

# The Legal Link

Summer—Part 1 2017



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# The Legal Link

**MISSION  
STATEMENT**

- Promote and enhance the competence and professionalism of all members of the legal management team;
- Improve the quality of management in law firms and other legal service organizations; and
- Represent professional legal management and managers to the legal community and to the community at large.

## President’s Message

Just four short years ago, in April 2013, I embarked on my law firm adventure. Why was it an “adventure,” you ask? Although I have more than 26 years’ experience in most disciplines of human resources management – and also have experience in corporate, international, information technology, banking, and health care – the law firm environment is. . . well, it’s a little different. This may stem from the business structure itself: partnership versus corporation. It may also be attributable to the organization structure; there is a direct dependency between the attorneys and staff. Maybe advances in technology, and the degree to which they’re embraced, impact the environment. These factors shape perspectives and drive expectations. Law firms are different – not worse, not better – just different.

So *thank goodness* for the **Association of Legal Administrators (ALA)**! Having a group of knowledgeable and experienced law- and business-focused managers I can tap into has been priceless. No matter what my question may be, I can always find a good answer and valuable insight. . . and even someone to jokingly commiserate with.

The Arkansas Chapter of ALA was chartered in 1981, and a charter member is still an active participant. We have several members who have participated in the group for 20 years or more. And we have newer members, like me. We represent small firms, large firms and everything in between. Beyond Arkansas, the international association provides endless resources for help, information, and best practices in the legal industry. If you’re in the legal field, ALA is a gold mine for sound business operations.

And then there are our business partners – both locally and at the national level. They know the legal industry and lend their expertise to support us both as vendors and as additional resources for knowledge and help. They also enable Arkansas ALA members to take advantage of educational opportunities and network on the broader international level. Through the ALA VIP Program, members can take advantage of discounted products and services from nationally-recognized companies like UPS, Principal, and Thomson Reuters. We are grateful for our business partners.

ALA provides an avenue to build strong, symbiotic relationships and support our businesses. As DeAnna Lopez, CLM, SPHR, SHRM-SCP – our regional representative – put it, ALA is legal socialpedia; it connects people to build relationships, exchange ideas, share knowledge, and collaborate. As part of ALA, I get to work with visionaries, leaders, mentors, and friends. I can’t imagine being on my law firm adventure without them, or the ALA organization as a whole!



**Arkansas Chapter  
President  
Jeannie Billingsley**

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# Member Spotlight: Tonya Wallace

**Tell us about your background, where you grew up and then transition into your career.** I was born in upstate New York and moved to Monroe, LA when I was 4. I lived in Louisiana, Florida, and Arkansas by the time I graduated from high school. I attended college in Louisiana, Texas, and finished my degree in psychology at UALR in 1997. I began working in property management at Stephens, Inc. in 1998 and spent a decade there. I knew I was ready to move on when I was offered the job as office manager/bookkeeper at Speed Law Firm.

**Tell us about your family.** I have been married for 19 years to Kirk Wallace, the best partner I could have imagined. Kirk has worked for Union Pacific Railroad for 5 years, and was in sales for the 15 years prior. We have one child, our son Jake. Jake is 14 and a great kid. He loves basketball and his PlayStation. He has, just this year, begun reading for pleasure, even asking me for recommendations on what to read next (this makes me happy!).

**How did you begin your career in the legal field?** Gary Speed, an Executive Suite tenant at the Stephens Building, offered me the job of office manager/bookkeeper at his firm in 2009. His previous office manager of 10 years had decided to stop working. When I accepted his offer, there were only two weeks to train for the position, and I did not have prior bookkeeping experience. It was a very intense learning period! Gary decided to stop practicing law about 5 years later. I had the good fortune to interview with Anderson, Murphy & Hopkins in November 2015. I have never been happier at a job; it is a wonderful place to work.

**How would your attorneys and staff describe you?** Conscientious.

**What is the best professional advice you ever received?** The only thing you can control 100% of the time is your attitude. I've found this to be great advice in all aspects of life.

