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## **MENTORING – AVOIDING ISOLATION**

**By: Lawrence M. Kohn**

Mentoring is the age-old process of training professionals with the help of seasoned partners. However, in most firms, mentoring is significantly underused or actually ignored.

Instead of making an effort to unite the members of a firm, lawyers are left alone. Young associates band together in an “Us vs. Them” attitude, and older partners pursue their own interests while feeling alienated from a firm that is changing around them.

Mentoring should be a way of transitioning skills from one generation to the next, but it offers more than a method for educating subordinates. The process provides the added benefit of motivating the mentors: mentors who actively participate in sharing their knowledge find that the process brings them clarity, energy and personal fulfillment.

Participation in a formal mentoring program is usually a welcome addition to even an already active lifestyle. Sharing knowledge is profoundly satisfying. It inevitably produces new, significant insights by stimulating creativity and through the satisfaction of offering one of the greatest gifts – experience.

In addition to the personal benefits of mentoring, there are significant firm-wide benefits:

- Mentoring builds a stronger inventory of quality professionals. It’s a real education.
- Mentoring builds team spirit. Because the process is so valuable for both parties, it creates bonds.
- Mentoring opens quality lines of communication. It strengthens the culture of the firm and the quality of the work product.
- Mentoring increases productivity. It stimulates cooperation and, subsequently, increases profitability.

### **INSTITUTION OF MENTORING**

For installing an effective mentoring program in the firm, the following tips can maximize your success:

1. Identify all of the areas that should be taught. While many firms offer mentoring in the area of technical skills, they often disregard the other aspects of running a profitable firm. Be sure to include management, leadership, delegation, client relations and marketing activities.

2. Create specific guidelines for mentors to follow. Great lawyers are not necessarily great teachers. All mentors must be aware of minimum standards. Of course, everyone should be encouraged to add their own style, but all should be trained in mentoring skills.

3. Be sure to get input from everyone in the firm regarding topics. Group participation in the planning will create ownership, and that increases enthusiasm.

4. Use standard procedures to rotate all mentors and students. Take politics out of the process. Mentoring is not a popularity contest. It is an opportunity for all parties to interact with random personalities.

5. Mentor/Student pairs should meet consistently. Skipping a meeting should be virtually prohibited. Inconsistent mentoring sends a negative message. Skipping sessions will destroy the process.

6. All mentors should be evaluated with typed, unidentified evaluations. Evaluations should be in a standard format and delivered immediately following each mentoring cycle to a review committee.

7. Mentors and students should meet periodically as a group to review their experiences and discuss alterations to the program.

Mentoring is a proactive procedure to pay attention to people – a ritual that strengthens the structure of the firm. It's nurturing. It's invigorating, and I believe that it teaches one of the most important lessons: Teaching teaches the teacher.