



A. Initial Meeting Conversations between Mentors and Mentees

I. Setting the Ground Rules

To get the relationship off to a good start, it is important for both mentor and mentee to discuss what they want from the relationship and what the ground rules (guidelines) should be. Ask the following questions of yourself first and then discuss them with your mentoring partner either at the first meeting or early on in your relationship.

How much time can you realistically commit to the relationship?

How can we best communicate? Voice mail, email, when is the best time to have in-person meetings, etc.

How would you like to receive feedback, i.e. how am I doing?

What do you expect from each other in the way of:

Support?

Behaviour?

How will you evaluate the relationship?

How long would you like the relationship to last and why?

How will the relationship be severed if either of you determine that you are incompatible for mentoring purposes?

What are your goals for the mentoring relationship?

Who will be responsible for follow up contact and scheduling meetings?

Confirm confidentiality expectations.

II. Familiarization

The mentor and mentee will want to explore each other's background beyond the information you may know about each other from the firm's website. The following questions will help you prepare for that discussion and make it meaningful.

What are my personal values?

Which experiences have I enjoyed the most and what skills did I learn from those experiences (can be professional or personal)?

What are the personal and professional achievements I am most proud of? How have these added the most to my personal development and growth?

What skills did I use in these accomplishments?

What frustrates me at work?

How do you deal with stress or stressful situations?

What aspects of practice are you finding most difficult to deal with? What aspects are you finding easiest to deal with?

What aspects of your job do you enjoy and what aspects do you dislike?

Why did you choose your particular area of law?



III. Personal Growth and Career Development

Once you have become better acquainted with your mentoring partner, it is important particularly for the mentee to outline and discuss personal development and career goals. The following questions will help you prepare for that discussion.

What are my life goals and or aspirations?

What are my short-term career goals?

What are my immediate development goals? Are they specific or time-framed? Are there any barriers to achieving those developmental goals?

Are my career goals aligned with my current employer's business needs?

How will I measure my progress toward those goals?

How can my mentor help me with achieving those goals? Example, hold me accountable to follow through.

IV. Exploring Your Mentor's Career

As a mentee it will be beneficial for you to understand some of the challenges, choices and decisions your mentor had made in his/her career, what led to those decisions and what he/she learned from those experiences. It may be important to ask questions and learn (particularly about positive situations) while avoiding the temptation of trying to repeat your mentor's career path. You may wish to explore the following areas with your mentor.

Who has been your greatest mentor? Discuss the knowledge and skills you acquired from this person.

What positions (paid or volunteer) were most challenging/ rewarding and why?

What career experiences have been key in providing building blocks for your growth and development?

What professional/personal achievement are you most proud of and why?

How do you keep your knowledge and skills current?

What have been the pivotal/ critical moments or turning points in your career?

What career risks have you taken? Were they wise or the right choices?

What are the political "hot spots" one should be aware of when making career choices?

How has your specific practice area affected your career choices and priorities?

B. Sample Topics for Discussion between Mentors and Mentees



Topic: Managing Conflict (Interpersonal or Organizational)

Conflict can be subtle or overt but in whatever form it appears, it typically results in wasted or misplaced energy. Before your conversation with your mentor, think about which type of conflict you are particularly interested in discussing and finding ways to resolve (e.g. personal, organization or general), and use the following themes and questions to help you focus your discussion.

Interpersonal:

Discuss some examples of win-win solutions that you have instigated in the recent past. Discuss your approach and why you were successful.

Discuss current issues that are causing conflict. What can you learn from previous win-win solutions that will apply to the present conflict issue?

What risks are you prepared to take and what risks are you not prepared to take? Why? What are the pitfalls of taking those actions?

How important is it for you to manage the conflict? Is the conflict preventing you from achieving your goals?

Is the conflict the result of your own behaviour or values or is it the result of others behaviour or values? Is it inherent in your work environment or is it possible to positively affect it?

How do you handle bully lawyers?

How do you handle the challenges of being a visible minority lawyer? (This topic also would fall into several other topic areas, including career challenges and networking/marketing/branding.)

Organizational:

Are your firm's/employer's structure, processes, and ways of "doing business" aligned with your career/corporate goals and strategies or is there a disconnect? How does this create or alleviate conflict? What can be done?

Does your firm/ organization structure and build relationships that support your career development and growth or does it create conflict?

Can you realistically affect your firm/organization structure? Can you learn to live with the conflict?

Topic: Practice Management

Many starting lawyers have particular challenges and questions regarding managing different aspects of their practice. Mentors can often guide and advise mentees on these issues based upon their own experience or knowledge, or simply be supportive when the mentee needs to talk through issues that are creating conflict or stress. Some



OBA Mentorship Program

areas of practice management that a mentee may wish to discuss with their mentor, or a mentor may wish to explore with their mentee, are:

- Time management
- Communications
- Courtesy
- Work-life balance and hours of work
- Tickler systems and other reminders
- Scheduling
- Wise and effective delegation and oversight of delegated tasks
- Effective client communications
- Docketing
- Billing practices
- Client management
- CLE opportunities and experiences
- Stress management
- Interests outside of law
- Practice insurance
- How to handle losing a case or making a mistake on a file

Topic: Practice Skills

Another topic of interest to mentees is handling the aspects of practicing law that are more challenging or are often learned through experience. While questions related strictly to the law are not appropriate, the following topics may be of great help and interest in mentor-mentee discussions:

- Negotiation tips and traps
- Pointers for conducting trials, motions, settlement conferences or case conferences
- Courtroom conduct
- Civility and ethics
- Etiquette

Topic: Career Challenges and Management

Many discussions the mentor and mentee will have will undoubtedly touch on career challenges and management while discussing related practice or business issues. However, you may wish to spend an entire meeting discussing a particular career challenge and exploring how your mentor perceives the situation and what insight he/she may have or any similar experiences he/she has encountered. It is important to remember that your mentor will not make career decisions for you. The mentor's role is



OBA Mentorship Program

to challenge your ideas and perspectives and help you look at your choices from other angles. These challenges might include:

- Choices about moving to another position, location or firm/ employer and advice on how to find a new job/different job
- Relationship/ dealings with your principal, supervising partner, other associates, clients in general
- Improving / working on your “corporate” image
- Increasing your profile in the business community or within or area of expertise/practice niche
- Where and how to focus your development
- Whether to take an extended break from practice for work, family, educational or other reasons
- Billable hours, expectations, and reasonable consequences of choices
- Partnership – how to get there and what it entails
- Alternatives to private practice
- Switching practice areas
- Preparing a resume and cover letter
- Pro bono/community legal work
- Alternative work schedules

Topic: Networking/Marketing/Branding

Many starting lawyers are especially hungry for help, guidance and advice related to networking, marketing and branding. Topics that your mentee might find particularly helpful to discuss include:

- What is branding and how will it affect my practice?
- How to create your own marketing plan
- Effective networking
- Practice-specific marketing and networking advice
- What have you found to be effective in marketing your practice? What have you found to be ineffective?
- Your top 5 networking or marketing tips
- Where to go for further marketing and networking help
- Who's who in your area of law