**What is the most interesting job you ever had?** This one! Next in line would be waitressing at a comedy club in my early 20's.

**What do you like best about being a legal administrator?** Though there are always regular responsibilities to attend to, every day is different. I never know where the next challenge may come from.



**If you weren't a legal administrator, what would you do?** I'd go back to school.

**What is the hardest situation you have had to deal with in your career?** Learning every aspect of managing a small business in two weeks. There are many things that I've learned at AMH that were just as challenging, but I had a lot longer to ask questions.

## Member Spotlight (contd.)

**What are your outside activities?** Reading and just spending time with my family. Once a week, Kirk and I inform Jake it is “Triple F night” (Forced Family Fun). We all sit down to dinner together, play at least one game, and watch a movie or a couple of episodes in a series (we love *The Walking Dead!*).

**My friends describe me as...** Generous.

**My favorite quote is...** “This too shall pass...” It applies well to both the best and worst situations.

**My favorite musical artist is...** It’s too hard to choose just one! I love Dave Matthews and U2.

**A sound or noise I love is...** Children laughing.

**My favorite daydream or fantasy is....** Traveling the world in total luxury.

**My favorite movies are....** *Good Will Hunting*, *Braveheart*, *Tombstone*, *Armageddon*, and *Avatar*.



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# THE MOST FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS ABOUT ACCOUNTS RECEIVABLE MANAGEMENT

## (PART 1)

By: Jake Krocheski,  
President, Client Connection

Every law firm is different, but nearly all of them share common accounts receivable challenges. To help firms address their collection problems, we have compiled a list of the questions we hear most frequently from law firms, and offer our answers.

**Question:** *How should we evaluate our firm's accounts receivable management needs and strategy to ensure we are making progress?*

**Answer:** Ask yourselves – are we doing the right job, or do our processes, policies and procedures exist only on paper or in theory? All firms should take the time and effort to evaluate if they have A/R management best practices in place. The key questions to ask are:

- Do you have the appropriate governance and leadership structure?
- Do you have meaningful reports and information?
- How are the attorneys managing their A/R and are they spending enough time on their collection efforts?
- Do you have the right administrative staff in place, and are they doing the right work the right way?
- Are you measuring their performance by results they are achieving?
- Is the firm regularly collecting its older, difficult A/R?

**Question:** *What role should firm leadership play in A/R management and collection efforts?*

**Answer:** Effective receivables management needs to start from the top. Leadership needs to tell the attorneys to address their collections, but also understand the need sometimes to use other resources to help them achieve results. Start with a self-evaluation to figure out what the firm is doing right and what you could be doing better. Take stock of what you are doing – and why – and evaluate what is and is not working. Look at everything, including how your firm historically has managed its receivables, to determine where changes need to be made based on today's legal profession and how clients pay. Assess whether you have the right people, with the right skills, in place to do the job. This includes both attorneys and A/R staff.

**Question:** *We have policies and procedures for our attorneys to follow. Why are they not working?*

**Answer:** While the financial management sector of a law firm wants to have strong black-and-white procedures that are common in most businesses, there are so many complicated transactions and relationships that do not lend themselves to black-and-white procedures. Have written procedures in place concerning accounts receivable management, and communicate expectations on collections to the attorneys. However, the procedures need to be workable, and there need to be exceptions, which should be monitored closely and not be seen as a way to avoid firm collection policies and rules. Giving too much individual autonomy to the attorneys is often the root of a firm's A/R problems.

Firm leadership must help attorneys understand specific actions to take to ensure payment, give them a time frame for getting accounts collected, and provide the right professional support to help them.

# ACCOUNTS RECEIVABLE MANAGEMENT

## (PART 1 CONTD.)

**Question:** *How can we best overcome the backlog of our older, difficult A/R?*

**Answer:** These receivables must be actively pursued until they are paid or determined to be uncollectable. But do not expect payment without substantial effort on the part of the firm. There must be dedicated efforts, with status reports going to leadership to ensure progress is being made. Typically, firms focus their efforts on those clients that pay timely and avoid working with older accounts because they take time and are often not pleasant to deal with. Consistent follow-up efforts are the key to making progress with these types of accounts.

