

**WELLINGTON WOMEN LAWYERS
ASSOCIATION**

MENTORING GUIDELINES

**USEFUL INFORMATION FOR MENTORS AND
MENTEES**

Introduction

A difficulty often experienced by women law students and women who are new to the legal profession is a lack of contacts with whom to discuss their options, aspirations, career directions, and work problems. Put simply, women lawyers often lack mentors.

The committee of the Wellington Women Lawyers Association has introduced this mentor programme for its members as a response to this unmet need. The programme aims to link senior law students and new lawyers (those with up to five years experience) with more experienced women practitioners who are willing to share their wisdom and experience.

Once established, the mentoring relationship can be whatever the two of you make of it. However, it is useful to have some ideas and guidelines about mentoring relationships in general to help you get started. This document contains background information about the WWLA mentoring programme and practical guidelines to help you develop your mentoring relationship.

If you have any questions, please feel free to contact the current co-ordinator of the WWLA Mentoring (a WWLA committee member). Her contact details will be on the email these guidelines were attached to and are published in each issue of the WWLA newsletter.

Background

A mentor is an experienced, skilled and trustworthy person who is willing and able to provide guidance to a less experienced colleague. Mentors motivate their 'mentees', recognise their potential and help them realise it. Mentors also share their knowledge and expertise on career, technical, professional, personal and cultural issues.

WWLA's Mentoring Programme

The WWLA aims to link women law students and less experienced women practitioners with experienced women lawyers. The main features of the WWLA scheme are:

Flexibility: The scheme is flexible, and can develop in a way that suits our members. Some people will want regular meetings to discuss career development. Some will just want a sounding board at the end of the telephone to discuss specific problems. You can organise it however you like. These are guidelines but there are no rules.

Voluntary: The scheme is voluntary for all participants – mentors and mentees.

Mentors: Mentors will fall into two categories; (a) women practitioners with more than five years experience who want to mentor graduates and lawyers with less than five years experience and (b) women with up to five years experience to mentor law students. We welcome mentors from the whole range of careers within our membership: private practice, and the public, corporate or academic sectors.

Same Sector: We will try to link each mentee with a mentor who works in the same sector. So for example, a mentee who is practising mainly in litigation might be linked with a barrister who specialises in this area. A new graduate who has a job in a government department could be linked to counsel in another government department. However, the matches we can make are always subject to the availability of suitable mentors. We will try to cater to individual wishes as far as possible, so if as a potential mentee you are looking for a mentor who practices in a different area, please let the co-ordinator know.

Purpose: The purpose of the mentoring relationship is to maximise the mentee's development and provide an opportunity for the mentor to share valuable institutional knowledge.

One mentee: No mentor will have more than one mentee.

No fault way out: If the relationship doesn't work, either party can end the relationship with no questions asked (see below).

Confidentiality: Information exchanged between mentors and mentees must be treated in confidence unless permission is given. Additionally, the fact that the relationship exists may be confidential in itself, if the participants wish it to be.

Frequency: The frequency of meeting will be agreed between the parties at the beginning of the mentoring relationship.

Duration: The duration of the relationship will be agreed between the parties. Either party can terminate the relationship at any time (see below, under the heading "Ending the relationship"). Mentees may ask for a new mentor at this time and mentors may make themselves available for a different mentee.

Empowering the Mentee

People learn best when they are able to discover and experience things for themselves rather than simply being told or having things done for them. Mentors should encourage mentees to overcome difficulties and discover solutions to problems themselves. Mentors should prompt the mentee to explore a range of ideas and solutions and provide support and guidance while the mentee takes the appropriate action.

Mentors need to act in a way that builds the mentee's self esteem and creates a sense of experimentation with ideas, challenges and aspirations. Even the occasional failure can be reviewed as an unsuccessful trial and opportunity from which the mentee can learn.

Many mentees will find it useful to think about their training and career to date, their current aspirations and career position, or the job they would like to have. Mentees may wish to use the meetings as a basis for an ongoing discussion that focuses on how they can keep moving ahead.

