



“There are many things a young lawyer can do to build his or her reputation in the legal community.”

Young Lawyers

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PROTECTING THE “HEALTH” OF YOUR PROFESSIONAL REPUTATION

Growing up as a baseball player, my father always reminded me that I was only as good as my last at bat. Now that we share the legal profession as a career, he reminds me that I am only as good as my professional reputation. As you may have heard before, a legal reputation takes years to build, but only minutes to crumble. This admonition is especially true for young lawyers.

There are many things a young lawyer can do to build his or her reputation in the legal community. But how does one navigate the potential pitfalls that could quickly crumble a reputation? Mentors.

One Mentor May Not Be Enough

During law school, I was educated on the benefits of mentoring. For whatever reason, I thought that meant I needed to find “The Mentor,” the one attorney that would be my goldmine of knowledge. I was wrong. Instead of one go-to mentor, I took a different approach. This may not work for every young lawyer, but it has worked very well for me.

I have developed a network of targeted mentors. Instead of relying entirely on one mentor, I spread my reliance among a group. Much like investing, diversifying your mentor network is critical for the following reasons:

First, young lawyers rarely specialize in one area of the law. A mentor who excels in land use may not be the best mentor to educate you on the benefits of placing real estate in a Nevada series LLC. If you practice in multiple areas, develop targeted mentoring relationships that mirror your practice.

Second, I always encourage potential clients to obtain a second opinion, much like they would from medical

professionals. The same is true with mentors. If you receive the same advice from two excellent attorneys, you know you are on the right track. If you receive conflicting advice, you know you need to dig deeper to ensure you take the right approach.

Third, the best mentors are successful attorneys. Unfortunately, these individuals have the least amount of time to serve as mentors. All young lawyers have experienced that uncomfortable feeling of asking a supervising attorney question after question throughout a work day. By having access to several mentors, you decrease each mentor’s time commitment.

Fourth, a mentoring relationship is built-in networking. As I grow in my career, I am finding that the best referral sources are fellow attorneys. As you identify those who may serve a mentoring role, choose attorneys who might refer clients to you because they have a large workload.

Fifth, you will receive more total assistance from a network of mentors than from a single mentor. Five attorneys fielding two questions each is more helpful than one attorney fielding all ten questions.

A mentor network may not work for every young lawyer. If you are fortunate to find one excellent attorney willing to commit to you, then that may be for the best. If not, I encourage all young lawyers to diversify. One can never have too many experienced resources.

Creating Your Mentor Network

Admittedly, creating a mentor relationship is difficult. You are asking an attorney you barely know to invest time and knowledge in you for nothing in return. Fortunately,

there are several sourcing options available to young lawyers.

The Transitioning into Practice (TIP) initiative is a mentoring program for newly admitted Nevada attorneys. This program is the best place for any young lawyer to begin developing mentor relationships because the mentors have sought out this opportunity by applying for, and being accepted into, the program. You can find additional information at www.nvbar.org/tip.

Depending on the size of your law firm, you will likely be assigned a mentor in your practice area. If not, seek out a partner in your law firm and discuss the possibility of him or her serving in a limited mentoring role. Let them know you would like education or assistance in a very limited area so that they do not feel overwhelmed by a mentor request. For example, if you have a partner in your firm who is a master at the federal rules of evidence, ask if that person can be your resource when federal evidentiary issues arise.

Identify attorneys outside your firm that excel in certain practice. As a commercial litigator, I have come across some complex insurance coverage issues. After realizing there was no way I could educate myself on insurance law in a short amount of time, I developed a relationship with an excellent insurance attorney in Reno. He is not my mentor in the traditional sense, but he is my insurance litigation mentor, and an excellent one at that.

Lastly, I encourage all young lawyers to get involved in local or state bar associations. With your involvement, you create relationships with experienced attorneys organically. That relationship may develop into a mentoring relationship.

Maintaining Your Mentoring Relationships

Maintaining the mentor relationship is the most critical component of the relationship. My number one rule is to thank my mentors, constantly. My second rule is to find ways I can benefit the mentor's practice, such as referring clients or forwarding articles that may be of interest. My third rule is to schedule periodic lunches and maintain the relationship with personal contact. A mentor's time and knowledge are priceless. Thank your mentor by ensuring they benefit from the relationship as well. ■

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