**Question:** *What kind of A/R management information should we be looking at?*

**Answer:** A/R reports have to give firm leadership real, actionable information; they need to show that collection activity is moving forward and progress is being made on each account. Detailed reports should provide information on whether accounts are actively being pursued, what the payment status is, who is pursuing collections and what success they are having, why clients are not paying, and what steps are being taken to get them to pay.

*Jake Krocheski is President of Client Connections. He has more than 25 years of experience as a management consultant, working with law firms. Client Connection assists law firms of all sizes throughout the United States by furnishing accounts receivable management services and developing practical receivable programs. He can be reached at [jakek@clientci.com](mailto:jakek@clientci.com).*

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# What's New with the Arkansas chapter of ALA?



To promote participation of our non-Little Rock chapter members, we're meeting via video conference! May's meeting took place at the offices of Friday, Eldredge & Clark LLP. Our northwest and northeast Arkansas members are now able to participate in the monthly meeting without having to travel to Little Rock.



**Arkansas Chapter Changing of the Guard** (from left to right): **Connie Straw** (secretary), **Jeannie Billingsley** (president), **Michelle Tyree** (past president), **Michelle Stewart** (president-elect)



# ACCOUNTS RECEIVABLE MANAGEMENT— BREATHING NEW LIFE INTO AGEING RECEIVABLES (PART 2)

By: Jake Krocheski,  
President, Client Connection

Behind most receivables more than 90 days past due is a story about why the account has not been paid – cash flow problems, complicated transactions, and many more. Understand those stories, get to the bottom of them – and you will have a better understanding of how to get paid.

Firms find themselves facing a dilemma. On one hand, they truly want to embrace institutional thinking and run as a business, putting structures and procedures in place and holding people accountable. On the other, they are reluctant to hold the individual attorneys accountable and deprive them of their autonomy because of the different circumstances that impact payment from clients.

It is hard to have clear-cut procedures while poking holes in them with plenty of exceptions. The truth, though, is that your firm must. You need to make it clear to the attorneys and staff – as well as your clients – what your policies and your expectations are. Yet, there needs to be a fair amount of latitude for decisions based on individual client relationships.

To ensure that your receivables are not enjoying a ripe old age, take these steps:

1. Start on the older, harder-to-collect backlog of receivables. It may be necessary to dig deep to understand just how old they are. Many firms do not differentiate between receivables that are 90 days past due and those that are much older. Look to see if there is any recent billing activity on the account, when the last payment was received and for how much. It is surprising how firms continue to do work for clients without considering whether they are paying their bills.
2. When managing the backlog of receivables, look first at your oldest receivables and work your way back to those that are newer.
3. Ask all attorneys to review their clients with outstanding balances and ask them to be truthful. Have them take decisive action: make the collection themselves, get help from the firm's accounts receivable management team or clear the books. The attorneys are best able to assess whether a receivable should be kept on the active list or written off. However, they are often reluctant to follow through with the write-off process. Evaluate each account and determine the likelihood of payment if the firm invests more time and effort to collect. But recognize that when a receivable exceeds 180 days past due, there is only a 50% chance that it will be collected, and the likelihood drops off dramatically after that point. There may be a logical reason why it has not been paid. Perhaps the client does not have the ability to pay. Maybe the attorney has worked out an arrangement with the client whereby he can pay after the matter has been completed. Make sure the responsible attorney communicates what arrangements have been made with each client.

