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The Best of PALS

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Abstract

Prospective lawyers are not the only ones who lack role models, these days,

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Prospective lawyers are not the only ones who lack role models, these days. Equally serious is the lack of role models that young lawyers find, once they arrive at the firm. Acutely aware of this problem, the Fairweather, Winters & Sommers (FWS) Committee on Associate Retention and Evaluation (CARE) sprang to action recently with this memo from CARE Chair Stephen Falderall.

To: All Partners
From: Stephen I. Falderall, CARE Chair
Re: Membership

Our young associates are floundering. If you doubt this, step outside your office and watch them flopping about in the hall. Not a pretty sight, especially at what we're paying them.

CARE has determined that the major reason for associate floundering is the lack of mentoring that our young associates receive today. Forty years ago, when our firm was ten lawyers, mentoring took place naturally. For the last thirty-five or so years, it hasn't taken place at all.

Recognizing this, CARE adopted the following resolution, 4-3: "RESOLVED that there's no time like the present to do something about the firm's mentoring problem." (Two of those voting 'nay' agreed that it was time that something be done about the problem, but could not in good conscience support the resolution because of their belief that there might yet prove to be another time like the present.) This memo sets forth our new Partner-Associate Liaison Strategy (PALS).

INTRODUCTION

Some partners may approach mentoring with a certain skepticism. "Why," they might ask, "is this necessary? I was able to make it in this

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firm without any sort of formal mentoring program," they might say, "so why can't associates today do the same thing, especially since we pay them so much money and they're supposed to be so damn smart? I'm very busy and I've got a lot of pressures on me—to bill, to develop clients, to write articles, to serve on firm committees, just to name a few," they might add. "Why do you have to dump another responsibility on me? Huh? And," they might continue, "it's not like I'm going to get any credit for this, either. I've got plenty of other things I'd rather do than mentor. Why don't you just leave me alone?" they might conclude.

CARE is happy you were able to get all of that off your chest. Venting is healthy. CARE understands your problems. After all, CARE is composed of partners, too. So now can we get on with mentoring?

ESTABLISHING THE MENTOR-MENTEE RELATIONSHIP

CARE wants to make our mentor system as natural as possible. As we know that many of our partners have not related to anyone—much less somebody a generation younger than them—in a decade or more, we list below several possible ways to greet your mentee:

- RIGHT:** Hello, I'm _____. I'll be your mentor. Any questions?
- OKAY:** Like, hi. I'm like _____. I'll like be your mentor. Do you like have any questions for me?
- WRONG:** Under the recently established PALS program, I have been assigned by CARE to serve as your mentor, a fiduciary position that I am very happy to assume. I would like our relationship to be a very natural one, if that is acceptable to you. Should you have any interrogatories, you should feel free to pose them to me at a mutually convenient time.

Once you have greeted the mentee, you will want to try to break the ice. Set forth below are some icebreakers that you may find helpful:

- ☛ "Do you have much debt, coming out of law school?"
- ☛ "The Grateful Dead are quite a group, aren't they?"
- ☛ "I believe in a supernatural force that created the universe, do you?"
- ☛ "Which wines do you prefer—red, white or pink?"

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- "I'm opposed to the indiscriminate use of nuclear weapons, are you?"
- "How about those Cubs?"
- "How about that Supreme Court?"

Of course, the above are merely suggestions. You should feel free to use them or not, as you see fit. You are trying to establish a bond with your mentee and there are many ways to accomplish that. Use whatever works for you (although CARE discourages bonding by walking down the hall quacking, and requesting your mentee to follow behind you).

CARE knows that it is easier to establish a relationship with somebody with whom you have something in common. Accordingly, we have assigned mentees by height, so that no mentee will be more than two inches taller or shorter than his mentor. Unfortunately, this meant leaving our new 6'7" associate, Rolf Zitz, unmentored. (But chances of anyone relating to Rolf were slim in any case.)