Review process and support

Mentors need to encourage mentees to consider whether they are benefiting from the relationship and to discuss their perceptions from this self-evaluation at any time.

It is also essential for mentors and mentees to understand the need for ongoing informal reviews of the process. These may take the form of a five minute review at the end of a particular session or for either party to write down what appears to be working well, specific outcomes to date, and what needs to be developed further and how the relationship should grow. A guideline for discussion on these topics is included in the 'First Meeting' section.

Mentors will find themselves covering aspects such as encouraging informal networking, promoting career development, providing moral support, boosting self esteem, teaching by example, and discussing what mentees' developmental needs may be.

Effectiveness of the Relationship

Mentors and mentees need to discuss how to manage the quality of the relationship and how to deal effectively with difficulties that may arise through expectations not being met by either party. Where mentees have difficulty gaining access to mentors, this issue should be dealt with as part of the ongoing informal reviews that mentors will need to lead in evaluating the standards of communication. Where there are major difficulties with the relationship, mentees may set up a special meeting with mentors to discuss their concerns.

Who can be a mentor?

A mentor is an experienced, skilled and trustworthy person who is willing and able to provide guidance to less experienced women in the law.

What does a mentor do?

The role of the mentor is to:

- Serve as a role model
- Share information and influence
- Give feedback, support and encouragement
- Help the mentee to build a network
- Challenge ideas
- Teach specific skills – either professional or personal

Constructive advice

Given the extent of mentors' experience, it will be easy for them to jump to conclusions quickly and often far ahead of mentees on particular issues. What can occur is the development of a specific judgement of whether mentees are dealing appropriately with an issue. It is preferable for mentors to allow mentees to work through issues at their own pace to allow them to make their own judgements on issues. This will help the learning process. This is not to say that mentees should not expect constructive comments which may assist them to take a particular course that would be more beneficial. The skill is to avoid providing black and white judgements on issues too complicated to be appropriately considered in mentoring process.

Approachability

Approachability combines two issues. The first is the ability of mentors to manage their time and energy levels so that the mentees have access to them under relaxed conditions. The second relates to the value mentors place on their relationship with mentees and whether they communicate this to them. Mentors must be honest with themselves as to whether they are capable of managing a relationship with its time and energy demands and whether they want to develop with their mentees over an extended period. Mentors and mentees should also agree on how much time will be made available and how it will be spent.

Awareness of 'lifework' issues

Most of the issues mentees may wish to discuss have been experienced by their mentors. It is easy to devalue the importance of these issues given that they occurred in the past. Mentors need to be able to 'tune in' to how mentees are perceiving and feeling and show an appropriate level of empathy with each of these situations.

Mentors recognising their own limitations

Mentors will not have all of the answers all of the time. However, mentors should remember that simply having an objective, supportive listener or a shoulder to cry on can be extremely valuable for a mentee in distress. Occasionally a mentee's situation may be very difficult and complicated. If a mentor feels out of their depth, they should discuss with the mentee whether somebody else might be better equipped to help (for example, an employment lawyer or a counsellor). Mentors should try to ride through the rocky patches with their mentees, but if they feel too stressed, they are free to end the relationship.

Who can be a mentee?

Mentees are people who would benefit from a mentor under whose guidance and advice they will learn skills and develop knowledge, insight and experience.

WWLA members who are senior law students, new graduates, or practitioners with less than five years experience are encouraged to become mentees.

What makes a successful mentee?

A mentee may have been working for less than five years, but on the other hand may not yet be employed or will still be completing her legal studies.

The following characteristics of the mentee will contribute to the success of the relationship:

- Willingness to be responsible for their own growth and development
- Openness to feedback, both positive and negative
- A tendency to seek out challenges and responsibility

The First Meeting

An agreement between the mentor and mentee on the roles of the mentor, the goals of the relationship, procedures and the responsibilities of both mentor and mentee forms the basis of an effective and professional relationship. The points set out below should be used to focus the initial discussion.