# ACCOUNTS RECEIVABLE MANAGEMENT CONTD.— BREATHING NEW LIFE INTO AGEING RECEIVABLES (PART 2 CONTD.)

By: Jake Krocheski,  
President, Client Connection

4. Urge firm leadership to be decisive and step in to take action. Management must work through receivable issues and not just take the attorney's word for it. Get your arms around the problem by creating – and empowering – a committee.
5. Evaluate the firm's overall collection efforts. Ask yourselves: Did we do the job right, or did our processes and procedures allow receivables to age far longer than they should have? Review the firm's policies and procedures concerning receivables that go beyond 90 days. Determine if policies exist only on paper. Implementation is the key. Do you have the right people in place to move the ball forward, and are they empowered to do so? Many firms receive their older receivables with the goal of determining why accounts have not paid and if they have collection problems. Often they learn they have long had problems, but did not detect them earlier in the ageing process.
6. Make the most of staff whose job is to focus exclusively on receivables. Ensure they have the skills and talents that can help attorneys reduce the backlog of receivables. Also, measure the staff's performance to ensure progress is being made and sufficient time is being devoted to working directly with accounts receivable, as opposed to other administrative duties.
7. Write off the account after all efforts have been exhausted. If efforts have been made to collect that do not bear fruit, accept the fact that there is little chance of getting paid and write it off. If the attorney continues to hold up the write-off process, firm leadership needs to step in and get the account written off.



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# Diversity and Inclusion

Advancing diversity and inclusion in your organization is more than the right thing to do: it’s critical to the success of your business. This new brochure cites facts and studies that demonstrate why your company can’t afford not to consider [Why Diversity? The Business Case for Diversity and Inclusion.](#)

To receive a copy of the brochure, [Why Diversity? The Business Case for Diversity and Inclusion](mailto:michelle.stewart@kutakrock.com), please email Michelle Stewart at michelle.stewart@kutakrock.com. Below is an excerpt from the brochure, **Inclusion=Success**.



### Inclusion = Success

- ◆ Organizations are struggling with recruitment and retention; closely examine the inclusion aspect of the work environment to improve measurements.
- ◆ The best way for a firm to convince women and other diverse attorneys that they can succeed is to have a leadership structure that features attorneys like them. When young diverse lawyers look up, they want to see successful women, black, Latino, Asian and LGBT leaders. They want to know that there’s an opportunity for them, too, to reach that level.
- ◆ Giving diverse attorneys a platform to lead—supported and funded by the firm—may identify and propel a new generation of leaders that reflects demographically what law firm management should be.
- ◆ In most law firms, professional development and diversity and inclusion are separate initiatives. Instead of having committees for both, invite a group of lawyers and professionals from both areas to join an advisory group to share perspective and thoughts—and then ask participants to set a living example for others. While subtle, the minor change can be a powerful way to shift the focus to behavioral outcomes.



*“Diversity is being invited to the party. Inclusion is being asked to dance.”*

- Vernā Myers

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# Tips for Writing Effective Job Descriptions

By: Kylie Ora Lobell  
Freelance Writer

**Assembling a stellar team for your law firm is crucial to your success. With the right partners and support staff, you can ensure that operations will run smoothly and your clients will be satisfied with your service.**

But finding the best team members starts with writing effective job descriptions. If you can articulate your firms' needs and you know exactly what you want in a candidate, you will be able to keep your firm moving forward.

"A well-written job description is an important part of the hiring process," says Charles Volkert, Senior District President at Robert Half Legal, a legal staffing agency. "It outlines the criteria to evaluate potential hires, which can help determine what skills and experience candidates should possess. A job description can be used to form the basis for online job postings and as a guide for consistent candidate assessment when the time comes to review resumes."

When searching for new employees to welcome into your law firm, you need to follow a few guidelines for writing excellent job descriptions. Here's where to start.

## KEY DETAILS

Volkert says to begin with the basic requirements. These include the job title, an overview of the position, clear expectations for the job and detailed descriptions of duties. Also, list the most important functions, job qualifications and specifications, locations, and other relevant details like workplace culture and reporting relationships.

Delia Swan, Founder of Swan Legal Search, specializes in placing partners and associates at firms. She says that if you're looking for lawyers, you should list Juris Doctor (JD) years, academic and bar requirements, and specific practice areas you're seeking out.

In your job descriptions, you need to, "Be as precise as possible in describing what you're looking for, without excluding the possibility of enticing unique candidates whose experience adds up to more than the sum of the parts," says Swan. "For example, while you might want candidates with particular JD years, similar length of experience in the specialty might open you up to more seasoned attorneys who shifted gears during their careers."

