

Community-Building: More than Mentoring

The Association for Women Lawyers values the connections it helps women lawyers create and the community it helps to build. Mentoring is more than the traditional one relationship between two people; it is building broader communities of connected people.

BY KRISTA G. LAFAVE

I am proud to preside over the Association for Women Lawyers (AWL) as we celebrate our 50th anniversary this year. Over these decades, AWL has worked to support the community of women lawyers in the greater Milwaukee area and throughout Wisconsin. Early on in AWL's history, the organization met monthly to connect women lawyers. Over time, these morphed into different types of events, and AWL no longer holds monthly membership-wide meetings.

AWL's board has spent the past year working on strategic planning to determine where we currently fit in the legal world and how we can better serve our members. The overwhelming feedback is that AWL is valued for the connections it helps women lawyers create and the community it helps to build. The AWL board is currently fine-tuning our strategic plan. Key to our plan is to continue to provide community-building opportunities for women lawyers, through formal mentoring events and informal membership events.

Typically, we think of mentoring as a one-on-one relationship: one person is the mentor, and one is the mentee. Law schools, lawyer organizations, and some firms host formal mentoring events where mentees try to find mentors to help them throughout their career, and mentors seek to impart their wisdom to the next generation of lawyers. One of AWL's flagship events is our mentoring event with Marquette University Law School's AWL student group. It is always one of my favorites! However, mentoring does not always take that form. It's important to think broadly about mentoring, especially because we do not all

have a traditional mentor-mentee relationship. Perhaps it is better to think of mentoring as community-building.

When I reflect on my legal career, I cannot say that I have had one mentor in the traditional sense. I doubt I am alone in my experience. I have come to realize I have many mentors in different parts of my life and legal practice. Thanks to clerking for the Milwaukee County Circuit Court, I made deep connections with judges. In my full-time personal injury practice, I can call on multiple lawyers for thoughts and advice. Thanks to joining AWL, I have connected with many women lawyers who I consider to be mentors. As a municipal court judge, multiple seasoned judges have taught me best practices and inspired me with how they run their courts. It turns out that, while I may not have been building one mentor relationship over these years, I have been building a community.

Whether you connect strongly with one person as your mentor or invest in relationships with multiple people, the end goal is the same: support. Each of us has the capacity to provide support to other lawyers, and I urge you to reflect on those who have helped you and those you help along the way. Take a moment to reflect on the community you have built. **WL**



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