

Tips for *Their* Success: How Experienced Lawyers Can Help New Associates

IT IS THAT time of year when new associate attorneys will be joining your firms and making their first appearances in courtrooms around the country. Fresh out of law school, these associates will look to you—yes, you—for guidance as they begin their legal careers. Here are 10 tips to help make their entry into the practice of law successful and your work together rewarding:

1. Teach new lawyers what it means to provide excellent client service at every level.

Show your firm's new associates why their work on the most basic assignments during their early years of practice matters. For example, even though reviewing documents may not sound very exciting to a new litigation associate, the task is often key to a case. In the end, documents that have been identified or those that have been missed may mean winning or losing a case, especially in the age of electronic discovery. Steps taken or not taken during discovery will help determine what evidence is admissible at trial. Quality work at these basic levels is often the foundation for excellent client service.

2. Introduce new associates to your clients and contacts.

Include your new associates in a client pitch or case meeting and give them a substantive role in the meeting. Everyone benefits when the client understands the value added by members of the legal team. Take new associates to a local bar association event and introduce them to your friends and contacts in the legal community. Volunteer to co-author an article with new associates and give them speaking roles at a CLE session. Ask a new associate to join your firm's table at a bar association program or at another social event.

3. Encourage volunteerism.

Give new associates some breathing room to take on pro bono work or to volunteer for nonbillable work for the bar association. The Federal Bar Association, for example, is an excellent platform for

a new attorney to begin a career of service in the legal community. New attorneys in the local Minnesota Chapter of the FBA not only have led our Newer Lawyers Committee but also have taken on leadership roles in the chapter's pro bono work and diversity initiatives.

4. Acknowledge that every lawyer—even those with the most experience—learns something new every day.

One of the wonderful things about the practice of law is the continued opportunity to meet new challenges and to grow professionally. Let your associates hear you acknowledge that you are still learning. Confide in them. War stories about your big wins are good; however, there are also great lessons to be learned from battles you have lost.

5. Help create a culture in which attorneys are not afraid to tell you that they made a mistake.

Mistakes happen; we can only hope that they will be minor. But the worst mistake is one that is not identified or disclosed until it is too late. Make sure your associates feel that they are working in an environment where they can report a mistake. Keep an open door.

6. Lead by example when you interact with your adversaries.

Demonstrate how the sometimes faceless practice of law in our technically sophisticated world can still be collegial. Teach new associates to take the high road. Sometimes a strong letter is necessary, but mean-spirited letters and personal attacks are never necessary. Edit inappropriate language from letters and briefs and explain why you made the changes. Your example will help new lawyers remember to think before pressing the "Reply" button and to think twice before pressing the "Reply to All" button.

7. Show your respect for legal staff and teamwork.

Make it clear that your legal administrative staff is important. Publicly recognize the good work the staff performs. Train your new attorneys how to manage staff and to delegate tasks. A positive relationship with administrative personnel will enhance the associate's ability to produce excellent work efficiently.

8. Communicate your commitment to diversity.

Building diversity begins with the recruitment and hiring process. What happens next? Provide equal opportunities to your associates when creating work teams, giving assignments, and helping them network in the legal community. Your actions will teach associates early on that diverse perspectives are important and valuable.

9. Give new associates honest and timely feedback.

It is easy to congratulate someone for a job well done, but it is not always easy to tell people that their work needs some improvement. Do not wait until year-end reviews to tell associates how they can do better. Staying silent does not give new lawyers the chance to improve. Provide timely feedback along the way. Explain how their first draft led to the final work product. Then, take what you learned—together—and apply the lessons to the next project or assignment. More often than not, you will see real improvement.

10. Motivate the new attorneys.

My partner and the chair of our firm's Intellectual Property Litigation Department, Ronald J. Schutz, walks along the halls of our law firm often, stopping by each associate's office, coffee cup in hand, and asking with a smile, "Do you love the law today?" Ron's enthusiasm is contagious. The answer he gets is always "Yes!" Motivate your new colleagues with your enthusiasm for the practice of law. **TFL**

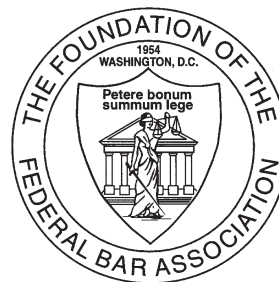
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