



AUCKLAND WOMEN
LAWYERS' ASSOCIATION

AUCKLAND WOMEN LAWYERS' ASSOCIATION MENTORING PROGRAMME GUIDELINES

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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, their career direction, their work problems, their hopes and their fears. Put simply, women lawyers often lack mentors.

Consequently the Executive Committee of the Auckland Women Lawyers' Association has introduced this mentor programme for its members. The programme aims to link up senior law students and new graduates (those with up to five years' experience) with more experienced women practitioners (five years or more) who are preferably working in the same general sector or area of the law.

The relationship, once established, can be whatever you make of it. However, it is useful to have some guidelines and ideas about mentoring relationships generally to get started. These materials contain background information about the AWLA mentoring programme and information and resources that will help you to establish your mentoring relationship. AWLA would like to gratefully acknowledge the help given by the Wellington Women Lawyers' Association (WWLA) and Chapman Tripp Sheffield Young. The information in these materials is based upon that of the WWLA which is in turn based on the CTSY mentoring model.

Some of the material (for example the sections on the first meeting, meeting agenda, and roles) consists of practical guidelines for developing the relationship.

If you have any questions please feel free to call the AWLA mentoring programme coordinator. Her contact details are published in each issue of the AWLA newsletter.

Good luck!

BACKGROUND

Definition of Mentoring

A mentor is an experienced, skilled and trustworthy person who is willing and able to provide guidance to less experienced colleagues. Mentors motivate their “mentees” (sorry about the use of this word, we just could not come up with anything better), recognise their potential and help them realise their potential. Mentors also share their knowledge and expertise on career, technical, professional, personal and cultural issues.

AWLA’s Mentoring Programme

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

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

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

Mentors: Generally mentors will be women practitioners with more than five years’ experience. We welcome mentors from the whole range of careers within our membership: private practice, public sector, corporate sector etc.

Same Sector: We will try to link each mentee up with a mentor who works in the same sector. So, for example, a mentee who is practising mainly in matrimonial law might be linked to a barrister who has a matrimonial practice. A new graduate who has a job in a government department could be linked to legal counsel in a different government department. A law student who hopes to practise in the tax area might be linked to a tax practitioner. We will try to cater to individual wishes as far as

possible (depending on the availability of suitable mentors).

Purpose: The purpose of the mentoring relationship is to maximise the mentee's development.

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

No Fault Way Out: If the relationship does not work out, either party can take advantage of a no fault way out.

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 meetings will be agreed between the parties and will be based upon the needs of the people involved.

Follow up: A member of the AWLA executive may follow up with you after approximately three months of arranging the mentor-mentee relationship. You should feel free to approach AWLA with any questions that you may have about the programme at any time.

Duration: The duration of the relationship will be agreed between the parties. The relationship may be terminated at any time by either party. Mentees may choose a new mentor through AWLA 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 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 the mentee's development 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.

The AWLA Mentoring Programme Coordinators are responsible for coordinating the programme. The coordinators may change from year to year, but their contact details are available on the AWLA website.

THE MENTOR

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.

We welcome members from every sector of the law (private practice, public sector, corporate etc) with five or more years' experience to participate as AWLA mentors.

What Does a Mentor Do?

The role of a 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 judgment 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 far in advance of them being appropriately considered in a 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 “Life / Work” 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 find an appropriate level of empathy with them.

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 her depth, she 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 terminate the relationship.

THE MENTEE

Who Can be a Mentee?

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

AWLA 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 several years, but on the other hand it is quite possible that she will not be employed yet or will still be completing her law studies. The following characteristics of the mentee will contribute to the success of the relationship:

- willingness to be responsible for her 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 on problems at work).
 - Prioritising the roles.

Responsibilities

Mentor

- clarify roles, responsibilities and procedures;
- take an interest in all aspects of the mentee;
- take joint responsibility for 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 lunch? Ad hoc telephone calls?)
- where meetings will be held (somewhere informal? A café?)
- how meetings will be initiated;
- procedure for reviewing progress and relationship;
- no blame termination procedures.

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 (for example reviewing her CV, discussing the pros and cons of 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 and there’s nothing wrong with that.

REVIEW OF THE MENTORING RELATIONSHIP

Regular reviews of the mentoring relationship and progress made should be carried out. These should not be heavy reviews but rather focused discussions about the progress of the relationship. 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.

ENDING THE RELATIONSHIP

Research indicates that effective mentoring relationships last 2-3 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 2-3 years, 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 “pre-nuptial” 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 the 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, mentees may choose a new mentor through AWLA and mentors may make themselves available for a different mentee.