To appeal to attractive candidates — whether they are support staff, partners or associates — you should highlight exclusive perks of the position and interesting benefits that come with working for your firm.





# Tips for Writing Effective Job Descriptions (contd.)

“Include sizzle points about your company or firm [and] think about what makes the position or company/firm unique,” says Amanda Ellis, Senior Vice President at Special Counsel, which provides legal staffing and recruiting services. “The sizzle could include unique benefits or perks, such as on-site massage therapy or pet insurance. Or, [the] sizzle could be a detail about the position, such [as the] opportunity to support the managing partner or [the] opportunity to support the practice group leader.”

The particulars about company culture may seem small, but in the grand scheme of things, they’ll help you recruit only the most appealing prospects. “We find that candidates are attracted to firm culture as much as prestige,” says Swan. “Today’s best candidates are often looking for a life experience that brings more breath to their resumes. You benefit, then, from attracting more thoughtful and mature lawyers.”

## THE STRUCTURE

After you’ve determined the content of your job descriptions, you have to then follow the best practices for all the technical details.

Volkert says you need to use a conversational tone as well as action words to describe the position, the skills and capabilities required, and the key responsibilities. “Employers should use concise language, but provide specific and detailed information. Use search-friendly keywords that will maximize viewing by increasing numbers of online job seekers and applicants.”

According to Ellis, shorter is better, and the descriptions should be 150 to 500 words. That’s because many candidates will be reading the descriptions on their mobile devices while on the go. She also suggests avoiding long paragraphs, and to use an opening paragraph followed by one to three sections with headings and bullet points. Another best practice is to write in second person using “you” and “your” to personalize the posting.

At all costs, you need to avoid using technical jargon, acronyms, buzzwords and abbreviations, says Volkert. It’s also crucial to go over the job description and make sure that there isn’t any language that could be considered discriminatory. When you’re formatting the description, keep it simple, and don’t feel the need to include large images that will take a long time for mobile users to download, he notes.

Aside from incorporating those search engine optimization-friendly keywords, you can make your job listing stand out by writing an article on LinkedIn about it, says Ellis.

In her own LinkedIn article, where she aimed to hire attorney recruiters, she started off the piece with conversational questions like, “Are you an attorney who is ready to leave the practice of law?” and “Do you enjoy attending networking events?” She then included some basics about the job and pictures of employees enjoying each other’s company. It served as a way to highlight the work culture, too.

## SAMPLES TO GET YOU STARTED

After you figure out all the technical and structural details of your job descriptions, you can look to other firms and legal staffing agencies to see what they included in their own descriptions. Then, you can use what you learned in your own listings. (For links to these, checkout the digital version of this article found in *Legal Management*, June 2017 edition.)

## Tips for Writing Effective Job Descriptions (contd.)

For example, in a job description on the Robert Half website for an administrator/office manager, the recruiter started with the responsibilities of the job, the required experience, and whom the candidate would report to in a short paragraph. Then, in bulleted form, the recruiter listed some of the typical duties that would be required of the candidate.

Robert Half also provides firms with a list of the U.S. glossary of legal job descriptions that they can use in their own efforts. The guide includes everything from job descriptions for law firm attorneys, litigation support staff, legal specialists and general administrative employees.

On Swan Legal, a job description for a bankruptcy associate is comprised of a summary of the job in a small paragraph up top, bullet points including the typical responsibilities, and additional bullet points for the on-paper qualifications like having a JD, being a member of the bar in California, and practicing bankruptcy law for at least four years at a private firm. There are also personality qualifications, such as possessing the ability to multitask as well as being able to work on a team.

### MAKE YOUR WORDS COUNT

Effective job descriptions can transform your firm by attracting only the top candidates. Volkert says they have many uses beyond their initial purpose when it comes to hiring procedures.

“Written effectively, job descriptions serve as a valuable resource for many audiences and across a variety of functions,” he says. “To name a few functions, job descriptions can be a comprehensive resource to advise job candidates about details and requirements of a position or serve as an objective guide to assist hiring managers during the recruitment and interview process.”

