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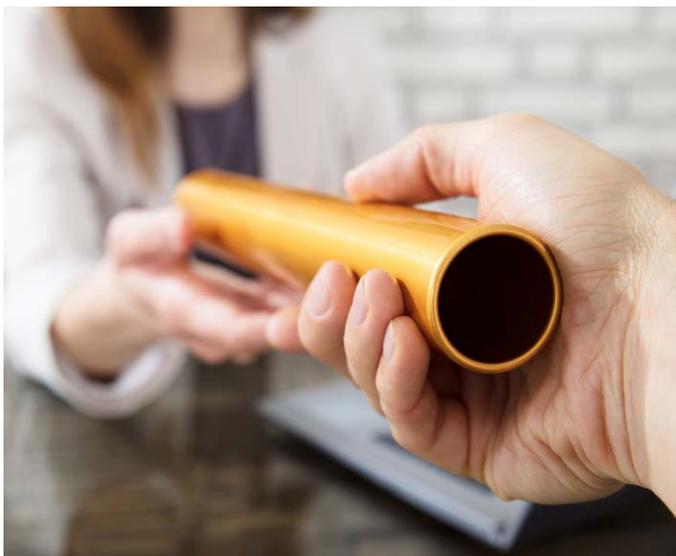
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How Do We Prepare to Pass the Baton? Mentoring Leading to Successful Succession Planning

By Bianca Moreiras



After investing more than three decades working in the legal industry, a person learns a thing or two — what works, what doesn't. And I'd like to think I learned everything I needed to know in kindergarten — like how to share everything, play fair, say you're sorry when you hurt somebody and live a balanced life of work and play.

It sounds simple, and it should be. But as adults we overthink and complicate our world.

When I think back to my success, I recall my mentors. At a young age, my mom and grandparents played a tremendous role in my early formation of thoughts and creativity. As a working adult, the managing partner of my first firm, where I thrived for more than 20 years, helped to form my thought leadership and business mind.

In my early tenure at the firm, I implemented a mentoring program for new associates. As the Executive Director of the firm, I would personally spend three months with each associate,

developing their business etiquette, time and billing habits, systems and programs knowledge, goal-setting understanding, and business development. This proved to be an efficient and effective use of my time. I was laying the foundation to develop excellent associates and our next best partners.

Not every associate will make the cut. Identifying who has it and who doesn't saved our firm a tremendous amount of time, money and client satisfaction. I recall one associate gave notice before the 90 days were up and thanked us for putting him through the associate program. He had learned so much — particularly that he didn't want to be a lawyer (at least not in private practice). Did I mention he had worked at the state attorney's office for eight years?

START EARLY

Finding the right associate who will rise to the occasion starts during the hiring process. Many firms are not thinking about this progressive development, especially when they're recruiting a newly graduated attorney or a lawyer with one to three years' experience. But this is the time to find your next best partner.

When I coach attorneys who are looking to build a book of business, make partner or hang their own shingle, they will suggest that there are no documents or processes in place that spell out what is expected of them to achieve partnership in their firm. But if a firm does not have this information available, it sends a message to your associates that you don't have a plan and that the process is subjective. Not a good way to attract talent.

When hiring a new associate (or any new hire), here are some questions to ask:

1. What one thing do you believe is important to do every day?

If your firm doesn't have a written vision, mission statement or goals, how do you know where you will end up each year? Success is not measured by revenue alone!

2. What has been the most courageous thing you have done in your adult life?
3. What concerns you most in today's world?
4. Right now, what do you think your greatest contribution would be to this firm?

I am sure you are wondering what the correct answers are. The only way you'll know that is if there's a clear, concise direction for where your firm is headed over the next 7 to 10 years. In addition, you should know the current goals the firm is trying to achieve.

If your firm doesn't have a written vision, mission statement or goals, how do you know where you will end up each year? Success is not measured by revenue alone! What about sustainability, employee turnover, client satisfaction and work-life balance? Direction is important. A GPS is only as good as the address you've entered; it cannot bring you to your destination if you don't have the correct information. For those of you who do have a clear vision or mission statement or set goals, check to see that the dynamics

of your firm have not changed. Have the client's needs, the environment, the economics or structure of your firm changed? Knowing where you're going and how you're going to get there is the key to any successful business. ■

ABOUT THE AUTHOR



Bianca Moreiras has been helping law firms achieve success in all areas of their business. She has more than 35 years of law firm experience in operation, mergers and acquisitions, practice area development, cross-selling and marketing. A retreat facilitator, speaker and keynote presenter, she also provides one-on-one coaching and development, specializing in networking and social skills.

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HOW TO CREATE AND IMPLEMENT A SUCCESSFUL MENTOR PROGRAM

Seize the opportunity and ask your firm to attend this year's Annual Conference & Expo in Grapevine, Texas. Bianca Moreiras will present her session, HR10: How to Create and Implement a Successful Mentor Program. It's just one of many courses that will teach all you need to know about developing your next generation of leaders and so much more. Register today: alanet.org/conf19.



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