Proskauer

# Why Mentoring Matters: Proskauer's Brianna Reed

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*In our "Why Mentoring Matters" series, Proskauer tax associate Brianna Reed shares how participating in the firm's Women's Sponsorship Program led her to meet and learn from a partner mentor in a different practice group. This experience has allowed her to be more vulnerable and open about sharing personal life stories and asking general career-related questions.*

When I was assigned a "sponsor" through Proskauer's Women's Sponsorship Program earlier this year, an initiative where senior partners are selected to serve as advisors and advocates for mid- and senior-level women lawyers, I was both excited and apprehensive.

I had concerns about whether I would be able to forge a successful connection with a mentor with whom I did not already have an established working relationship, and questioned whether I would be able to speak honestly and freely with someone I was just getting to know.

Mentorship has always been central to my progression at various stages throughout my life. From serving as a mentor to others in the Minds Matter and Big Brother Big Sister organizations, to being supported by practicing attorneys both inside and outside of Proskauer and at the Massachusetts Bar Association, both my mentor and mentee experiences have been immeasurably influential to my development. I wanted this experience to be no different.

At Proskauer, organic mentoring relationships are encouraged, and I had found mentors in the tax department over the course of my four years at the firm. My sponsor for the Women's Sponsorship Program, Camille Higonnet, a corporate partner at the firm, had been a participant in the same program earlier in her career. I knew that if I was going to be successful in the program, I had to trust the program's method of assigned pairings and not hold back on sharing with Camille.

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**Personal Information Can Kick-Start a Connection**

In our first assignment for the Women's Sponsorship Program, all 15 protégé and sponsor pairs were each tasked with crafting a life map using drawings, pictures, words, phrases, and details about pivotal life moments, starting with our early years and progressing through adulthood into the present day. Our life maps included seminal events in our lives and career paths, and lessons learned along the way.

This assignment allowed us to share more personal information than we typically would feel comfortable sharing in a professional environment, but it was exactly the push we needed to help kick-start a close connection, as the life map was only to be shared between protégé and sponsor.

During this exercise, I revealed that a close family member of mine had struggled with addiction and homelessness. This experience had been deeply impactful on my life, but it was not something I had previously shared with any colleagues. However, I felt comfortable sharing this during an exercise where we were encouraged to do so.

Not only was Camille a gracious listener, she also helped to contextualize my dedication to volunteering and pro bono work with my experience.

At a later meeting with Camille, we discussed how my volunteer activities could prove to be a central piece of my professional network and could even ultimately increase awareness and support for the organizations that are important to me. This is a connection I would not have made had I not decided to share this part of my life with my mentor.

It became clear that my willingness to be vulnerable could accelerate the growth of our mentoring relationship and could lead to positive results. This is a lesson I intend to take with me to other current, as well as future, mentorships, both as a mentee and a mentor.

Camille and I continued to meet at least every two weeks, sometimes more frequently if the program required. Having established a personal rapport with Camille through the life map exercise, I felt comfortable addressing other sensitive matters, like feedback from annual reviews, which led to one of the most helpful conversations we have had to date.

I was frustrated over the abstract nature of feedback to increase my confidence in my work product. Prior to speaking with Camille about this issue, I struggled to glean tangible steps I could take to make progress in my work.

She was able to reframe the way I should approach the comments, explaining that I should interpret them not as criticism, but rather as a form of encouragement and an opportunity to be intentional about demonstrating confidence in myself. In addition to reframing the feedback in a way that clicked for me, hearing this message from an objective third party was meaningful. I have found myself becoming more assured in my work as a result, taking lead on calls with clients and not hesitating to propose courses of action on projects.

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**My advice to associates is to pursue every opportunity to be mentored that is available to you, regardless of how the opportunity presents itself or what stage you are at in your career. Challenge yourself to build connections with attorneys outside of your own practice group. By doing so, an unlikely mentor may be able to provide new perspective needed for both professional and personal growth.**

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I later learned that Camille's insight on processing and implementing feedback was advice that she had learned from one of her mentors. To me, this was clear-cut evidence that mentoring relationships can come full circle.

**Take Advantage of Every Mentorship Opportunity**

Some might find arranged mentor-mentee pairings artificial, but that has not been my experience. If not for this experience, I would not have had the opportunity to develop a relationship with Camille naturally, as my other mentoring relationships at the firm have grown out of connections from within my practice group, the tax department.

Mentorship from partners within my group has been immensely helpful, but I have gained a fresh perspective from having a mentor in the corporate practice group. The close working relationship between corporate attorneys and tax attorneys in our group is an integral component of our practice and servicing our clients effectively.

While I had to push myself to open up during this experience, I am already seeing positive effects. Not only did I receive advice that gave me the confidence to grow in my career, but I also found inspiration to keep paying it forward.

My advice to associates is to pursue every opportunity to be mentored that is available to you, regardless of how the opportunity presents itself or what stage you are at in your career. Challenge yourself to build connections with attorneys outside of your own practice group.

You may find that it is easier to be open and vulnerable with those practicing at a distance. By doing so, an unlikely mentor may be able to provide new perspective needed for both professional and personal growth.

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