

Mentoring

Remember You Chose the Law (and Health Care Law at That)

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A mentoring relationship can and should be quite rewarding for both the mentor and the mentee. I am still in contact with many of the mentors I have had in my life that are still with us.

Leonard Homer was my first mentor when I entered the practice of law. I cannot help but think how misguided I would have been without his sage counsel and advice, not just almost 40 years ago, but also today.

It is always important to try to understand the perspective of each individual in these relationships because we cannot help but be influenced by our background, life experiences, and unique circumstances.

Being the father of three adult daughters (and no sons), I tend to focus on issues affecting women. When my daughters were growing up, I would often stop and think, “Would I want my daughters being treated that way? Or is this really fair?” Having had a life-long commitment to cultural diversity also affects my perspective and thinking.

I have had the privilege of working in a global law firm and law firms in the start-up, statewide, and regional space with anywhere from five attorneys to over 2,000. I cannot help but be affected by those experiences.

I have mentored law students and lawyers who went to the same law school that I graduated from, law students and lawyers that are members of AHLA, health care professionals of all kinds, and individuals who have been referred to me because of my almost 17,000 LinkedIn connections. I have found every mentoring relationship to be different and everyone brings unique challenges. However, they all have been quite rewarding experiences.

Many law students and newly minted attorneys seem to be looking more for an initial job than a mentoring experience. This should not be surprising, given that there were less than 1,000 health care lawyers in 1979 when I started practicing law, and reportedly there are over 20,000 individuals who call themselves health care lawyers today or profess to practice in the health care law space. Health care law has become much more complex over the last 40 years and there are many more opportunities for all of us, but I am not sure there are 20 times the opportunities. Having completed my PhD in Biomedical Informatics a number of years ago, I tend to focus on data analytics, informatics, health information technology, machine learning, and artificial intelligence matters to an increasing degree to differentiate myself from the other 20,000 or so health care lawyers.

Advances in information technology have reduced some of the mundane aspects of practicing law, and in turn, reduced the number of opportunities. We no longer fly to Honolulu to perform document review and use color coded index cards to categorize documents. We have virtual data rooms where one sits at a terminal for that review. Often, there are key word searches in documents, artificial intelligence models that are employed for part of the document review, and contract lawyers

hired by companies who review the documents (not always law firm attorneys). Technology is probably one of the reasons that lawyers are listed as one of 25 professions where the need is expected to decline.

The divide in law firms seems to continue with starting salaries at the top law firms of as much as \$190,000 per year, leaving most law students and younger lawyers sometimes wondering who gets those jobs. Not surprisingly, those positions tend to go to the graduates of the top law schools who also perform well in their classes. Such law students enter the competitive market as 2Ls with the hope of landing a job with a top law firm for the summer and working toward obtaining an offer as a 3L. Surprisingly, in all my years of mentoring students, no such students have approached me to assist them in finding their first job.

The market for computer science, engineering, and certain other STEM majors is not as competitive as that for lawyers. In fact, I am not sure the market for individuals who can critically analyze data has ever been better. However, we need to recognize that although we have chosen quite an honorable profession—the law, and when focusing on health law, even a more noble area—we cannot change the fact that the law—and health care law in particular—is an incredibly competitive field and getting more competitive every day.

Mentees need to be realistic about what help a mentor can provide when one is seeking career counseling as part of that relationship. It is particularly difficult for the mentor when the main focus of the mentee is trying to get one’s first job out of law school. A mentor has many skills and many contacts, and some mentors may even be geniuses, but they are not magicians.

Law students need to start early to distinguish themselves, particularly if they do not have an undergraduate or graduate degree in a STEM field. Attend AHLA events, starting as a 1L. Do not wait until your second semester as a 3L when you realize you do not have a position lined up. Offer to serve on AHLA groups and work on projects, articles, etc. Offer to help organizations and the lawyers in them. Try to develop additional skills, e.g. data analytics, cybersecurity, etc.

And most of all, own your situation. You are trying to enter a very competitive profession, and if you are not coming from a top law school and graduating at the top of your class with a STEM degree, you need to be realistic. Network, network,

The AHLA Mentoring Program provides an online portal to help mentees and mentors in health law connect. To sign up as a mentor or mentee—or both—go to www.healthlawyers.org/mentoring.

and network. Explore all opportunities, focusing on what you think you would like to do. Be gracious with all the people you meet who make their time available to help you, and seek to differentiate yourself from others.

Later, when you have achieved success, remember to give back to the next generation of law students and lawyers.

Finally, as my 20-year-old daughter, majoring in computer science, likes to say: “I pray that when I graduate from college, there will not be a recession. Otherwise, Daddy, you may have to pay for graduate school.” Thus, it also helps to have a little luck.



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