

In It for the Long Haul



Attorney Stacy D. Phillips of Phillips, Lerner, Lauzon & Jamra said her mentor, John "Jack" Quinn of Arnold & Porter, helped launch her career and has continued to be there for her over the years.

Photo by Dan Evans

Mentors Nurtured Skills And Desire to Give Back

By Joan Haratani

I hope that everyone who practices law has had the benefit of a mentor and has experienced the joy of mentoring others. I cannot imagine what my career would look like but for the mentors that have helped me, and continue to help me, throughout the 21 years that I have been practicing law. And I treasure the relationships I have developed through mentoring others. It's a win-win situation.

When I began practicing law, I was very much intimidated by the big-firm environment and felt that I did not fit in. The pace of litigation (and the stakes at risk for the client) were on me, and I often found myself awake at 3 in the morning worrying that I had not accomplished enough for the client that day.

I believe that within each of us resides an extremely wise soul. For reasons I have yet to understand, I stumbled on the idea of multiple mentors, and I developed mentor/mentee relationships with a few of the partners and senior associates in my firm.

Two of my mentors at that time were an Asian male partner and a white lesbian senior associate. Both of them encouraged me to stick with it, to hone my skills as a litigator, and to do the best job that I was capable of doing. And to keep smiling!

I also had mentors who helped me navigate the "political waters" of my firm. They were white male partners who took me under their wing. They helped guide my career so that I landed the plum assignment, worked with the name partner, and was front and center arguing a significant summary-judgment motion. They made sure that I was given every opportunity to succeed. Sometimes, they would smile at their baptism-by-fire approach, but it worked. By the time I was a second-year associate, I had second-chaired a bad-faith, four-week jury trial and was given the responsibility to cross the plaintiff and put on experts.

Now, at Morgan Lewis, a firm that I joined in January, I am again enjoying the benefit of several mentors who are my partners. All of them

help me in different ways, in areas ranging from career development (yes, after 21 years there is still more to learn!) to professional networking opportunities to life/work balance.

Looking back, all of my life, mentors have held something in common: They all liked and believed in me. I could feel it. And knowing that someone cared about me, my life, and my career has helped me immeasurably.

I have similarly learned from those I have mentored. Mentoring others has helped me "give back" and share some of the wisdom of my experience. I see mentoring others as a cheerful duty; it is fun and satisfying to help others so that they don't have to make the same mistakes that I made or give them the encouragement that helps them take their career to the next level or something as straightforward as specific litigation advice. It feels good to help another person grow from a summer associate to an outstanding partner or client, a professional satisfied with their life, a lifelong friend.

One of the unwritten rules I have with those whom I mentor is the "return the telephone call or e-mail right away" rule. When my mentees reach out to me, even though they are at a competitor's law firm or on the road, I contact them immediately because I know they need help. It is an honor to be trusted and have your opinion valued so much by others that they confide their fears or look to you for advice in a sticky situation.

The benefit to mentoring? I count among my closest friends folks I mentored and who still think of me as their mentor. The neat thing is, when I am with them now, I forget who is mentoring whom. All I focus on is the feeling of fulfillment that I have knowing I have mentors and mentees who have my backside, as I have theirs. That's why I believe that mentoring should be included as an essential part of our daily diets — it's healthy, it's the right thing to do, and to your mentors and mentees, you always are looking good!

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