

Advice for men mentoring women lawyers

BY JEROME SHORE

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Women are graduating from law schools in droves. Women are joining law firms in droves.

Women are leaving law firms in droves.

But some are staying, and good mentoring has played a role in that success. Obviously, there are many pressures that are forcing women from private practice. Is mentoring one of the things that ignites the passion to persevere? I think the answer is yes.

One additional reality is that much of the mentoring has, by necessity, had to come from men since there aren't enough senior women lawyers to go around. As a result, the successful mentoring ideas that follow all come from women lawyers who have had male mentors.

Donna Shier of Willms & Shier Environmental Lawyers LLP speaks of Hugh Morris, a mentor she had early in her career who inspired her to picture a successful future and plan for it. The idea is that when you, as a mentor, focus the conversation on your colleagues, you build trust, soften their resistance to being frank, and allow them to articulate the imagery of the future they want.

By visualizing this future, the other person can more readily take the steps for getting there. This is particularly important for women. The more vivid their imagery, the more energy to succeed it provides. Rosalind Cooper, a partner at Fasken Martineau DuMoulin LLP, speaks of how addressing work-life balance issues with positive imagery was an important component of the mentoring she received.

Another good mentoring strategy is to do more than just talk. Jennifer Babe, a partner at Miller Thomson LLP, told me an anecdote about Hartley Nathan of Minden Gross LLP. When she was a junior lawyer, she was on a file in which Nathan was on the other side. After the file was done, Nathan not only complimented her on her work but went the extra step of inviting her to do a continuing legal education workshop.

That was her first of many such presentations. So going beyond talk to open doors is something male mentors can do to add energy to the excitement that women lawyers have for private practice.

Because men sometimes have fewer outside pressures, they can take more time to mentor someone patiently. If they use that time to get deeper into the process, they can be very successful. "The men that mentored me taught by

example," says Alexandria Pike of Davies Ward Phillips & Vineberg LLP. "I watched them draft, and we discussed why a particular approach was preferable. It's time-consuming but invaluable."

Cooper has three other suggestions that come from her experience with male mentors. First, she suggests that a mentor can help instill self-reliance. The idea is to set some objectives for which reliance on others is a small factor and personal efforts will determine success in the struggle.

Second, mentors can help their colleagues get involved and succeed in firm-wide activities and administration. Tethering people to the management of the firm can be energizing

when done well. In these situations, mentors must be helpful as a subject-matter expert helping their colleagues participate more effectively.

Third, Cooper suggests that mentors inspire a view of the law as a special endeavour with a venerable aura. Having a vision of the law from above the day-to-day trudge is energizing. Of course, mentors need to have this view themselves.

So if you're a male lawyer mentoring a female colleague, here are six helpful ideas:

- Radiate energy. Possibly the most important mentoring goal you have is to infuse your colleagues with the energy to overcome the pressures on women in law.
- Encourage the women you mentor to visualize a successful future for themselves and tell you about it. One way to do this is to have them identify a role model they identify with who gives them the optimism to believe that what they want to do can be and has been done. Then support that vision of success.
- Do more than talk. When possible, use your connections to get your colleague an elevated role such as delivering continuing legal education or a place in some managerial function.
- Get deeper into the process with your colleague. While it's more time-consuming, it's also more worthwhile to drill down and communicate the underlying philosophy, thinking, and learning that supports what you have to say.
- Challenge your colleague to build self-reliance.
- Be inspirational. Inspire your colleagues to love the law and their work in a way that's energizing. Yes, practising law is hard work, but it comes with a purity of purpose, for the most part. Help them remember that aspect, which is too often buried under their in-basket. **■**

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Speaker's Corner