

MASSACHUSETTS ATTORNEY MENTORING PROGRAM

SJC Standing Committee on Lawyer Well-Being



Attorney Connect



Mentor Connect

Overview

The Massachusetts Attorney Mentoring Program is about:

- Advice
- Networking
- Perspective
- Guidance
- Support
- Problem solving
- Professional development
- Personal growth

The Massachusetts Attorney Mentoring Program is NOT about:

- Substantive legal issues or questions
- Specific legal advice or strategy on individual cases
- Advertising or selling services
- Applying for a specific job

Attorney Connect is about:

- Engaging fully for a one-hour meeting.
- Formulating short and long-term goals.
- Letting the mentee direct the course of the discussion.
- Summarizing the content of your discussion before ending the meeting.
- Expressing gratitude to one another for the time and collaboration.
- Deciding if there will be any follow up, and if so, what type.

Mentor Connect is about:

- Sketching out a plan for the six meetings to meet the mentee's overall and specific goals.
- Keeping in mind that with six meetings there is time to go deeper into issues of professional development and personal growth, including well-being, stress management, identity, and bias.
- Paying attention to progress toward the mentee's goals during and after each meeting, and redirecting the course of the discussions, as necessary.
- Maintaining professional boundaries.
- Scheduling the next meeting at the close of each meeting.
- Deciding if there will be any follow up, and if so, what type.

MASSACHUSETTS ATTORNEY MENTORING PROGRAM

SJC Standing Committee on Lawyer Well-Being



Attorney Connect



Mentor Connect

Guidelines

Mentoring in the MA Attorney Mentoring Program

- Commit to the structure, expectations, and best practices of the MA Attorney Mentoring Program.
- Establish a confidential, working partnership with a peer for the benefit of the mentee.
- Accept the responsibility of being prepared for meetings and available to one another.
- Take the time to get to know one another and explore topics, ideas, and feelings.

Scheduling meetings

- Mentor shall respond promptly to mentee requests to schedule or reschedule meeting(s) and confirm meeting dates with mentee by email, phone, or text in the week prior to meeting.
- Mentee shall respond promptly to mentor communications and follow through with commitments.
- If anyone needs to change a meeting date or time, do so in advance, and reschedule promptly.

Preparing for meetings

- Preparation on both sides makes all the difference.
- Mentor shall ask mentee to formulate long and short-term goals for the mentorship experience, and to share these goals with the mentor in advance of their first meeting so the mentor can prepare thoughts and ideas and think about possible resources to recommend.
- Mentee shall prioritize topics and prepare questions and issues to discuss in advance of each meeting, consistent with the mentee's overall and specific mentorship goals.

The initial meeting

- Be upbeat, sincere, and appreciative of each other's time.
- Express interest in working and learning together to support the mentee's professional development and personal growth, and to maximizing the time together.
- Mentor shall be honest and direct in communications, ensure mentee knows their conversations are confidential, and encourage discussion of issues of well-being and/or identity.
- Mentor shall relieve mentee of concerns regarding burdening the mentor with the sacrifice of time or worrying about having "silly" questions or issues to discuss.
- Mentor shall reinforce the importance of taking risks, being open to doing things differently, thinking outside the box, and moving outside one's comfort zone.
- Share previous experiences with mentoring, if applicable.

Establishing a working partnership

- Be respectful of each other's time.
- At the beginning of each meeting, take a few minutes to check in, share how things are going, and learn what topic or experience is most pressing for the mentee that day.
- Be willing to take chances, consider different ideas and feelings, and try new approaches.
- Use effective communication skills, including listening actively, asking probing questions, pausing and observing, and demonstrating curiosity and empathy towards the speaker.
- Remain open to exploring and understanding differences of identity.
- Mentor shall draw out the mentee to allow the mentee to find an individually suited positive direction or course of action and not be prescriptive or tell the mentee what to do.
- Mentor may share personal experience to establish trust but remember to focus on the mentee.

MASSACHUSETTS ATTORNEY MENTORING PROGRAM

SJC Standing Committee on Lawyer Well-Being



Attorney Connect



Mentor Connect

Best Practices for Mentoring

Building Trust

Trust is the foundation of successful mentoring, and it requires attention and develops over time.

- Communicate clearly, demonstrate care, and openly discuss your roles, goals, and expectations.
- Be approachable and respond promptly to requests with a friendly, open, and accepting style.
- Show genuine interest, curiosity, and respect by listening actively, asking open-ended questions, expressing appreciation and gratitude, and avoiding judgment, critique, and assumptions.
- Be willing to take chances and share bits of your own personal experience, including mistakes.
- Encourage individual strength, offer resources, and follow up on commitments.

Showing Empathy

Empathy involves making a conscious and active attempt to understand how another person feels from that person's point of view. Mentees treated with empathy are more likely to feel at ease and bond.

