

# Finding a Mentor in the Legal Industry



finding a mentor feature image

Is finding a mentor easy?

Believe it or not, the answer is Yes. Some would have you believe that finding a good mentor is difficult. And it is – *if* you don't have a cohesive strategy to follow.

What if you have the right strategy?

Finding an amazing mentor becomes inevitable. A simple and straightforward process you can follow. With the right approach, you can build a successful practice rapidly, navigating industry twists and turns, successfully.

## Finding a good mentor isn't the problem

*It's avoiding a bad one.*

That seems counterintuitive, doesn't it? But it's true. There's an abundance of seemingly qualified mentors, they're everywhere. Under the right circumstances, there are quite a few people who are both qualified and able to mentor you.

*Most aren't right for you.*

Finding a mentor in the legal industry depends primarily on you – where you are, what you want and what you'd like to accomplish.

It's about you.

That's the problem. Most mentees make two fatal mistakes.

1. **They make everything about their mentor.** These mentees give too much, too fast. They approach potential mentors with a dysfunctional attitude, placing themselves in a [one-down relationship](#) (e.g. *I'm unworthy. I'll do absolutely anything and everything you want*).
2. **They make everything about themselves.** They begin each relationship with a self-serving attitude (e.g. *You're beneath me. What are they going to give me? I deserve this opportunity*). These mentees choose to take far more than they give.

Bad mentors make these dysfunctional behaviors worse.

It's subtle.

They actually encourage these dysfunctional behaviors. Bad mentors feed off their mentees sense of unworthiness, using them to improve their own self-worth or simply to do their dirty work.

Or they latch onto arrogant mentees.

They use their confidence and self-assurance to attract new, more favorable opportunities. Then, they toss them aside once they have what they need.

## **Finding a great mentor starts with your needs**

Are there specific goals you'd like to accomplish in your law firm? Balancing paid and pro bono case loads? Networking with courthouse and industry professionals? Keep up with the changes in your practice areas?

Figure out what you want.

Take the time to map out *your* desires, goals, expectations and problems. You'll want clear and distinct answers to some seemingly general questions.

Be specific and precise.

Set clear expectations and measurable goals. Outline your problems in detail, stating why they're problems for you. List the consequences of these problems if they're ignored.

### **Don't skip this!**

When you document your desires, goals, expectations and problems, you're creating a checklist of sorts. The kind of checklist you can use to *qualify* or **disqualify** any potential mentors you come across. It's a simple way to weed bad mentors out.

But it also communicates value.

Most of the time, mentees aren't sure about what they want for their career or practice. This typically means they don't know what they're looking for in a particular mentor.

Okay then...

What should you be looking for in a mentor?

## **The unexpected qualities you need in a great mentor**

The answer to this question is usually a generic one.

*"Find a mentor who's willing to communicate. Make sure they listen, are prepared and have good character"* – all pretty obvious stuff right? It's generic because a mentor, if they're any good, already has these qualities.

It's common sense.

So what kind of quality should you be looking for in a mentor then? Are there specific details you should keep an eye out for?

Absolutely.

Here's a short list of qualities to look for in a mentor.

- **Your mentor views you as an equal.** If you're treated like a groupie or viewed as the help, you're in a one-down relationship. Eventually, that may become abusive or predatory. Great mentors approach mentees as equals.
- **They're open to a quid pro quo relationship.** A great mentor expects a certain amount of give and take in the relationship. It doesn't have to be focused on a particular outcome or scenario, but it should be balanced. A great mentor expects their investment in a mentee to pay off.
- **Their ethos and values align with your own.** If you disagree with your mentor on a fundamental level the relationship is probably not going to work. As people, we're drawn to those who [are most like us](#). It's important that your mentor's thinking is aligned with yours.
- **The relationships they have are stable and healthy.** Does your mentor have good relationships (personally and professionally) with those around them? What do their direct reports say about them? How does your mentor treat those at the bottom?
- **They've accomplished similar goals,** solved comparable problems and they have the experience you need. This isn't simply about finding a mentor that's successful in general. This is about finding a mentor that's successful in the specific areas you're looking for. Want to attract more environmental law cases? Find a mentor with that specialty.

These details seem simple enough, don't they?

But they aren't.

It takes a fair amount of digging to figure out whether the mentor(s) you have in mind is actually a good fit for you and your organization. Which brings us to our next question.

Why should a mentor (any mentor) work with you?

