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Colorado Supreme Court Mentor Program Underway. CLE credit and curriculum template available, website launch in October

by Christine McManus VonGunden



Mentor and mentee pair Charlie Garcia and Jennifer Hayden.

In the old days, senior lawyers mentored younger lawyers. Naturally. Informally.

But these days, mentoring partnerships are more and more difficult to find, both in the public and private sectors. Would-be mentors and mentees alike are consumed by the recent economics of the practice of law. Furthermore, it's not easy to find the right match, much less to know how, to go about mentoring or being mentored.

The Colorado Supreme Court noticed this dearth of mentorships. Thus, officials have been building CAMP—the Colorado Attorney Mentoring Program. So far, more than 140 mentors—and counting—are certified through the Colorado Supreme Court.

Once the mentors are paired up with young or transitioning lawyers requesting mentorship, they can take advantage of a professional mentoring curriculum template. CLE credit is available for mentor and mentee alike.

"This is a much needed program," said mentee Jennifer Hayden of the Hayden Law Firm, LLC. "When I hung a shingle, I had this one case that just snowballed. I needed to run specific ideas by someone familiar with my area of practice."

Hayden applied to the program and was matched up with mentor Charley Garcia, president-elect of the Colorado Bar Association.

"He said, 'Read this case law, it might not fit the situation exactly, but it will help you be more knowledgeable,'" said Hayden. "He gave me some great advice, too, to not allow the client to dictate how you practice (criminal) law. I'd been trying to accommodate a client's request, and I realized he (Garcia) was right."

Research and development of CAMP began several years ago. In 2011, the Chief Justice's Commission on the Legal Profession recommended that the Colorado Supreme Court establish a statewide lawyer mentoring program. In February, an executive director was selected. By May, the Court established Rule 255, setting up CAMP as an independent part of the attorney admission, registration and regulation system.

As a statewide program, CAMP is based in the new Ralph Carr Judicial Center, in the heart of downtown Denver. Atop the desk of CAMP Director John Baker sits a large, family photo from his retirement celebration last year—his first attempt at retirement, anyhow.

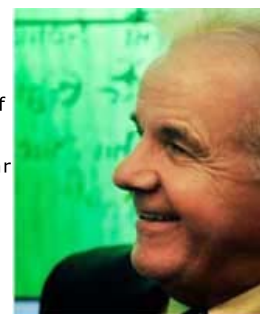
"I sat at home for the month of December last year, and man, I got bored. It wasn't for me," the energetic Baker said. "I applied for the director position and was hired in February."

Baker spent 33 years concentrating his legal practice in products liability litigation, representing individuals that have been injured by defective pharmaceutical products and vehicles.

Resistant to taking too much credit, Baker said CAMP is innovated from successful aspects of several mentor programs. One heavy influence was the successful DBA mentor program, which was started in 2009 by Nancy Cohen and Mark Fogg, and nurtured by them during Baker's DBA presidential term in 2010–2011. CAMP is also modeled after programs in Ohio and Illinois.

What makes CAMP unique is that it not only serves as a partnering service, it also provides a standardized mentoring curriculum, approved by the Colorado Supreme Court. CAMP sends mentorship resources and training materials to local bar associations, specialty bars, law firms, agencies, law schools, inns of court and other legal organizations, on request.

Many Colorado law offices still facilitate mentorships within the office, but fewer resources go toward development. Young lawyers are increasingly trying to start their own practices, without the necessary



CAMP Director John Baker

How to Get Matched

Mentees: Licensed, active lawyers who intend to practice in Colorado may apply. Preference will be given to lawyers who are in their first three years following admission to practice law in Colorado.

Mentors: Colorado attorneys or judges who have practiced at least five years with an active license, or are retired in good standing may apply.

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guidance from practiced attorneys. Judges can spot a new attorney a mile away when they show up for court unprepared.

"For example, they'll only bring one set of trial exhibits, when three sets are needed for trial. The judge has to postpone the case, and it clogs the docket," Baker said. "Or they'll take cases whether they're competent or not, or take on too many cases, in an attempt to build their client list. If they mess up the case, the client gets hurt and it really affects the integrity of the legal system."

Another common problem occurs when inexperienced lawyers don't fully understand how to manage trust accounts for clients, Baker said.

"I was lucky, I grew up as a lawyer during a time when there was access to great mentors," said CAMP mentor Garcia. "The lawyers I have mentored, informally and formally, are clearly bright lawyers. But sometimes it's hard to know where to turn to, or the right thing to do."

Garcia caters to individual mentee needs. He helped Hayden by visiting her office and going through some of her cases. With any mentee, he always emphasizes quality of practice and *pro bono* civic duties, over making money.

"I want to run into my mentees and be able to say, 'I'm hearing great things about you!' Not necessarily that they're making money, but contributing quality to the profession and society," said Garcia. "Mentoring is more important now than ever."

To grow and expand its reach, CAMP is building relations with local bar associations, law schools and other legal organizations across the state. CAMP's lean office staff of one-and one-quarter paid employees is supported by lawyer admission fees. The program is governed by the Colorado Supreme Court Advisory Committee.

CAMP's website will launch in October. Attorneys will soon be able to find links to a compilation of helpful articles and websites, concerning inter-generational working relationships, hanging a shingle, professionalism, ethical issues, public service and more.

"The creation of CAMP was a strong statement by the Court, to say, by the Court that this is important," said Baker. "The program's a novelty right now. But in five years, I want it to be a common experience for all young and transitioning lawyers—to be a well-known, standard mentorship resource that lawyers use, so that it's no longer novel." **D**

Freelance writer and editor Christine McManus VonGunden is a former Director of Communications at the Denver Bar Association.

What does CAMP curriculum include?

Goal setting, personal and professional development (work-life balance, inclusiveness, diversity, wellness), Colorado bar and legal community, history of the legal profession, rules of professional conduct, litigation and transaction experiences, negotiation, law office management and in-office procedures, working with clients, and pro bono and civic involvement.

CAMP's Mission

CAMP's Mission: To promote professional pride, excellence and identity in the legal profession by forging strong relationships with the bar, courts, clients, law schools and the public.