- Listen without interrupting or focusing on what you want to say next.
- Take note of non-verbal communications like body language.
- Imagine yourself in that person's shoes.
- Seek to understand even when you don't agree.
- Identify biases that may interfere with your ability to empathize.

Promoting a Growth Mindset

A commitment to continuous improvement is essential in mentoring. Leading psychologists have studied motivation related to mindsets for professional development¹. People with a fixed mindset believe they are born with certain intelligence, skills, and abilities, and avoid challenges for fear of defeat. Those with a growth mindset develop strategies to improve, try new things, and learn from mistakes and feedback. Individuals may toggle between mindsets and work to enhance a growth mindset.

As a mentor, you can encourage and promote a growth mindset with your mentee.

- Model a growth mindset.
- Embrace imperfection.
- Allow time for self-reflection and emotional responses.
- Reframe challenges as opportunities, set goals, and suggest new approaches.
- Reinforce the notion of simply not being there quite "yet."
- Discuss the importance of self-care and positive self-talk.

Encouraging Vulnerability

Allowing oneself to be vulnerable in a mentoring relationship is key to personal and professional growth. Research has shown a direct correlation between vulnerability, connection, growth, and happiness². Taking risks in thought, ideas, relationships, and action is a critical and necessary step to building courage, deepening bonds, and developing a sense of worthiness and fulfillment.

¹ Carol S. Dweck, <https://psychology.stanford.edu/people/carol-dweck>

² Brené Brown, The Power of Vulnerability, https://www.ted.com/talks/brene_brown_the_power_of_vulnerability

MASSACHUSETTS ATTORNEY MENTORING PROGRAM

SJC Standing Committee on Lawyer Well-Being



Attorney Connect



Mentor Connect

Identity

Being available and equipped to discuss issues of identity and their impact with your mentee is essential to supporting your mentee's well-being. Whether in one session (*Attorney Connect*) or in multiple sessions (*Mentor Connect*), if identities are shared or different, and regardless of whether the issues are personal to the mentee or observed happening to others at work, these topics may be hard to raise and discuss. Mentors may need to open the door and must take responsibility for creating an environment for these conversations to happen. It may be uncomfortable and the path may twist and turn. It will be important to center your mentee's well-being.

Commit to continuous learning

Mentors must demonstrate a commitment to becoming culturally competent, keeping current, and adapting to societal changes regarding justice and equity as related to identity. It is important to understand and appreciate that systemic and structural barriers have contributed to the marginalization of groups of people in the legal profession. The impact has been particularly strong on racial and cultural groups resulting in biases and stereotypes that may negatively impact your mentee by limiting exposure to growth opportunities or access to challenging work, or by affecting their mental and emotional well-being. The social conversation around these topics is challenging and changes with our collective understanding. Mentors should increase awareness of and appreciation of these changes.

Create a comfortable space for open discussion

Mentees may hesitate to discuss issues of identity for a variety of reasons, including not knowing how you will respond. Tell your mentee that you would like to support your mentee in all aspects of their professional life, including issues related to identity. Create and ensure a safe, non-judgmental space for your mentee to take risks and discuss sensitive topics that may make them feel vulnerable. This can often be done by acknowledging the risks associated with vulnerability or by modeling vulnerability, as appropriate to the context.

Employ a strengths-based approach

Be direct about identities you may share and acknowledge identities that may differ to increase psychological safety. Employ a strengths-based approach by discussing how an individual's identity added a previously underdeveloped perspective, improved the outcome in a matter, or contributes to the community. Let mentees know that you and your mentee will learn and grow together. Reflect upon your own identities and share your personal experience to build trust without turning the focus to yourself. Become an ally and an ally in power.

Be honest, compassionate, and curious

Remember that some identities are visible, and others are not. Best not to overstate your empathy, but rather demonstrate honesty, compassion, and active listening. Ask open-ended questions and embrace new ideas and approaches. Validate your mentee's feelings and experience and recognize that your differences may create a gap in your understanding. Let your mentee lead the way. Explore, reflect, and seek to understand. After validating their feelings and experience, you may be better positioned to guide your mentee in turning professional challenges into strengths and opportunities.

Keep trying

Open the door to conversations about identity throughout each mentorship. If you didn't handle a conversation with your mentee as well as you would have liked (maybe you felt uncomfortable, weren't sure what to say, or instinctively shied away from a difficult subject), go back to your mentee and tell them you don't think your response was optimal, and that you would like to try again. You don't need to be perfect. It is best to be real.