First meeting agenda

Discussion and agreement of roles, responsibilities, procedures and goals will help to clarify expectations and objectives of the mentoring relationship.

Jointly agree an agenda between yourselves at your first meeting based on the suggestions in this section. Allow up to an hour for the meeting.

Roles

Discussion topics:

- Roles which you believe should be emphasised in mentoring relationships (different mentees may be looking for different things from their mentors – from structured career advice to ad hoc help with problems at work).
- Prioritising the roles

Responsibilities

Mentor

- Clarifying roles, responsibilities and procedures
- Take an interest in all aspects of the mentee
- Take joint responsibility of initiating meetings
- Test assumptions
- Respect confidentiality (this may include keeping the existence of the relationship itself confidential)
- Give honest, open feedback
- Obtain informed consent from the mentee before going outside the relationship for further information

Mentee

- Identify areas for discussion
- Make good use of meeting time by preparing

- Take responsibility for own development
- Take joint responsibility for initiating meetings
- Respect confidentiality (this may include keeping the existence of the relationship itself confidential)
- Give feedback to the mentor
- Communicate openly and honestly
- Be open to feedback
- Test assumptions

Procedures

Discussion topics

- Frequency and duration of meetings (regularly for coffee? Ad hoc telephone calls?)
- Where meetings will be held
- How meetings will be initiated
- Procedure for reviewing progress and relationship
- No-blame termination procedures (see below)

Goals

Discussion topics

- What you both want to get out of the relationship
- Specific goals for the mentee (if applicable)

Subsequent Meetings

If you have decided to meet regularly (as opposed to establishing an 'as needed' mentor relationship), you may find it helpful to agree on specific topics to discuss at each session:

If the mentee does not yet have a job, you may wish to focus on specific job search strategies (e.g. reviewing her CV, discussing the pros and cons of working in different areas of law and different sectors, discussing interview techniques).

If the mentee is working and is looking for career strategies, you could identify her main concerns and make time to discuss them in turn.

Of course, sometimes you may just want to have a cup of coffee and a gossip about how things are going on in general and there is nothing wrong with that.

Review of the Mentoring Relationship and Process

Regular review of the mentoring relationship, mentoring process and progress made should be carried out. These should not be heavy reviews but rather focused discussions about the progress of the relationship, what is working and what could be improved. Either party may want a review at any time but reviews should be held at least six monthly.

A review involves reflection and evaluation of the relationship by both parties, and of the processes (for example, how often meetings occur or availability of the mentor for quick questions outside of the meeting).

Ending the Relationship

Research indicates that effective mentoring relationships last 18 months – 2 years. At the beginning of a mentoring relationship it is important to consider how the relationship will end.

It may even be a good idea for mentees to have several mentors in the course of their career, in order to gain a wide experience of opportunities and career advice. While your mentor/mentee relationship may work well for 6 to 12 months, for a variety of reasons, it may not. Therefore it is important that the termination process is simple and effective. Changing a mentor should not cause anxiety or recriminations for either party.

If for whatever reason a mentor or mentee wish to terminate the relationship, it helps if you have discussed a termination process before the need arises. You may feel that it is inappropriate to discuss ending your relationship at its outset, but something of a 'prenuptial' arrangement will make an early ending much easier to achieve. Two possible methods are outlined below, but any jointly agreed process is acceptable.

Two Options:

- Either party can ask for a termination meeting. At this meeting a review of the relationship's benefits and progress is made and the reasons for moving forward are discussed. Generally the reasons for terminating are positive and prompted by a wish for wider development opportunities.

Or

- Either party can terminate the relationship without having to give a reason to the other party. In this case a meeting (or telephone conversation) will simply involve ending the relationship. No questions will be asked about reasons for the conclusion.

It is essential that the mentor and mentee clearly agree about which type of conclusion they will use before the commencement of the relationship.

Once the relationship has ended, the mentee may choose a new mentor through the WWLA Mentoring Programme co-ordinator and the mentor may make herself available for a different mentee.

