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THE MENTORING MAKEOVER **A MODEL FOR REPAIR AND RENAMING**

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From the late 1970's through today, law firm mentoring programs have been touted alternately as either the answer to associate concerns or disastrous forced relationships. In progressive law firms, mentoring programs were meant to signal a commitment on the part of the firm to the development of its associates. It has sometimes served as a hallmark of a firm's commitment to diversity through the development of women and minority associates. Law firm executive and associate's committees have spent many hours trying to fashion mentoring programs that would produce the results of increased associate retention and skills development, but would also be palatable to busy partners conscious of the time commitment. It may be time for a new model for mentoring programs. For those firms who have yet to attempt a mentoring program, this may be a good time to think about how one might be designed. For those who have a program in place that needs help, there may be a need for a "Mentoring Makeover."

WHY A MENTORING PROGRAM IN THE FIRST PLACE?

A frequent criticism of legal education is that students are taught the subject matter well, but they are not shown how to use it in the real world. The law firm partners become the educators when a new associate is hired. The gaps in the associates education, usually centering around practical application issues and how to work within an organization, must be closed somehow within the firm in order for the associate to advance within the organization and become a contributing force for the firm.

Mentoring programs have often been suggested as the solutions to the gaps in associates' formal training by providing support from an individual who is accountable for helping a new associate understand the culture of the organization as well as "coaching" them on skill development. David Jamieson, et al in Managing the Workforce 2000, Gaining the Diversity Advantage, says that "Performance management needs to be individualized even more with today's diverse workforce. The type of assistance, amount of direction, and form of feedback can all be varied in order to be more effective."

The purpose of this individualized approach to training is the maximization of the most important asset of any firm, its intellectual capital. In order to control staffing costs, to manage attrition, and to better prepare mid-level staff to become contributing partners, all firm members must be involved. David H. Maister in Managing The Professional Service Firm notes "While these [formal training programs] undoubtedly play a role, most firms have learned that formal training serves well for knowledge transfer, but is relatively poor in the more important area of skill building. To speed up the acquisition of critical skills, firms must turn to the third device: better on-the-job coaching and teaching by senior professionals." Successful mentoring programs seek to enhance existing training and evaluation programs through the addition of individualized coaching.

Another goal of successful mentoring programs is an increased commitment to the overall goals of the firm and an increased sense of belonging among all firm members. Programs such as this provide opportunities for new members to interact with the leaders of the firm in a structured, but informal way. A program such as this may also bring to light more quickly those associates who are not progressing as expected. Stephan J. Carroll, et al, in his article, "*Performance Enhancement Through Mentoring*", states that the mentoring process can "serve to clarify performance expectations, provide work incentives, career direction and reinforcement to both parties to the relationship....It is also an acknowledgment of the evidence that upward mobility depends to a considerable degree on having some type of close relationship with a senior member of one's field."

In summary, the goals of mentoring programs appear to be the following: **retain key associates, create a sense of collegiality, and increase job satisfaction for both associates and partners.** The name, however, may create expectations too high for any partner to meet. **Coaching** may be more appropriate and descriptive of what actually occurs. Partners may feel more comfortable as a "coach" than as a mentor.

FIVE STEPS FOR DEVELOPING A SUCCESSFUL "COACHING" PROGRAM

- STEP 1.** Decide on a central committee for strategy and oversight. The associate's committee or a new committee set up for this purpose are good choices.
- STEP 2.** Develop clear goals and objectives, agreed upon by all involved and tied to appropriate associate developmental criteria and concerns.
- STEP 3.** Identify the best "coach" candidates and match associates to coaches carefully, taking into consideration personality, practice area, and availability considerations.
- STEP 4.** Provide training for both associates and "coaches" in the program. It may help to define the characteristics of a positive coaching relationship:
- A. It is informally evaluative, with feedback designed to support development
 - B. It provides an outlet for an associate to admit fears, frustrations, or concerns without negative impact
 - C. The coach provides an additional source for legal knowledge
 - D. The relationship is supportive, but honest, with the occasional "kick in the rear" if it is in order
- STEP 5.** Develop a means of evaluating the coaching efforts. Tie it to performance reviews

of partners. Consider coaching efforts in compensation formulas for time devoted to these important efforts

SUMMARY

Natasha Josefowitz in Paths to Power calls mentoring, or coaching in our words, "A brain to pick, a shoulder to cry on, and a kick in the pants". Phillip Kotler in Marketing Management-Analysis, Planning and Control calls it "feed forward" or the process of communicating to new firm members what they should be doing and motivating them to do it. Kenneth Clark, Editor, Measures of Leadership, calls the process transformational leadership in which "The leader sets examples and assigns tasks on an individual basis not only to satisfy the immediate needs of subordinates, but also to elevate a subordinate's needs and abilities to higher levels. Individualized consideration is, in part, coaching and mentoring."

Coaching or mentoring can be all of these things or none of these things. The program developed must meet the needs of the firm and it must fit the personalities of the participants. **The goals are consistent: retain key associates, create a sense of collegiality, and increase job satisfaction for both associates and partners.** Regardless of its' name, a program that pairs committed senior staff with ambitious, talented associates should provide a basis for meeting these ambitious goals.