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SUSAN SALTONSTALL DUNCAN ■ TIPS & TACTICS FOR NEW LAWYERS

Benefit From Good Working Relationships

The practice of law often draws individuals who enjoy independence and autonomy. In the workplace, however, success and satisfaction most frequently result from interdependent approaches. Many relationships will affect your career. Important people will include mentors, supervisors and those whom you supervise. Each relationship offers an opportunity to grow and contribute to the success of your work.

Find good mentors. Find, build and capitalize on good mentor relationships. Formulate your goals and expectations and determine in what areas you want advice. Substantive legal issues? Business development skills? Leadership skills? Research, identify and observe potential mentors by attending internal meetings and other events. Talk to lawyers in the firm. Think about those you have worked with on projects. If need be, look outside your firm. Once you've identified a few prospective mentors, approach them and explore the potential for a commitment.

Learn from supervisors. Ask your supervising lawyer whether what you delivered was adequate or whether additional work is needed. Ask to see the end result of your work product so you can learn if and how your work was incorporated into a document or strategy. If your supervisor is too busy, or reluctant,

to give you candid and constructive feedback, seek input from a mentor.

Be a team player. Don't let the drive to be independent or compete with your peers prevent you from developing good, collaborative working relationships. Brainstorm with others about client matters and solutions, marketing and other firm initiatives. Offer help as often as you ask for it.

Manage projects well. Those with whom you work on projects—your secretary, paralegal and others—can enhance your ability to serve your internal and external clients. Give your project team a context by sharing information about the client and the matter. Ask for their ideas on producing work more efficiently. Develop an organizational chart of team members, roles and contact information. Clearly communicate and prioritize assignments, deadlines and expectations, checking that your priorities don't conflict with others that your team members may have.

Look for new relationships. Keep your eyes and ears open to all of the many people who can teach, help, guide and support you. Your success will depend on the collaborative relationships you build.



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Checklist

How to Build Good Working Relationships

- Don't wait for a mentor to be formally assigned to you. Proactively seek out people you respect and with whom you have things in common. Some of the best mentor-mentee relationships evolve out of work assignments or because there is mutual interest and chemistry between two individuals.
- Respect the time you spend with mentors and supervisors. Be prepared when meeting with them, and don't overstep time boundaries.
- Respond promptly to phone messages and e-mails from supervising lawyers and others. Communicate regularly about the status of your projects and other efforts.
- Become an avid listener and observer to better understand others' needs and perspectives. Find opportunities to offer something in return.
- Be a mentor to others. It will help you hone your leadership skills and allow you to give back to others.
- Earn and build trust, respect and credibility with colleagues by being reliable, timely, accessible and responsive. These traits form the foundation of all meaningful relationships.