MASSACHUSETTS ATTORNEY MENTORING PROGRAM

SJC Standing Committee on Lawyer Well-Being



Attorney Connect



Mentor Connect

Formulating Long and Short-Term Goals

MENTORING TOPICS

Professional Life

- Business of law
- Case management and the practice of law
- Challenges in the workplace
- Courtroom culture and practice
- Ethics
- Interacting with adversaries and civility
- Job search, networking, and interviewing
- Lawyering as a second career
- Setting up a law practice
- Specific areas of law, e.g., bar advocacy, criminal, family, government, housing, non-profit, probate, real estate.
- Strategies for advancement
- Transitioning to a new area of law

Individual Well-being

- Addiction and recovery
- Creating community and reducing isolation
- Diversity, equity, and inclusion
- Identity
- Mental health
- Microaggressions and bias
- Racism and discrimination
- Resilience
- Stress management
- Wellness and self-care
- Work-Life balance

GOAL SETTING EXAMPLES

Attorney Connect

Mentee has been in solo practice for less than a year and is feeling isolated and stressed.

Long-term goal: Develop a plan to address stressors, reduce isolation, and improve well-being.

Short-term goals: Discuss and clarify stressors. Identify systems, activities, and/or individuals to provide support and community, including connections to local, affinity, and specialty bar associations, among other communities. Develop strategies to overcome perceived obstacles to accessing support.

Mentee, first in family to attend higher ed, has recently passed the bar, and is seeking employment.

Long-term goal: Familiarize self with the job search process for attorneys in MA.

Short-term goals: Discuss challenges, needs, and gaps. Get advice on job searching, networking, and interviewing. Identify systems and/or individuals to provide additional support and discuss the possibility of finding a longer-term mentor.

Mentor Connect

Mentee has been a bar advocate for several years and is thinking of moving to a new area of law.

Long-term goal: Decide if transitioning to new area of law is best, and if so, develop course of action.

Short-term goals: Discuss career goals. Consider pros and cons to remaining a bar advocate. Brainstorm alternative legal careers and their benefits and challenges. Network with individuals in careers under consideration. Decide on a path and develop action plan to get there.

Mentee has been in a small firm for two years and is experiencing challenges with their supervisor.

Long-term goal: Understand and gain strategies for managing issues with supervisor.

Short-term goals: Discuss challenges with supervisor. Consider strategies and approaches that have been tried and their results. Brainstorm ideas for handling challenges in the moment and long term.

MASSACHUSETTS ATTORNEY MENTORING PROGRAM

SJC Standing Committee on Lawyer Well-Being



Attorney Connect



Mentor Connect

Communication

Active Listening

Active listening establishes trust and builds rapport between two people. It demonstrates interest in another person, enables the expression of empathy, curiosity, and care, and elicits thoughts and ideas that might otherwise be left unsaid. Active listening creates a safe space for your mentee to be fully present and take risks to grow. It takes concentration, determination, patience, and practice.

Active listening means:

- Using non-verbal cues (nodding, leaning in, and eye contact).
- Uttering brief affirmations (“yes,” “right,” or “I see”).
- Asking follow-up, open-ended questions to promote introspection and draw out information.
- Observing body language and mood to guide questions and timing of responses.
- Choosing specific questions to focus or redirect conversation.
- Being sensitive to when and how much it is appropriate to share your own personal experience.
- Allowing for silent pauses to provide the opportunity to reflect.
- Summarizing and repeating back what you heard and asking if that is correct.

Active listening is NOT about:

- Disconnecting from the conversation or getting caught up in your own thoughts or emotions.
- Thinking about what you will say next or jumping in with a similar story or to complete sentences.
- Expressing disapproval or judgment or trying to talk your mentee out of feelings.

Probing Questions

The use of probing questions keeps the focus of your conversation on your mentee’s thought process. These questions are thoughtful, inquisitive, and neutral. They do not suggest a direction or lead to a conclusion. They are designed to enable mentees to think deeply and critically about a situation, interaction, idea, goal, or feeling.

Probing questions often start with:

- “What do you think might be...”
- “How would you...”
- “Can you say more about...”
- “Is there anything else that could contribute to...”

Delivering and Receiving Feedback

Learning to deliver feedback effectively and constructively to your mentee and to receive feedback graciously and openly from your mentee helps build trust and connection, and significantly contributes to successful mentoring and mentee growth. Pay close attention to when and how to communicate with your mentee, listen carefully to tone, and observe body language to guide you. Be receptive to your mentee seeking clarification of your communications, disagreeing with your perspective, and offering alternative approaches. Cultivate hope, progress, and positivity.

Learn from your mentee how best to help your mentee:

- Be clear on the purpose of the feedback, go slowly, and take note of reactions.
- Evaluate if your mentee seems hard wired to have a positive attitude (more likely to hear feedback) or not, and tailor your approach accordingly.
- Feedback delivered with good intentions may not be received as such if the receiver is unable to understand or if you trigger a strong emotional response – alter your course, as necessary.
- Consider various approaches with your mentee and choose one that is most supportive.