

A VIEW OF THE TRANSITIONING INTO PRACTICE (TIP) PROGRAM FROM THE MENTOR/MENTEE PERSPECTIVE

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The Transitioning into Practice (TIP) program is well underway; the third six-month cycle began in January 2013. The program replaced the previous Bridge the Gap program with a one-on-one mentorship program that individualizes the transition into practice by pairing each new attorney with a Supreme Court-approved mentor. Mentors and mentees are matched by general interest in similar areas of law and are required to complete a mentoring plan for the program. Portions of the mentoring plan are standardized and require that certain elements be met. However, many elements of the mentoring process are left to the mentor, along with the new lawyer's input. Mentors and mentees may also customize the plan to suit their needs within their particular area of law. With two six-month TIP pilot cycles completed, most of the feedback has been positive.

Here we share some mentor/mentee perspectives:

Mark Gunderson is a small practice owner in Reno and has been in practice since 1979. As an official TIP mentor, and an unofficial mentor to his daughter, son-in-law and various young attorneys, he gives his unique perspective on the TIP program and what can be gained by both mentor and mentee:

“TIP is a forward-thinking and practical way to better prepare new attorneys in Nevada to practice law effectively and ethically. The TIP program very thoroughly and completely addresses many critical practice areas and tasks to better serve new attorneys in becoming effective and ethical attorneys. The interaction required between the mentor and mentee to address the critical practice areas and tasks provides a unique and well suited way to start new attorneys in practice.

In my experience, if both the mentor and mentee approach the required tasks with a positive attitude in a fostering learning environment, a great deal can be gained from the TIP program. That, of course, requires a good faith commitment by both parties. While that may not always be possible, the opportunity is there for a very positive and educational experience.

The days of when new attorneys would largely be mentored in public practice or private practice law firms before starting their own individual practices are gone. TIP fills that gap and provides uniquely tailored mentoring to better serve the new attorneys as well as the public.

As a mentor, it has likewise broadened my experience with new attorneys, their attitudes and approaches, and been a good educational experience as well. In fact, those I have mentored still reach out to discuss their practice issues, which facilitates more than the mere satisfaction of a requirement.”

Dana Place-Jantos is a TIP mentee in Gardnerville, Nevada. Place-Jantos has been licensed since 2003 and asked to participate in the TIP program even though it was not required of her. She and her mentor, Justin Clouser, practice in rural areas of the state. Place-Jantos speaks about how the TIP program gives the mentee “real world experience” in the practice of law:

“As part of the inaugural group of TIP mentees, my perspective is unique, because I not only completed the Transitioning into Practice program, but the Bridge the Gap program as well.

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Although the Bridge the Gap program for newly admitted attorneys was necessary and useful, it lacked the one-on-one real world experience that is gained by working with an experienced mentor. I view the mentor-mentee relationship as an indispensable part of making the leap from the safety of law school to the real world practice of law. Once a newly admitted attorney accepts her first case, she is now ultimately responsible for the client's well-being. This is an awesome and daunting responsibility. Luckily, the TIP program gives the new attorney a moment of pause to *transition* from a theoretical attorney to one who is practice-ready. For example, the mentor not only reviews the ethics of practice, but the nuts and bolts as well.

The mentor can also offer an insider's view of the local legal profession. For example, my mentor not only took me to court with him, but also met with me at bar association luncheons, and other legal and political functions. He introduced me to judges, executive assistants, lawyers and clerks in my own community. As a seasoned practitioner, he was able to impart a critical understanding of what it takes to be a successful practitioner in a rural environment. The value of a mentor cannot be overstated."

Justin Clouser – Place-Jantos's mentor, Justin Clouser, agrees. He is a small practice owner in Minden, Nevada and was licensed in 1986. Clouser shares his experiences with the TIP program and expounds on the value TIP has for both mentor and mentee:

"I enjoy teaching and try to present at least one CLE each year, but I had never taught one-on-one before so I was interested in seeing how that would work. I already knew my mentee, so we jumped right into the workbook and planned out the assignments. Having an eager mentee certainly made the experience more productive and enjoyable. However, I discovered as we went through the various assignments that it was also a very productive exercise for me, too. The discussions and questions that were raised as we went from topic to topic allowed me to reflect on why I did certain things the way I did. Being able to share my experiences – good and bad – was helpful for both of us. I commend the bar for this program and encourage other experienced practitioners to participate and share their knowledge and experiences."