### ABOUT THE AUTHOR

**Kylie Ora Lobell** is a freelance writer living in Los Angeles. She covers legal issues, blogs about content marketing and reports on Jewish topics. She’s been published in *Tablet Magazine*, *NewsCred*, *The Jewish Journal of Los Angeles* and [CMO.com](http://CMO.com).



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# Modern Mentoring

## How to Create Effective Mentoring Programs for Today's Law Firm

By: Mary Kate Sheridan  
Writer, Editor and Attorney

**Lunch, small talk, repeat: This recipe for formal mentoring has been the mainstay at many law firms. But with Millennials now claiming the majority of associate positions, it is time for law firms to up the mentoring ante.**

As Thomson Reuters' Legal Department 2025 survey indicates: "Mentors, as well as work/life balance, are strongly valued by Millennials. The importance they ascribe to both mentorship and work/life balance reflects the emphasis Millennials place on relationships." In fact, the 2016 Deloitte Millennial Survey found that Millennials would like to receive more than three hours of coaching and mentoring in an ideal work week.

Given the current focus on mentoring, firms should assess the effectiveness of their programs or consider creating a mentoring strategy if one is not in place. Simply making mentoring matches is not enough — administrators must carefully plan, customize and engage to create successful mentoring programs.

"I think people underestimate what it takes to make mentoring happen," says Rik Nemanick, PhD, Co-Founder and Principal of the consulting firm The Leadership Effect. "Recognize that it looks easy on the surface but it's one of those things that you really have to put time and thought into to get it right."

This article will offer advice on developing an effective mentoring program, including establishing clear objectives, providing guidance and structure, and shaping the program in innovative ways to meet your attorneys' needs.

### CREATE CLEAR OBJECTIVES

As with any initiative, mentoring programs require concrete goals. But establishing objectives is twofold, as both the firmwide program and the individual mentoring relationship require specific aims. Failing to have well-planned objectives is the biggest downfall to a mentoring program, according to Ida Abbott, Founder and Principal of Ida Abbott Consulting.

"Even with the best of intentions people are busy and distracted in so many ways that without clear instructions and some method of accountability, it is difficult to follow through," says Abbott.

When determining the goals on the program level, Abbott suggests that administrators consider the following three questions:

- What do we want to achieve?
- Can mentoring help the firm achieve this objective?
- How can we implement the mentoring process to achieve that objective?

Ultimately the program goals will depend on what the firm is hoping to accomplish through its mentoring program, which may include retaining associates, promoting career development, boosting associate confidence, leadership grooming, coaching on business development, etc. Whatever the objectives, firms should take time to clearly specify them and use them to shape the program.

## Modern Mentoring (contd.)

Similarly, each mentoring pair should create its own plan and goals. "It needs to be written down somewhere, and then a year later you can go back and see if you've achieved it," says Abbott "If you don't have any desired outcome, how are you going to know if you succeeded?"

The key question that Abbott suggests each team ask is: What will be different for the mentee and mentor at the conclusion of the program?

### OFFER GUIDANCE AND SUPPORT

Once a firm has established clear goals for its mentoring program, administrators should provide training and resources to help attorneys optimize the relationship. Below are some ways in which the firm can support mentoring relationships.

- 1. Teach attorneys how to be mentors and mentees.** Through training, attorneys can learn how to harvest the mentoring relationship to its full potential. Nemanick recommends preparing mentors in four key areas: 1) How to initiate a mentorship; 2) How to approach the role; 3) How set goals; and 4) How to launch the mentoring partnership.

But it is not just the mentors who need training; Nemanick also suggests preparing mentees to develop their career goals and to focus on this larger picture within the mentoring relationship rather than concentrating on how to be a lawyer.

Also useful is to share best practices in mentoring with both the mentor and mentee, says Kristy Weathers, Professional Development Partner at Eversheds Sutherland (US) LLP. From big-picture items — like successfully forging the relationship — to small behaviors — like being thankful and mindful of each other's time — these best practices can help attorneys shape their relationship from the start. At Eversheds Sutherland (US), attorneys use these best practices to create an agreement on how the mentoring relationship will operate and move forward.

