



RENEWABLE ENERGY FOR LAWYERS

BY LAURA GRANIER, YOUNG LAWYERS CHAIR

“Having new lawyers at the table brings a proverbial breath of fresh air and a new way of thinking.”

Renewable energy, as we typically think of it, headlines the news these days and, hopefully, will prove a wonderful opportunity to help preserve our environment and maybe even be a growing niche for lawyers of all ages. For purposes of this article, though, let’s discuss a different kind of renewable energy – that which can be generated by meaningful mentoring relationships between new lawyers and their more seasoned colleagues. New lawyers bring something special to the practice – a fresh set of eyes and way of thinking and, hopefully, a strong and contagious infusion of new energy. So, I offer a few thoughts on how best to capitalize on these assets.

First, do not be afraid to speak up and ask questions and give your opinion. As a new lawyer, you have an important perspective to add and – you never know – you may raise an issue or argument that no one else does. Certainly, we all have different comfort levels when it comes to public speaking. But, I suggest you speak up and engage in the discussions and provide your meaningful input if you want to grow as a lawyer and as a person. You are not expected to know everything as a new lawyer but you are expected to think like a lawyer and to analyze challenging issues. Find the opportunity either in a group setting or, if you are more comfortable, one-on-one with a more experienced lawyer. By showing your interest, you also show you are eager to develop professionally and may find yourself new and great opportunities. Chances are everyone will not always agree with you but if you don’t find the courage to say anything, you’ll never know and, even if they don’t agree, they likely will appreciate your contribution to the discussion.



Second, seek out a mentor. We are lucky to have so many very talented lawyers in our community who also happen to be really good people. If you just ask, you are likely to find they are willing to invest their time in the future of our legal practice through, among other things, working with and mentoring new lawyers.

I was extremely fortunate to learn first-hand how invaluable such mentoring can be. My first year out of law school, I had the privilege of clerking for Judge Procter R. Hug, Jr. Among the many great things about that experience, one of the best was the judge’s practice of holding “conference” with his clerks at the end of every work day.

Judge Hug would walk through the office collecting all of us to join him in a conference room where we talked about our casework, brainstormed about challenging legal issues, discussed the news and current events, and talked about what was going on in our own lives. Generally, these meetings lasted about an hour or so and often they were the best part of the day. I cherished that precious time when we could analyze legal issues of first impression, some of which found their way to the United States Supreme Court, and learn, not only from the judge himself, who is unquestionably one of the smartest and greatest individuals I have ever known, but also from each other. It was also there that I began to find some of the confidence to speak up once in awhile, because even as “baby” lawyers fresh out of law school, I discovered we often did have something meaningful to contribute.

I also have been fortunate to find great mentors in private practice. But it’s not always easy. You may need to proactively seek them out. Still, they are out there and they

are willing if you just ask. If you do, I promise it will be worth your time. There is no better way to learn the practice. A good, seasoned lawyer can teach you things you will never learn in law school or in any book or CLE. There are many practical lessons to learn in this profession and having a voice of experience can prove invaluable. In addition, your mentor may very well learn some things from you.

This brings us to my theory of renewable energy for lawyers. After practicing for decades, some professionals may grow complacent with what they do day-to-day. Having new lawyers at the table brings a proverbial breath of fresh air and a new way of thinking. Use your energy and enthusiasm to breathe new life into things and raise new excitement, questions and issues for discussion. When you show up eager and engaged and ask for help and mentoring from a more seasoned lawyer, you may just renew their energy. Most of them enjoy sharing their expertise and experience, helping shape future stars and new talent in our legal community and sharing in your enthusiasm. Heed the words of Margaret Mead: “The young, free to act on their initiative, can lead their elders in the direction of the unknown.” So, ask the questions that some would never think to ask and trust your mentors to work with you on the answers. Remember, when you are asking for help or seeking out a mentor, it will very likely be a symbiotic relationship – they may gain just as much as you do. **NL**



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