BASIC MENTORING TIPS

Types of Questions

Open Questions

Type	Purpose	Examples
Basic	To acquire information To open discussion	Who, what how, where and when questions
Breadth	To expand discussion	What can you tell me about your work?
Summarising		Can we conclude etc?
Depth	To probe the last statement of a person	Tell me about that/Can you explain more about your last project?
Defining	To define a topic or problem	In what way would this help solve the problem? What other aspects of this could be considered? How would this be done?
Challenging	To challenge old ideas To develop new ideas To examine reasoning and proof	How do you know? What evidence do you have? Why do you think so?
Input	To introduce a new idea To advance a suggestion of your own	Could we consider this as a possible solution? Would this be a feasible alternative?
Hypothetical	To develop a new idea To suggest another, perhaps unpopular, opinion to change the course of the discussion	What would happen if we did it this way? Another firm does this – would it be feasible here? What do they do in other firms that could work here?
Clarifying	To clarify	Can you give me more details about that?
Option	To make a decision between alternatives To get agreement	Which of those solutions is best – A or B? Is A our choice in preference to B?

Closed Questions

Type	Purpose	Examples
Basic	To obtain minimal information To get a concise reply	Can be answered 'yes' or 'no' and in many cases encourage the use of 'but' e.g. 'yes but ...'

Collaborative	To get agreement	Can we conclude that this is the next step? Is there general agreement on this plan?
---------------	------------------	---

Questions to be avoided

Type	Examples
Leading	Surely you agree that Option A would work best!
Multiple	Is your job challenging and rewarding? You may answer yes to the first part but no to the second part.

Good listening skills for both parties are crucial for the mentoring relationship.

Poor Listeners

- Don't look at the speaker
- Impose their own ideas
- Are judgmental
- Distract the speaker with mannerisms or fidgeting
- Jump to conclusions
- Interrupt
- Think of their question or contribution rather than what is being said
- Switch off
- Fail to check for clarification
- Fail to check out assumptions
- Are defensive
- Won't shut up!

How can listening skills be improved?

The following are some suggestions:

Don't judge or jump to conclusions

Let them finish their point, clarify if necessary and suspend judgement.

Listen analytically

Can the speaker support her/his views? Where is the evidence for what is being said?

Join in the conversation

Without interrupting to put your own views across, join in by asking for clarification, summarising the speaker's view as you see them, to encourage the speaker to continue.

Make encouraging listening noises (mm, uhhu, yes...)

Let the speaker know that you are still interested and concentrating on what he/she has to say.

Maintain good eye contact

Show up your posture and facial expression that you are interested.

Use spare thinking time more effectively

Think about what the speaker is saying; what words are being used; what her/his body language and non-verbal communication are telling you.

Stop talking

You can't listen and talk at the same time.

Learn to live with silence

A thought provoking question may demand several seconds of 'thinking time'. It's a useful time for both of you to reflect and consider the next contribution.

Don't interrupt

Are you sure you've really heard what they have said, or are you just waiting for your turn?

Body language

Assume a physical posture that implies interest in the speaker.

Remove any barriers to listening

Barriers may be physical, emotional or psychological. Is the room too cold or hot? Is your mind still on an earlier meeting/confrontation? Have you made up your mind about the person even before they have spoken?

Finally, remember that listening is not a passive activity. It is hard work and needs sensitivity, patience and above all, practice.

Problem Solving Strategy

Suggested guidelines

- Write down the specific difficulty which is challenging you
- Discuss the feelings you have about the difficulty
- Develop a rational strategy for solving the problem
- For each part of the problem, identify a key action to perform which you believe will go towards solving the difficulty.
- Define specific steps you will need to go through to advance each action that you have identified. For example, time frame, who else to consult, where to obtain additional information to assist with solving the problem.
- Define a method for reviewing how much progress you have made in carrying out the actions.
- On completion of your action list, write down your current feelings about the problem and your ability to implement and control your problem solving strategy and achieve the desired outcome.

Setting Goals

Use the SMART goal setting criteria when you set goals.

Specific

Measurable

Achievable

Realistic

Timebound