- 2. Provide structure.**

Another valuable tool in fostering successful mentoring relationships is offering guidance to the mentoring teams.

"Administrative oversight is helpful," says Weathers. "We give [mentors] a cheat sheet for different [approaches] to check in [with the mentees] and a list of activities they can do with that mentee."

Similarly, at Baker, Donelson, Bearman, Caldwell & Berkowitz, PC, the professional development department prepares plans with suggested discussion topics and activities for mentoring pairs to use. "Once a month, I send out an email to mentors and mentees with a topic of the month," says Susan S. Wagner, Director of Professional Development and of Counsel at Baker Donelson.

This kind of structure is useful for time-strapped attorneys who may not have an extra hour to plan a worthwhile meeting but can add a lot of value to a mentoring relationship. Such guidance also enables the mentees' voices to be heard when they may otherwise be hesitant to suggest points of interest.

## Modern Mentoring (contd.)

For example, Eversheds Sutherland's (US) professional development committee seeks out topics of interest from associates and then frames the mentoring meetings with those topics. The committee seeks to make the topics engaging and relevant. "It really doesn't take that much effort and it makes a huge difference," says Weathers.

### 3. Check in with each pair

Finally, when it comes to managing an effective mentoring program, legal management professionals should check in with both the mentor and the mentee separately to gauge how the relationship is working.

"We do [a] check in after each quarterly meeting to make sure everything is going okay," says Weathers. By following up with the associates, Weathers can determine if there are any gaps in the mentoring relationship, and if need be, assist the associate in making additional mentoring connections within the firm.

### INNOVATE YOUR MENTORING APPROACH

Once a firm has determined its goals and how it will manage a mentoring program, it then must decide what kind of mentoring program will best advance its associates. Firms may consider the following innovative approaches when developing or revamping their program.

#### *OFFER MENTORING BY APPLICATION ONLY*

A fresh way to think about a formal mentoring program is only to offer it to those associates who are truly ready for it.

"One of the things I try to teach people is to think of a mentor's time as a precious resource. How do you want to spend it?" says Nemanick.

Rather than pushing some associates into mentoring relationships that they won't value or maximize, firms can offer mentoring through a formal application process, says Nemanick. Through a program like this, associates who want a mentor would submit an application, and a committee would determine which of the applicants are best suited for the mentoring program at that time.

"If you're not willing to fill out an application, you're probably not going to make good use of a mentor's time," says Nemanick. "The return on mentoring is going to go up a lot."

According to Nemanick, an application process may encourage associates to ruminate on their goals and take ownership over their careers. Potential topics for the application may include career goals, general career trajectory, and how a mentor could help an associate reach his or her goals.

#### *FOCUS ON CAREER DEVELOPMENT*

Firms use mentoring for a variety of reasons — including skill building, networking, providing an open door for questions and more. But one way to approach mentoring is to tailor it specifically to career development.

A mentor is a valuable resource for "sitting down with someone and helping them really understand what they want out of a career and what is going to make them feel fulfilled," says Nemanick.



## Modern Mentoring (contd.)

At Eversheds Sutherland (US), associates engage in the Career Planning Program after their first year at the firm. Each associate is assigned a partner mentor with whom they develop a career plan and meet quarterly, says Weathers. The firm provides career planning guidelines, which are tailored to each practice group, as well as firmwide guidelines, which delineate areas that associates should strive to develop. "It's not intended to be a checklist, but it gives you a framework," says Weathers. She further indicates that topics like business development, committee development and pro bono are among the areas included.

### **MENTOR ASSOCIATES IN GROUPS**

Group mentoring offers an interesting dynamic through which mentors work with several or more associates. Through this type of mentoring, a group may meet to discuss a particular topic, engage in a dialogue together on a variety of issues, or work on the same type of assignment, says Abbott.

