

Chicago Daily Law Bulletin

Volume 158, No. 70

Mentors, mentees find emotional intelligence critical to relationships

One of the key ingredients to professional success is powerful mentoring relationships. These partnerships enable a mentor and a protégé to meaningfully collaborate toward achieving specific, well-defined career and personal goals. Mentoring can take a variety of forms, both formal and informal, and is free of gender, racial, ethnic and age restrictions.

While sharing substantive legal expertise is an important part of mentoring, the emotional intelligence of both the mentor and mentee is critical to the overall success of the mentoring dynamic. The most effective mentoring draws upon the mentor's ability to identify his/her own emotions and those of others, manage both sets of emotions, motivate oneself and others and manage the overall mentoring relationship. The mentee must likewise exhibit these types of soft skills to maximize the relationship's effectiveness.

What is an effective mentor?

Effective mentors have a number of personal attributes. These include being authentic, candid, nonjudgmental, empathetic, committed, inspirational, positive and successful. Mentoring is a form of supportive coaching; rather than focusing on a mentee's weaknesses, it is important for mentors to focus on enabling the mentee's strengths to foster growth and to enable him/her to see the magic in themselves. At the outset, mentors should choose their mentees wisely and set the tone of the relationship to ensure that there is alignment of attitudes, goals and expectations. Both must speak the same language and, since the most effective coaching styles differ from person to person, mentors must discern which method will work best for the mentee. There should be agreement up front as to how the success (or failure) of the mentoring relationship shall be measured. In addition, a dynamic and commu-

nitive environment must be created where feedback is openly offered and willingly received. Confidentiality is a critical part of developing and maintaining mutual trust, which is also an essential ingredient.

As the relationship develops, mentors should remember that the ultimate goal is to enable the mentee to flourish and grow to their full potential, whatever that may be, even if the mentee ultimately takes a very different path than the mentor. Mentors should provide concrete, practical tips on successfully navigating through various types of issues within the mentee's organization, both substantively and politically. Mentors serve as sounding boards, and their candor is particularly important, especially with respect to the more delicate issues facing the mentee. In ad-

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dition to sharing specific tips and guidance, mentors should share war stories, which often provide the most memorable teaching. Indeed, sometimes the best lessons that mentors can impart are about their failures and what they learned as a result, rather than their successes.

Mentors must remain mindful that these relationships are not meant to last forever. In fact, some of the most effective mentoring occurs under a fixed timeline of limited duration, which helps ensure that the mentor and mentee stay focused on the specific goals of the partnership. Mentors should be sensitive to signals as to when the relationship has run its course and should carefully determine how best to wind it down in a timely, constructive and thoughtful way.

What is a successful mentee?

A successful mentee is appreciative, courageous, eager to learn, flexible, open-minded, resilient and self-confident. They have a clear vision of what they hope to achieve and they are likewise discerning in choosing their mentor. They realize that some of the best

mentoring relationships are ones that develop organically and informally and they are open to such experiences. Mentees should be willing to step outside their comfort zone and are well-served to seek experiences from a wide variety of people, including ones with whom they have little in common but who nevertheless have much to teach. Indeed, cultivating a number of mentoring relationships over time is an invaluable way to learn and share a variety of perspectives and styles.

Mentees should be active participants in the mentoring partnership; the dynamic should be one of both give and take. They should be willing to break old habits and develop new ones by taking the coaching and working diligently to ensure that they are actively integrating the mentor's advice into their lives. Mentors can provide mentees with a number of advantages, including access to their professional contacts, and mentees should understand the importance and value of developing this aspect of the relationship. They should also be mindful that mentoring relationships are just one component of an effective professional development strategy and mentees should actively seek other types of opportunities by which they can learn and grow. Finally, mentees should show appreciation for their mentor's generosity and should remember the importance of "paying it forward" by sharing their knowledge and experiences with other professionals.

Conclusion

While mentoring requires a significant commitment of time and resources by both mentor and mentee, it provides an effective, meaningful way to assist professionals in their career advancement. This investment is also a fundamental part of an organization's leadership development and succession planning; it is invaluable in positioning it for future success.