

Mapping Her Path

Mentoring Newsletter

1st Edition



What is mentoring?



It means different things at different stages of your career. When I was younger, I think it meant finding someone who I could look up to and respect. [Someone] that I thought enjoyed their life as a lawyer and also had a personal life, and taught me technique and the tools of the trade as to how to be a lawyer. When I think about mentoring now, I think it's about supporting younger lawyers, for me, particularly women in a male-dominated industry, to get them to be able to move higher up the food chain and into leadership positions.

~ Rachel Mockler

Vice President, Legal at Flatiron Construction

Why is mentoring important, especially for female lawyers?

In BC, women have accounted for about 50% of all law graduates over the past decade, however only around 36% of practicing lawyers in private practice are female, with an even smaller percentage in partner positions.

Having women in visible leadership positions not only promotes a culture where advancement is based on merit rather than gender, but also encourages junior female lawyers to aspire to such positions. Mentorship is instrumental in retaining young female lawyers in the profession, and subsequently in developing more leadership positions for women.

The [*Justicia Guide to Women's Leadership in Law Firms*](#) discusses the value of women's leadership and identifies several practical strategies for advancing and supporting women leaders.

In 2015, [*Mapping Her Path*](#) conducted a survey that collected the viewpoints of 400 BC women lawyers in BC. They described their aspirations and excitement about the profession, their struggles to manage career transitions, be taken seriously in their workplaces and how the demands of family and motherhood compete with the demands of a legal career.

Women continue to face unconscious and sometimes systemic bias in the workplace. In the Mapping Her Path survey, respondents reported alarming levels of workplace sexual harassment (35%) and described their disappointment as they made career decisions driven by the inflexibility of the private firm model.

Learn more about their challenges in the [*Mapping Her Path Needs Assessment Report*](#) and [*The Glass Ceiling for BC Lawyers*](#) article in the December '17 issue of BarTalk.

Debunking mentoring myths

We asked some top BC lawyers if they agreed with these common assumptions about mentoring:

MYTH: Mentoring is only needed at the start of your career

Someone can benefit from a mentor at all stages of their career. I'd like to think the Chief Justice probably says she has a mentor or two. Whether you are a first year associate or articling student, or the most senior partner in a 600 person firm, I suspect everyone can point to someone who is their quiet sounding board, their person, and that's valuable. You should never feel afraid to reach out and ask for help at any stage of your career.

Miranda Lam, Partner, McCarthy Tétrault LLP

MYTH: You only need one career mentor

From my experience, that's really not the case. It's taken a village to get me through law school and practicing, and it's a whole bunch of different mentors. Someone who's a peer, someone who's in your practice area whom you look up to, someone who's senior at the bar who you can go to with ethics or professional questions, and then someone you can help out. It's not just one relationship that makes you successful and supports you.

Christine Murray, Cassels Murray Family & Estates Law

MYTH: Mentoring is too much of a time commitment

I typically meet with my mentee about once every 4-6 weeks for a dinner, lunch or coffee meeting, whatever works best. The other time commitment is regular email and phone calls as issues arise. Again, this is infrequent and usually relatively short. A part of my practice is also to send out regular check-in emails. So all in all, I certainly haven't found that a mentoring relationship takes up an unacceptable amount of time.

Joan Gordon, Arbitration,
Mediation & Dispute Resolution Services

MYTH: Mentoring needs to be a formal relationship

Mentoring is more than that, it's multi-faceted. Sometimes an interaction over lunch, coffee or some unexpected interaction can have as big an impact on the person you're speaking to as a formal mentoring relationship can. So what I would say to people is to look for those opportunities. It's about being genuine in your interest [in] other people, about really listening and responding on a human level based on your own experience.

Carmen Theriault, Partner,
Norton Rose Fulbright LLP

MYTH: To have a successful mentoring relationship, you need to find your perfect match

I talk to a lot of mentoring partners at the outset of a formal mentoring program, and I find that the most reassuring thing to say is 'chances are, this isn't going to be the love of your life.' Most of us, over the course of our careers have, if we're lucky, perhaps 2 or 3 people who were instrumental in helping us find our path and vision, who gave us a big opportunity, who saw us through that dark time. They're meant to be rare - that yoda-like character. It's important to remember that most of our supportive relationships are more modest than that. Think of your formal mentoring program as a skills program, one which you enter to gain support and learn how to work with someone to get that support. So don't feel upset if you haven't made a deep connection, you can still get a lot out of the experience.

Andrea (Verwey) Rayment, Professional Development
Director, Clark Wilson LLP

For more on Mentorship:

Read LAWPRO Magazine's [Mentoring 101](#)

Learn from mentoring match [Ron MacPhee and Heather Williams](#)

Be inspired by these [influential B.C. women](#) who are supporting and encouraging women at all stages of their careers, striving to level the playing field in what is still a man's world.