mentors serve on a voluntary basis – use their time wisely.
- Mentors do not provide professional services to the clients of mentees.
- Throughout the mentorship relationship, the NSBS Legal Ethics Handbook apply to both the mentor and mentee. You should therefore familiarize yourself with the rules and govern your behaviour accordingly. As well, you should be mindful of client confidentiality and conflict of interest guidelines at all times.

- Ask questions regarding substantive, practical, or ethical issues you encounter. Remember that mentors probably had similar experiences when they began in the practice of law and that they will be more than happy to answer even the most basic questions.

If there are any questions, concerns or other issues not covered by this brochure, please do not hesitate to contact LIANS Counsel.

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