



CAALA President

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Being a mentor is a big reason why CAALA is special

CAALA OFFERS A MEMBERSHIP PROGRAM THAT'S QUITE A BIT DIFFERENT FROM ANY OTHER ASSOCIATION'S PROGRAM

Those of you who know me well or have read my columns in *Advocate* know that, for me, one of the most rewarding aspects of being CAALA's president is the amount of time I get to spend with members. I thoroughly enjoy listening to the varying issues and questions members have and giving advice and suggestions to people when they ask for help. It's not something that I'm obligated to do, just something that's part of who I am because of my professional and personal experiences.

Recently, a CAALA member asked to meet with me for lunch. When we met she had a list of issues she wanted to talk about. After lunch she thanked me for spending time with her and complimented me for being such a good mentor. That was a very big compliment, and I appreciated hearing it. Truthfully though, it never occurred to me to put that label on my interest in spending time giving advice, and I never thought of myself as being a mentor. I just enjoy sharing my life and professional experience with people eager to learn from another's experiences. But after doing some thinking and some research, I found that that's exactly the definition of a mentor. The Oxford English Dictionary's definition of a mentor is "an experienced and trusted person who gives another person advice and help especially related to work or school over a period of time." Merriam-Webster's definition is that a mentor is "a trusted counselor or guide."

I have been very lucky in my life to have people who took an interest in me and served as mentors, even if I didn't realize at the time what they were doing. When I was growing up, my mom was my biggest mentor and was the most important figure in my life, giving me advice and teaching me valuable lessons. As I got older I became involved in high school sports, playing linebacker on my high school football team in Connecticut. I was lucky that I had a high school football coach that took the time to give me advice and teach me many things, forty-plus years ago, that I remember today. They

weren't just lessons about how to be a better linebacker, they were lessons about how to be a better person.

Later, as college was coming to an end and I was considering a career in the military, I was fortunate again to have someone in my life who had observed me in various situations – which told him to convince me to go to law school. He did and here I am today. He was more than just a professor and a friend: he was a mentor, a trusted person who gave me some of the best advice of my life. Once I started my career as a trial lawyer, there were many attorneys who took the time to give me advice about how to build my practice and how to become the best lawyer I could be. I got so much from them – that's one reason why being a mentor to others is so important to me.

I don't think that I'm alone, that's the way most CAALA members feel. To see this, all you have to do is attend a mixer, go on the CAALA List Serve or attend a Case Collaboration roundtable. Those are examples of CAALA members mentoring other members by giving advice and suggestions. I know most CAALA members do the same thing that I do, and I've come to realize that "mentoring" is a big part of CAALA's culture and is probably the biggest thing that separates us from other legal associations and organizations.

I don't say this as a CAALA President sound-bite. I say it from decades as a CAALA member and years in leadership of this great organization. In that time, I've met many members and leaders of other legal organizations and associations. When I talk with them, I sometimes bring up examples of how mentoring is such a big part of CAALA. Most of the time they are surprised, and I've learned that being a mentor is not as important for other organizations as it is for CAALA. It's just one more thing that makes CAALA unique and special.

Since I've been CAALA's president, I have seen many examples of why it's important for us to give our time answering questions and giving advice. It's what I do every time I speak to a group of

CAALA members. Typically, I will listen to their questions – identify where they want help – and try and share my experiences. Many times, the practice of law is not the main topic – I will spend time discussing how to balance work and family and how to grow as a person outside of the practice of law.

I want to give you one other example. Everyone knows how proud I am of CAALA's Plaintiff Trial Academy, which just graduated its fifth class. What you may not know is that since the beginning of the year, we have invited previous PTA graduates to get together periodically and talk about their professional and personal experiences in an informal, casual setting. I get a lot of pleasure sitting in these sessions and providing advice and suggestions. I didn't think of it as mentoring, but that's exactly what happens. I've noticed at those meetings of PTA grads how they connect with each other, providing tips and suggestions. In other words, they have become mentors to each other.

CAALA's Mentorship Program

CAALA has a vibrant Mentorship program and it's exactly the same as what I have seen with the PTA grads. The CAALA Mentorship program is about members providing advice and suggestions to each other. CAALA's Membership Director Liz Hagan administers our Mentorship Program and as of this month, 562 CAALA members have participated in the program as mentors or mentees. The program includes attorneys and law students, but it's quite a bit different from any other association's mentorship program. Visit: <https://www.caala.org/index.cfm?pg=mentor>.

What makes it different is the fact that the structure is determined by the participants and is organic; once the members are connected they decide how best to work with each other. Members can also join the program and serve as both a mentor or someone who wants mentoring; a lot of people volunteer to

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be both. It's also not just older members giving advice to younger members. You might find a member with 30 years' experience who is trying a new practice area and asks for a mentor to give him advice and suggestions. Sometimes a new lawyer prefers to talk with another new lawyer to learn about their experiences. The program is based on the needs of the people who participate.

Liz says that the results have been spectacular and that there are many examples of mentees being hired by their mentors and also times when a mentee is brought in to co-counsel a case. I can add that the Mentorship Program can also lead to lifelong friendships.

My guess is that most of you reading this column have had someone in their life or career who spent time with you

serving as a trusted person who gave you advice. If you aren't already doing so, maybe it's time to find someone who could use a little of your advice. I think you will find it as rewarding as I do, and I think you'll agree that providing mentorship is a big reason why CAALA is special.

