

No Such Thing as "All-in-One" Mentoring

By Linda Morkan

Many young attorneys make the mistake of thinking that they need to find, and align themselves with, one senior attorney who will be their designated "mentor." Think Master Po to the serious young Caine in the old Kung Fu series, or Miranda Priestly to the spunky young Andy Sachs in "The Devil Wears Prada." Our fiction often offers us scenarios where youth sits at the feet of the elderly and learns all there is to learn about being . . . well, whatever it is that the youth in question wishes to be.

In my experience, life in the practical lane is not quite that neat. While it may certainly be more efficient to find one individual who can teach you everything you need to know to be a [fill in the blank] lawyer, plus have a personality that so closely mirrors yours as to encourage trust and confidence, it's a long shot. Of the long, long shot variety.

Does this mean you shouldn't bother trying to find a mentor? Of course not. Silly rhetorical question, that. What it means is that you might have to find more than one mentor.

For example, maybe there is one older attorney who is unmatched in his substantive abilities who would be willing to help you when you are stuck or confused on a point of law. And maybe there is another attorney you know who is fabulous in drumming up business, a hand-shaker extraordinaire who excels at matching names to faces and needs to workers. Perhaps she would allow you to tag along to bar or industry functions where you could watch her work, analyze her style, and maybe even be introduced as an "up and comer." Finally, there might be someone else with whom you feel a particular closeness who could act as a sounding board as you try to navigate your personal life around the shoals of a professional career. You might find all of these people in your firm; you might have to troll your legal community.

So, my advice is to diversify. Look around and try to wring the juice out of every mentoring possibility available to you. You will meet smart and engaging people. You will make connections and build relationships. Even better, you will grow as a lawyer.