

## **Lawyers: Do you REALLY know what mentoring is all about?**

Posted by [Cordell Parvin](#) on June 10, 2011

You've been told you are supposed to be a mentor for a young lawyer. Where do you start? What is expected? How can you make the mentoring relationship most successful?

I am asked frequently about mentoring in law firms and how to create a successful mentoring program. I owe a great deal of my own success to mentors. So, I have written a great deal on [mentoring](#). To learn more about what mentoring is all about, read some of my articles.

I like to ask mentors to describe what a mentor is and to give examples of when they were mentored. Once you have those specific examples you can boil them down to essential characteristics.



What is a mentor? In her popular book titled: [The Art of Mentoring: Lead, Follow and Get Out of the Way](#), Shirley Peddy describes the term mentor “as most often used to mean a friend and role model, an able advisor, a person who lends support in many different ways to one pursuing specific goals.” What does a mentor do? Here is a quote from my article: [Some Specific Tips on What You Should Do as a Mentor](#):

Historically a mentor had many roles and functions including teaching and training, giving career guidance, being available to answer the really stupid questions, explaining unwritten firm politics, helping get quality work assignments, providing opportunities to observe the mentor or others, observing and providing feedback, sponsoring the mentee for raises, bonuses and promotion. Today an associate may have many mentors, both formally and informally. So no one mentor may provide all of the support previously provided. A formal mentor should focus on short and long-term

career guidance and on making sure the associate is becoming the best lawyer she can be. He should provide real-time feedback and make sure the mentee is on the right path.

Dr. Peddy believes the process of mentoring is best described in her eight word subtitle: “lead, follow and get out of the way.” As a mentor you should lead by teaching and being a role model. You can follow by listening carefully and advising and counseling (when asked). You get out of the way by letting your mentees not take your advice and recognizing the mentoring relationship ends at some point. I recommend this book to each mentor.

Just as in lawyer-client relationships, no two mentor-mentee relationships are alike. Each younger lawyer you mentor is unique with his or her own dreams, strengths, weaknesses and experiences. That means it is incredibly important to get to know your mentee on a personal level. How you mentor will be guided in part by their personalities, goals, level of commitment and time constraints you and your mentee have.

One final thing to remember: I learned from my own mentoring and more recently from coaching not to assume all associates really *want* a mentor, even some who say they do. Those who tend to need mentoring the most also tend to not want it.

After some frustrating experiences, a wise friend shared with me that I cannot motivate the unmotivated. I also cannot help lawyers who only want to hear what they are doing well. The greatest mentor in the world cannot assist a lawyer who looks at his legal career as merely a job or has little desire to learn and become a better lawyer.

Who was your mentor? What did he or she do that made the relationship so helpful for you? I would love to hear your story and collect the best of mentoring stories for an article I will write.

# Cordell Parvin Blog

DEVELOPING THE NEXT GENERATION OF LAW FIRM RAINMAKERS

**Cordell M. Parvin** built a national construction practice during his 35 years practicing law. At Jenkins & Gilchrist, Mr. Parvin was the Construction Law Practice Group Leader and was also responsible for the firm's attorney development practice. While there he taught client development and created a coaching program for junior partners. In 2005, Mr. Parvin left the firm and started Cordell Parvin LLC. He now works with lawyers and law firms on career development and planning and client development. He is the co-author of ***Say Ciao to Chow Mein: Conquering Career Burnout*** and other books for lawyers. To learn more visit his Web site, [www.cordellparvin.com](http://www.cordellparvin.com) or contact him at [cparvin@cordellparvin.com](mailto:cparvin@cordellparvin.com).