



The Mutual Benefits of Mentorship and Best Practices for Mentors and Mentees

BY NYSSA P. CHOPRA

In the first edition of *Mentor in Law*, we unpacked what mentorship is, why it matters, and how to find the right mentors, especially for those navigating law school or the early stages of a legal career without a built-in network. We also introduced the idea of building a personal board of directors: a group of mentors who each bring different strengths, perspectives, and guidance.

Now that fall is upon us, with law school back in session and new associates stepping into their roles, it's the perfect time to revisit that idea. Whether you're a 1L finding your footing or a senior associate supervising others, one of the most valuable investments you can make in your legal journey is engaging in mentorship—as a mentee, a mentor, or both.

Law school may teach you to think like a lawyer, but it doesn't teach you how to be one. It doesn't teach you how to advocate for your

own growth, build emotional resilience, or navigate the unspoken rules of the workplace. That wisdom is passed down through stories, informal conversations, and trusted relationships. In one word: mentorship.

In a profession that often prizes perfection over vulnerability and independence over connection, mentorship offers something essential: perspective, support, and a humanizing anchor. Over the years, I've participated in dozens of mentoring programs, both as a mentor and a mentee. Some have been wildly effective, while others have been less impactful. Through my experiences, I've come to believe that mentorship, when done right, truly has the power to transform not just careers, but also the culture of the profession itself.

This third installment shifts from finding mentorship to nurturing your mentoring relationships. How do you build a relationship

that doesn't fizzle out after one meeting? What makes a mentor truly effective? And how can mentees take ownership of the process?

What follows here is a practical guide for both sides of the mentoring relationship. Whether you're offering guidance or seeking it, this is about how to show up, build trust, and create something meaningful, whether it lasts for a season or evolves into a friendship over years.

Why Mentees Need Mentors

Mentorship isn't just about résumé reviews or career tips; it's a strategic advantage. Here's why:

- **Real-world insight:** Mentors help bridge the gap between classroom knowledge and practical application. They help you understand how legal strategy plays out in real cases, how lawyers make judgment calls, and what clients actually expect.
- **Confidence building:** Especially for first-generation and underrepresented lawyers, a mentor can validate your voice, help you make sense of uncertainty, and remind you that you're not alone.
- **Learning the unspoken rules:** Every firm, agency, or organization has its own culture. Mentors can decode the unwritten norms around communication, hierarchy, and professional expectations.
- **Professional network expansion:** One introduction can change the trajectory of a career. Mentors often connect mentees with people and opportunities they wouldn't otherwise access.
- **Stress reduction and support:** Having someone to call after a tough day in court or an overwhelming partner meeting makes a tangible difference in your ability to stay the course.
- **Perspective and strategy:** A good mentor may tell you what to do, but a great mentor will help you think through why you might make one choice over another, broadening your decision-making framework.

Why Mentors Benefit, Too

Mentorship is often seen as a one-way street designed to support mentees, but mentors can gain just as much in return. From personal

growth to professional insight, here's how mentors benefit from the experience:

- **Reflect and refine:** Explaining how you got to where you are can spark your own growth. It forces you to slow down, reflect, and articulate your journey in a way that sharpens self-awareness.
- **Invest in the pipeline:** Mentoring is a way to shape the profession by investing in emerging talent early and setting the tone for thoughtful and inclusive lawyering.
- **Broaden your network:** Today's mentees are tomorrow's colleagues, collaborators, and referral sources. Mentorship is an organic form of professional networking.
- **Stay fresh:** Learning about what matters to newer generations of lawyers keeps you agile. It offers insight into emerging tech, values, and shifts in professional expectations.
- **Boost personal fulfillment:** Studies show that mentors report higher job satisfaction, productivity, and retention. Giving back feels good, especially when you can see the impact.
- **Hone leadership and communication skills:** Mentors develop *soft* skills like active listening, providing feedback, asking better questions, and managing relationships—skills that directly translate to better leadership and business development.
- **Personal branding and thought leadership:** Serving as a mentor elevates your profile. It positions you as someone who adds value and is a respected contributor to the community.