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## Most mentees are the same. Are you?

Most mentees do the same thing. They pick a target, work themselves up into a lather, then they go for the ask. *"Will you be my mentor?"*

It usually doesn't work.

Because it's common advice. We're told to ask for what we want. So we do what most inexperienced mentees do. We ask and then we're rejected.

But why?

We're not looking at it from our mentor's perspective. Let's assume, for the sake of argument, that the mentor we have in mind is moderately successful.

They're in demand.

If you're busy, they're drowning. They're bombarded with demands from the time they wake up, to the time they lay down. They spend their days sifting through the demands and requests placed on them. In fact, 9 out of 10 times, someone wants something from them.

### **It's exhausting.**

Imagine you're trying to carve out some precious family time and you see this request.

*"Will you be my mentor?"*

What's the first thought that goes through your head? *Yet another person who wants more of my valuable time (most likely for free).*

Ugh.

Their answer will probably be No. Which makes sense right? Here's how you dramatically increase your odds.

## **Step #1: Create transformative results**

Results come in two flavors.

1. **Conventional.** You hit your billable hours, do amazing work, communicate well, etc. You're doing an outstanding job, performing at a level that most your peers aren't.
2. **Transformative.** These results create significant change. They can attract positive attention to your firm, make things better for the legal industry, or provide a significant amount of value that goes above and beyond.

If you're an associate looking to attract a mentor you'll need to achieve conventional results first. Conventional results creates trust (in partners, clients and mentors). It's an entry-level foundation that tells mentors *it's safe to take a risk on you*. If you own your own firm, conventional results are typically assumed.

Which leaves transformative results.

Transformative results are frightening. They shake up industries, go viral, attract national attention and bring in a significant amount of revenue.

These results can be [positive](#) or [negative](#).

Transformative example: Two Lawyers Charged With Porn Fueled Copyright Extortion Scheme

## **Step #2: Give your mentors the things they want**

Solve their problems, help them reach their goals, propel them towards the things they desire. Let's say your mentor wants to be featured in ABA Journal so you...

- Pitch a compelling story to ABA with your mentor as the hook
- Reach out to your mentor. Mention that you'd like to interview them for the ABA
- Do the interview, then promote the interview online
- Rinse and repeat

## **Can you see what's happening?**

With a little bit of ingenuity and persistence, you've accomplished what most mentees won't. You used value to initiate a relationship with your mentor of choice.

Here's the thing.

These strategies and tactics don't require a massive investment. It certainly helps, but it isn't a requirement at all. So what are the requirements? Your ideas, time and a willingness to try. What other ideas can you use to attract mentors?

- *Run* a webinar discussing the biggest problems in your industry or practice areas
- *Sponsor* your mentor's charities or local events
- *Ask* mentors to weigh-in on a noteworthy debate, then share their feedback
- *Infiltrate* local groups (e.g. ABA, Chamber of Commerce, SuperLawyers, rotary clubs, etc.)
- *Connect* your mentors with influencers and power brokers they want but don't have
- *Locate* hard to find information/resources then share it with your mentor

## **See the hidden strategy?**

It's giving.

Give your mentors the things they want (or need). Find a way to add transformative value to their personal or professional lives. Do it well and you have their immediate attention.

### **Step #3: Make your first ask, the right ask**

If you've delivered a significant amount of value to your target mentor they should be asking questions. *"Who are you, what's your focus area, what do you want?"*

It's time for the ask.

Your first ask needs to strike the right balance. It needs to be easy enough for your mentor to say Yes to, but challenging enough that it's not considered condescending.

#### **It's a tough spot.**

But *whatever you do, **don't** ask them to be your mentor.* Now's not the time for that. In fact, *it might **never** be the time for that.*

Why not?

Because mentor / mentee relationships tend to be organic. They develop slowly, naturally, over an indeterminate period of time. *You don't ask for a mentor, you're adopted by a mentor.*

See the difference?

The mentor / mentee relationship has to be predicated on value. Giving identifies you as unique, a diamond in the rough.

## **Finding a mentor is easy with the right strategy**

Some would have you believe that finding a good mentor is difficult. But it doesn't have to be. With the right strategies and tactics, finding a mentor is both easy and inevitable.

The legal industry is full of twists and turns. The kind of traps a good mentor knows how to avoid.

With a clear process and the right amount of persistence, you'll have everything your organization needs to easily attract and convert the right mentors.

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