Another way to implement group mentoring is to assign the same mentor or adviser to a group of associates. Baker Donelson operates a unique type of group mentoring through its "Adviser" program. In addition to individual mentors, associates in their first three and a half years of practice are assigned to an adviser to provide a second level of mentoring. Advisers are shareholders who are responsible for up to about eight associates in their offices. They are open to answering associates' questions, provide an informal midyear evaluation and solicit feedback on how the associates are doing. Additionally, some advisers gather their group of associates to meet together.

"The Adviser program has worked so well," says Wagner. "It [has] been a huge success on so many levels." Not only does the Adviser program provide an extra form of mentoring to associates, but it has served as a useful "incubator" for future leaders within the firm, says Wagner.

According to Wagner, the key to ensuring that this type of program works is to "look for someone who is very firm-minded — [someone] who is keenly interested in helping the firm and helping the associates to be successful."

### **MAKING IT WORK**

An effective mentoring program requires clear objectives, meticulous planning and consistent support. Also important is that the firm chooses an approach that is tailored to its needs, which may require thinking outside of the box.

#### **ABOUT THE AUTHOR**

**Mary Kate Sheridan** is a writer and attorney with a JD from Columbia Law School and a BA in writing from Mary Washington College. She is currently pursuing her MFA in Creative Writing at The New School.



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Ultimately, the formal mentoring program should provide associates with the foundation and connections to forge additional mentoring opportunities as they continue in their career.

"Ideally you want the mentoring support they get in the program and the experience they get in the firm [to] allow them to build a team of mentors who can help them in different ways," says Abbott.

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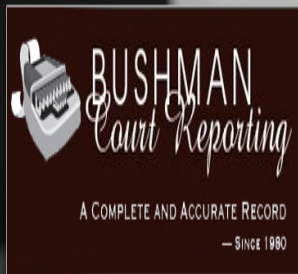
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						1
2	3	4 July 4th Holiday	5	6 ALA Webinar: A Profession on Notice: The Ethical and Liability Case for Why Law Firms Must Get Serious About Substance	7	8
9	10	11	12 Business Meeting	13	14	15
16	17 Barbara Bennett's Birthday	18	19 ALA Webinar: Better Self-Management Through Type Cathy Dille's	20 Chapter Leadership Institute (Minneapolis, MN)	21 Chapter Leadership Institute (Minneapolis, MN)	22 Chapter Leadership Institute (Minneapolis, MN)
23	24	25	26	27	28	29
30	31					

# August 2017

Sun	Mon	Tue	Wed	Thu	Fri	Sat
		1	2 <b>Julia Strickland's Birthday</b>	3 <u>ALA Webinar:</u> Mindful Mentoring  Large Firm Principal Administrators Retreat (Boston,	4  Large Firm Principal Administrators Retreat (Boston, MA)	5  Large Firm Principal Administrators Retreat (Boston, MA)
6	7	8	9 Business Meeting	10	11	12 <b>Angela Falco's Birthday</b>
13	14	15	16 <u>ALA Webinar:</u> Attorney and Matter Profitability	17 National Seminars Training— How to Supervise People (Fayetteville, AR)	18 National Seminars Training— How to Supervise People (Little Rock, AR)	19
20	21	22 <b>Terri Dickinson's Birthday</b>	23	24	25	26
27	28	29	30	31		

# September 2017

Sun	Mon	Tue	Wed	Thu	Fri	Sat
					1 <b>Marie Ray's</b>	2
3	4	5	6	7 <u>ALA Webinar:</u> Finding the Balance Between Technology and Real Estate  Region 4, 5, 6 Legal Management Conference (Las Vegas)	8  Region 4, 5, 6 Legal Management Conference (Las Vegas)	9  Region 4, 5, 6 Legal Management Conference (Las Vegas)
10	11	12	13  Business Meeting  <b>Diane Smith's</b>	14	15	16
17	18	19  <b>Tonya Wallace's Birthday</b>	20 <u>ALA Webinar:</u> The Mindful Law Office: Strategies for Reducing Attorney Stress and Improving Productivity	21	22  <b>Michelle Tyree's Birthday</b>	23
24 <b>Michelle Stewart's Birthday</b>	25	26	27	28	29	30



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