Best Practices for Mentors

You don't need a perfect résumé to be a great mentor. You need intentionality, vulnerability, and follow-through. Here are concrete ways to show up:

- **Get to know your mentee as a whole person.** What are their values? Hobbies? Personal motivations? You'll give better guidance once you understand what's at stake for them.
- **Share your story—the good, bad, and unfiltered.** Honesty builds trust and

reminds your mentee they're not alone in their uncertainty.

- **Clarify what kind of support you can offer.** Résumé reviews? Career brainstorming? Introductions? Be clear on your bandwidth.
- **Set the rhythm.** Communicate how often you're available and how you prefer to stay in touch. A simple, agreed-upon cadence helps avoid drop-off.
- **Be dependable.** Showing up on time, responding to emails, and keeping your word goes further than you think.
- **Lead with empathy, not prescription.** What worked for you may not work for them, and that's okay. Your role isn't to create a clone, but to help them find clarity on their own terms.

Best Practices for Mentees

The most successful mentoring relationships are driven by the mentee. That means taking ownership of logistics and being clear about your goals.

- **Take initiative.** You are responsible for scheduling meetings, sending calendar invites, creating agendas, and following up.
- **Be specific.** Prepare questions in advance. Share updates. Identify areas where you want support. Don't expect your mentor to read your mind.
- **Use SMART (specific, measurable, achievable, relevant, and time-bound) goals.** Avoid vague statements like "I want to do public interest law." Instead try: "I want to identify five public interest fellowships and draft one application by October."
- **Respect their time.** Be punctual, keep emails concise, and always send a thank-you note. Thoughtful follow-up is not optional; it's the backbone of sustained mentorship.
- **Clarify expectations early.** Your mentor is not your therapist or your job placement counselor. Be upfront about what you're hoping for and open to adjusting as the relationship evolves.
- **Be mentorable.** Listen with humility. Ask thoughtful questions. Accept feedback, even when it stings. Show that you're

invested in your own growth. You don't have to take every piece of advice, but you should give it thoughtful consideration before deciding it's not right for you.


- **Circle back.** If your mentor introduced you to someone or gave you advice, let them know how it went. Quick updates can go a long way.

A Final Thought

Mentorship isn't about having all the answers. It's about showing up. For mentees, that means learning to ask for what you need. For mentors, it means meeting someone where they are and offering perspective without judgment. When both people bring intentionality, curiosity, and care, the relationship becomes more than just informational—it becomes transformational.

Mentorship isn't reserved for those with decades of experience, nor is it a one-way exchange of wisdom. Some of the most impactful mentors are just a few steps ahead, offering insight and support drawn from recent experience. At the same time, every mentee, regardless of how junior, brings meaningful perspectives, thoughtful questions, and lived experiences that enrich the relationship. Both sides have something to give and something to gain.

Whether you're navigating your first 1L cold call or negotiating your first major deal, mentorship can be the difference between feeling stuck and feeling seen, and between simply surviving and truly thriving.

Sometimes, all it takes is one conversation to change the course of a career—or a life. 



Nyssa P. Chopra is a technology, privacy, and trust and safety attorney at Perkins Coie LLP, where she advises some of the world's largest online platforms on data disclosure, cross-border data governance, child safety, AI governance, international human rights, and platform liability. She is also co-chair of the Data Privacy and Security Committee at the National Asian Pacific American Bar Association (NAPABA) and Denver City Lead at the Leadership Council on Legal Diversity (LCLD). Previously, she was corporate counsel at Microsoft and has held fellowships with the Aspen Institute, LCLD, World Affairs Council, and Washington State Bar Association—nyssapchopra@gmail.com; nyssapchopra.com.