William "Bill" Terry was one of the first attorneys to volunteer to serve as a mentor in the TIP program. Terry has been licensed since 1973 and runs a solo practice in Las Vegas. He gives us his thoughts on the TIP program and how it provides the "missing element" in the transition from passing the bar exam to actual practice:

"Having practiced in Nevada for a long period of time, but likewise recalling how difficult it was to start out as an attorney, I welcome the concept of the mentor/mentee. Law school obviously provides the basics for any practitioner, and the passing of the Nevada bar is an indicator that an individual is competent to practice law in the state. Unfortunately, what is missing is the practical aspect of what it is like to practice law on a day-to-day basis.

Bridge the Gap typically consisted of a one-day program for new admittees to acquaint them to the court system, but it did not provide the answer to the question, 'How do I do this?' The TIP program, in my view, has been extraordinarily successful in providing this missing element.

My first mentee was an exceedingly enthusiastic mentee named Zohra Bakhtary. Because my practice necessitates appearances each and every day and oftentimes in multiple jurisdictions, my mentee and I both felt that it would be helpful if she made these appearances with me. She would come to my office each morning whether there were basic cases on calendar or extraordinary cases such as a preliminary hearing, a sentencing, etc. She was introduced to court staff and other attorneys, but most importantly, she had the



opportunity to see how the court actually functioned. Every judge in every court has ... unique procedures. To learn these procedures is critically important. My mentee was able to meet the prosecutors and was able to see how each court worked whether it was justice court, district court, Henderson courts, etc. My mentee was even given projects, which she fulfilled. She was, in effect, the ideal mentee.

The continued success of the TIP program stands critically upon the relationship between the mentor and the mentee. The mentee should be allowed to in effect pick his or her mentor and vice versa. My area of law deals predominantly with criminal matters and it is therefore critical that a mentee have the same interests and will ultimately appear in the same courts that we go to. If I, for example, was the mentor to an individual that was more interested in the civil aspects of law, I could not be as helpful. However, the learning process would still be the same as far as the relationship was concerned. The TIP program should absolutely continue, but it requires the mentee's desire to learn and the mentor's desire to teach."

Zohra Bakhtary was paired with her mentor, Bill Terry, after she personally came to the state bar office and requested him as her mentor – before knowing whether he had even applied to serve! Bakhtary discusses the importance of the TIP program to the newly admitted attorney:

"The first year of practice of law is fundamental to the decision of what type of attorney one will become.

While I had a general idea of what type of attorney I wanted to be, I was not sure how to accomplish my goals. I was fortunate enough to be paired up with attorney William “Bill” Terry. He is not only one of the best criminal defense attorneys in the state of Nevada, but also well respected and accomplished in the legal community. He taught me the importance of being an attorney with integrity, character and ethics. The TIP program gave me an opportunity to acquire practical skills necessary to the practice of law prior to starting my legal career.”

Lynsey Williams is a TIP Mentee in Las Vegas. Williams was licensed in 2011 and recently relocated to Nevada from out of state. She explains how a good mentor is such a benefit for a new attorney and how TIP helped her make connections in the legal community:

“I had been practicing law for a few months before entering the pilot session of the TIP program. I was excited to be paired with a mentor I hadn’t met previously since I had moved to Nevada from another state and had lost most of my network due to relocation. What a pleasure it was to work with Billie-Marie Morrison. Not only were we able to discuss the topics needed in the TIP program, but she was able to branch out to other attorneys she knew and introduce me to great networking opportunities such as SNAWA and the Young Lawyers Section. She is a perfect example of what a mentor is supposed to be. She was flexible with her scheduling, she always had a quick response to my inquiries and she portrayed much wisdom as to an attorney’s role with regard to different aspects of the law. I am appreciative of her attentiveness, her knowledge and learning from her experiences. I couldn’t be more pleased to have gotten the chance to know her and have the opportunity to see what being an attorney is all about.

The Nevada Supreme Court recently signed an order extending the TIP Pilot Program for another year. With all the positive feedback and continued improvement of the TIP program, we have asked the Supreme Court to permanently amend its rules to make TIP the method by which we introduce new attorneys to the practice of law in Nevada. If you are interested in serving as a TIP mentor, please apply online at <http://www.nvbar.org/tip>. ■