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Law clerks add value, need mentors too

At a recent charity benefit I ran into Rob, a man I had not seen in almost 15 years. He had little recollection of our previous meeting, but for me the memory was vivid. In my prior career in finance, we were introduced by a family friend for the purpose of an informational interview. Rob was gracious with his advice and time and as a graduate student in finance, the opportunity to have lunch with an established investment banker meant the world to me. And there were so many more like Rob, including Debra, the attorney who provided me with an introduction to my first job after a dear family friend sent out a mass mailing on my behalf.

Like a montage, when a new law clerk starts at my firm the positive experiences I have had over the years with more established professionals flashes through my mind. The warm feeling of someone caring about me stops me in my tracks, reminding me to extend myself to this new person.

When we were in school, we always worked harder for teachers we liked and performed better in their classes. Everyone used to say it was about “motivation” — students (and employees) were said to work harder for teachers (and employers) they liked. However, advances in technology and neuroscience have proven that the limbic system, the portion of the brain responsible for emotions (whether we like someone or not), is the gatekeeper to long-term memory. Before information goes to long-term memory, it passes through the limbic system. If the limbic system is closed (I hate him! She is so rude!), whatever information is being transmitted goes in one ear and out the other. The communication never reaches long-term memory, so the goal is never executed. The bottom line is that neuro-imaging has proven

to be a window to the brain, a window to thinking habits. We must use this valuable information to build effective work teams — and remember that law clerks are an important component of the team.

We all remember our first interview, our first internship and our first summer position in the legal profession. Now, as practicing attorneys, we are in a position to help shape the experiences of summer associates. If you were fortunate enough to have someone go out of their way and spend time with you when you first started out, you appreciate the importance kindness played in learning the culture of your chosen profession. And, if you had a less than positive experience with seasoned cohorts and felt that others were unwilling to mentor or to educate you, all the more reason to go out of your way and spend the time and commit the energy to help shape someone else's future.

My experience as a law clerk at Chuhak & Tecson P.C.

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THE BUZZ



**LINDSEY
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encouraged me to participate in our firm's recruiting committee after I became an associate here. While our law clerk program had a solid foundation, I was determined to create more structure so students would have the most meaningful experience possible. Although I now serve on other firm committees, I remain “the law clerk ambassador.” I have spent countless non-billable hours with clerks and am always the go-to person for letters of recommendation. On the flip side, the law clerks I work with have all expressed their appreciation for my advice in words and in actions. My research projects are tackled immediately and former clerks have even contacted me with referral opportunities and to retain me for their personal estate planning.

Colleagues often comment that they do not have a specific project for a law clerk, and I remind them that any experience can be challenging and meaningful. In a time crunch, law clerks are phenomenal at due diligence — and for a complex matter, if given the opportunity

to think and contribute to problem-solving, a law clerk can bring to light issues that are not routinely considered.

Regardless of the project, it is important to communicate to the law clerk the value their task adds to the project as a whole. For the most mundane tasks (search through 20 files to find a single document), I communicate that this type of due diligence is routine for any attorney because the information provides context for the project. If the grueling file review is related to a large litigation matter, invite the clerk to attend a court appearance so they can appreciate the value of their participation in the case. And, if a law clerk is looking for work and no billable matters come to mind, consider asking them to assist with a marketing project for the firm or your practice area. As important as legal assignments are, working on other projects communicates to the clerk the culture of the firm and can greatly contribute to their education as a future practicing attorney. In addition, opportunities to share lunch or grab a cup of coffee build relationships and help relieve a newcomer's anxiety and stress.

From a learning perspective, when we provide the law clerk with the big picture and explain the relationship of their task to the whole, we set them up for success. Clerks can identify how their role has an impact on the project, which helps to build consensus for team development.

Neuro-imaging provides us with a valuable window into human behavior. We must use this information to build teams and bring out the best in everyone so that our colleagues can experience the pleasure and joy of meeting new challenges.

Mentoring law clerks is a valuable experience for both the clerks and attorneys involved and I encourage you to make this commitment — starting with this summer's class.