



Mentor a student

Pay them some attention today and the plaintiff's bar will benefit tomorrow



Kippes

BY ALTHEA T. KIPPES

I can already imagine what you are saying: "I'm too busy to be a mentor! I am going to trial! I don't have time to show anybody how to do anything! I don't even know where to find students! Don't they learn all about litigation in law school?" (Did you?)

While you may believe these are legitimate excuses, they are not. *Everybody* is busy. The trial lawyers who mentored my legal students over my past 15 years mentored them when they had a Supreme Court brief due, when they were in trial, when they were in back-to-back trials, when they were preparing for arbitration, drafting an appeal, or planning an around-the-world vacation. All of these lawyers were busy, but they took the time to sit down and talk with a student, to invite the student to join them in court or to have the student help research an interesting appellate issue.

For the mentoring process to be successful, you need to meet with students, talk to them, and tell them what you love about being a plaintiff's trial lawyer. As to what kinds of students you should mentor, it can be *any student interested in a legal career*. Don't limit yourself to law students. Sometimes, we can make the biggest impression by mentoring a high school student, a paralegal student or a community college student. For example, I have been teaching paralegal students for many years. A number of those paralegal students later went on to law school and passed the bar. And they all became *plaintiffs' lawyers*. Several shared with me that it was because of what they learned in my classes that they chose the path of a plaintiff's lawyer.

Create a meaningful internship

Another great way to create a positive impression of the plaintiff's bar is by hiring a student intern. Here come the financial protests: "We don't have enough money! We can't afford another employee!" Worry not. Most schools require students to participate in an *unpaid internship*. This means that the student pays their school for the privilege of working in your office! If done correctly, this is a win-win situation. You have someone to help in your office, and the student learns what being a plaintiff's lawyer is really like.

A caveat, please. An intern *is not* unpaid part-time office help. (The California Wage and Hour laws take a dim view of internships that have such an appearance. See Daily Journal, April 29, 2010.) The internship must be set up as a learning experience for the student. Do *not* take on a student intern if you don't want to take the time to meet with them regularly, both to explain what you are doing and to give them feedback on their work.

How to plan the internship? Think back to when you were in school. What kind of learning experience would you have wanted? Would you have wanted to accompany the attorney to court or to a deposition, then get debriefed afterwards about the experience, or would you rather have been given a stack of files and told to "do your best" to figure out what was going on; that there was no time for questions.

Or what about the lawyer who tells the law student to draft a demand letter, but never explains how to do it. You'll recall from your own legal education that students don't learn the practical aspects of law in school. That is why your role as a plaintiff's attorney mentor is so important.

Opportunities in mentoring

To locate a student internship program, you can contact the litigation program at most law schools, the paralegal program of your local community college or the career planning office of the college or law school. (If you are on the peninsula, you can request an intern from the Cañada College Paralegal Program by calling (650) 306-3201 or from the Skyline College Paralegal Program by calling (650) 738-4121 or email me at kippesa@smccd.edu.)

Another great way to create a positive impression of plaintiffs' lawyers is to mentor students at a trial lawyer convention. For example, at AAJ's annual convention there is a law students' program followed by a law-student-mentor reception. Law students are set up with experienced plaintiffs' attorneys who encourage and support the students by giving them advice and sharing their own experiences. If you are short on time, this is the perfect event. It lasts about two hours and food and drinks are provided. If you are attending the 2010 AAJ Annual Convention in Vancouver, you can be a law student mentor by contacting Brandon Grubsky, AAJ Membership Specialist, at (202) 944-2825 or e-mail brandon.grubsky@justice.org. You can also visit



JUNE 2010

www.justice.org and contact the membership department.

One of the best ways to reach future plaintiffs' lawyers is by speaking at your own law school. As an alum, you will most likely be welcomed as a speaker by the litigation or torts professors or by the career planning office. What should you talk about? Anything having to do with getting a job seems

to attract large numbers of second and third years (almost as many as free pizza and beer). Another popular topic is public interest litigation and organizations such as Public Justice (www.publicjustice.net) can provide you with useful information and handouts. By working to help students today, you will be contributing to the survival of the plaintiff's bar tomorrow.

A.T. Kippes is the editor of Plaintiff. She is a graduate of the Haas School of Business at the University of California, Berkeley and Golden Gate University School of Law. She focuses her practice on employment litigation, competitive business litigation, and animal law. A life-long resident of the Bay Area, she is an at-large board member of the CAOC.

