

# LAW WEEK

## COLORADO

# New Mentoring For The Law

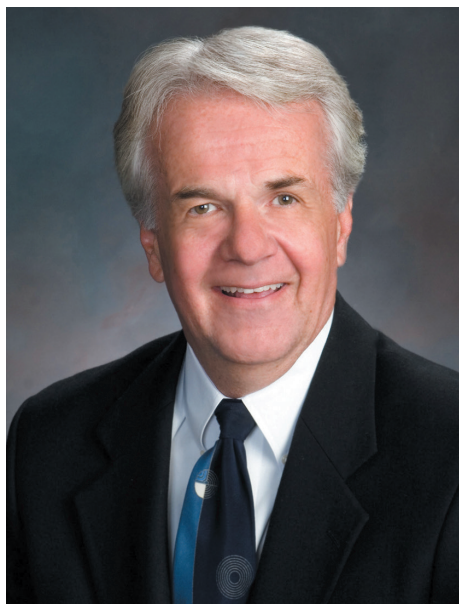
By **John Baker**  
COLORADO SUPREME COURT

MENTORING always played an integral role in the development of the legal profession in Colorado; at least since the establishment of an organized bar. "One-on-one" mentoring between an experienced attorney and a young attorney has been the norm to promote the professional identity. Whether it's partners and associates in law firms, senior lawyers and new lawyers in government agencies, or judges and their law clerks, this mentoring model prevails.

Some young lawyers found mentors outside of their firm or place of work, but the relationship was always one-on-one. This traditional "pairing" relationship works best, because it promotes a trusting and private environment for the mentor and mentee to be frank and open with one another. It is a safe place for critical feedback between the lawyers.

However, there is a new normal in the legal profession. Law practice has gone through dynamic change over the past five to 10 years, driven in part by the challenging economic times, but also influenced by the fast-paced and high-pressure technology. Experienced attorneys and the young lawyers feel that they have less time for mentoring. Even the pyramid-shaped structure of law firms with a small number of partners at the top and large numbers of young associates at the bottom has changed.

In some firms, associate recruiting class numbers have been reduced or replaced by the hiring of contract attorneys. More young law school graduates are starting practice by hanging out their own shingles, and these attorneys



JOHN BAKER

want mentors. Former third-year associates, laid off by law firms, are starting their own practices and want mentors to teach them about opening law offices. There are not enough effective mentors.

No worries! Attorney mentoring in Colorado evolved to keep up with the changes in the legal profession and in the legal system. There are three newly conceived mentoring ideas, designed to meet the challenges of these changing times. Two are perhaps only short-term fixes, but the third has promise for bringing back mentoring to prominence in the long run.

First, the definition of mentoring has expanded to include more alternatives. Ida Abbott, author of "The Lawyer's Guide to Mentoring" from the National Association of Law Placement, tells us that the traditional concept of an old, trusted sponsor, who boosts the young lawyer's career has been replaced by an "advisory council"

of mentors. Young lawyers have many mentors who fulfill differing needs over the years of practice. Some act as teachers, some as coaches. Others act as sounding boards, champions or role models. Seldom does one person fulfill all of the roles. Some of the relationships last for years; some are brief encounter help sessions. All of the relationships are one-on-one between a mentor and a mentee. Under this concept, the mentees must be proactive in finding the members of the advisory council and should share in the responsibility for maintaining the mentoring relationship.

Second, the concepts of the structure of mentoring "pairings" have been altered due to an apparent lack of qualified, knowledgeable mentors with the time needed to be one. Leadership trainer and attorney Nan Joesten of Rapid Evolution in Boulder encourages good mentors to create multiple mentee groups or organize mentoring circles to overcome the dearth of mentors.

Under the multiple mentee idea, the experienced attorney simply mentors several mentees in a group setting. This group idea works best in legal organization settings and bar associations. As to the mentoring circles concept, Joesten suggests that the mentor gently monitors or facilitates a group of mentees as they share their own professional development ideas with each other. This model works in settings where the mentees have a variety of experience levels and years in practice. Joesten admits that neither the group mentoring nor mentoring circles offers the individualized opportunities of the traditional one-on-one mentoring, but will help the mentees in the development of their professional identity.

Finally, in 2013 the Colorado Supreme Court, through Chief Justice Michael Bender's Commission on the Legal Profession, established the Colorado Attorney Mentoring Program, or CAMP, to cope with the evolution of the legal profession and to help promote mentoring. In addition to collaborating with bar associations and other legal organizations to create mentoring opportunities in many of the 22 Colorado judicial districts, CAMP plans for 2014 and 2015 to provide training and resources to make both mentors and mentees more effective in their mentoring relationship.

This CAMP training includes components of: communication and listening skills; understanding of generational, ethnic, gender and other differences; and concepts to promote a professional identity through mentoring. To complement the training programs, CAMP currently actively works with bar associations statewide to recruit more mentors, including "the next generation mentors." For the long run the Colorado Supreme Court and CAMP hope to increase the numbers of qualified and effective mentors to meet the needs of the Colorado legal profession.

The message is clear to all lawyers in Colorado, young and old. Experienced attorneys need to start a mentoring effort in their law offices or volunteer with their local bar association or at CAMP to be a mentor. Young lawyers need to find a mentor. Visit the CAMP website for more information and to help at <http://coloradomentoring.org>. •

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