

## **Mentoring New Legislators In the Louisiana House of Representatives**

*The following are topics to be considered in planning and executing a Mentor-Mentee relationship. These topics are suggestions only; a list to inspire your creativity and guide you through your new relationship. They are not meant to be treated as a checklist, rather leaving to your sole discretion whether to touch on any one particular topic.*

### ***Be Available***

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- **GENERALLY**
  - Make time for regular, preferably weekly, conversation.
  - Commit to at least one year with your mentee.
  - Be fully present, recognizing the tremendous trust you have been handed.
  
- **LEGISLATIVELY**
  - Be one of the first to reach out to your mentee upon his election and reach out routinely and consistently between the election and the organizational session.
  - Take time to visit your mentee in committee and on the House floor, particularly when complicated procedural or substantive issues present themselves.

### ***Be ethical, credible, and discrete***

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- **GENERALLY**
  - Keep confidential all conversations between you and your mentee.
  - Demonstrate to your mentee that you are consistent, dependable, and trustworthy both through your words and your actions.
  - Being credible does not mean that you need to have all the answers.
  
- **LEGISLATIVELY**
  - Model behavior that demonstrates that the legislature operates on truth and trust by honoring your commitments, following your moral compass, and holding on to your values.

- Discuss the importance of one's word in the legislative environment and how, should circumstances arrive that preclude one from keeping his word, that informing the person to whom he gave his word is important and honorable.
- Comment on the rule of confidentiality that is imposed on House legislative staff and how what you tell a staff member is privileged communication unless specifically indicated to the contrary.

### *Be a positive role model*

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- **GENERALLY**

- A good mentor is respected by his mentee and often the mentee learns simply by watching how their mentor behaves in a particular situation.

- **LEGISLATIVELY**

- Model civility in the legislative process by facilitating dialogue, allowing other points of view to be heard, questioning policy stances instead of questioning motives, and encouraging the building of better relationships across the aisle.
- Present the qualities of statesmanship: bedrock of principles, a moral compass, a vision, and the ability to build a consensus to achieve that vision.
- Encourage your mentee to be objective, fair, and candid.
- Avoid criticizing fellow legislators, staff members, or the legislative institution in front of your mentee.

### *Be genuinely interested*

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- **GENERALLY**

- Be genuinely interested in your mentee as an individual.
- Get to know your mentee personally and let your mentee get to know you.

- **LEGISLATIVELY**

- Ask your mentee about his campaign and what issues he believes to be of importance to the state, the mentee, and his constituents.
- Find opportunities to introduce your mentee to your colleagues, the staff, administrative personnel, and lobbyists.

## *Listen and respond*

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- **GENERALLY**

- Remember to listen to your mentee so he can share his or her thoughts or concerns.
- Ask open-ended questions so as to identify your mentee's real needs, values, and passions; such questions usually begin with "why" and "how" or phrases such as "what do you think about..."
- Act as a sounding board by allowing the mentee to explore his thoughts and ideas openly with you so he can unravel his own thinking and gain insight as he shares his concerns with you; offer advice only if your mentee asks for it.
- Provide helpful feedback and in a way that will help your mentee gain insight to further develop specific qualities or skills; avoid making decisions for your mentee.
- Often times learning is accelerated by having the mentee answer his own questions.

- **LEGISLATIVELY**

- Ask your mentee what concerns he has before he handles his first bill or how he thought a particular debate went.
- Note available resources that may assist a member with his concerns, including resources such as a colleague, the legislative staff, or NCSL and SLC.
- Share with your mentee the importance of listening to ~ and perhaps voting with ~ a member who is an expert in a particular subject matter and who shares the same policy beliefs as the mentee since it is impossible to read every bill or be an expert in all subjects.

## *Share your experiences and insights*

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- **GENERALLY**

- Be generous in sharing your own experiences and insights.
- Understand the experience gap between you and your mentee and strive to lessen that gap with every interaction.

- **LEGISLATIVELY**

- Share stories of your failures as well as your successes, as the former are often where the most meaningful lessons are learned.

- Discuss the importance of a long-term vision and perseverance and how a good bill can be hard to pass but many bad ones appear to have wings.
- Openly discuss the struggles felt by being required to make tough votes on competing interests.
- Reflect on how you often make tough decisions by staying true to yourself and your constituents despite outside pressures.
- Comment on your experiences with legislative staff when in need of a bill, amendment, explanation, or information, and encourage your mentee to get acquainted with House legislative staff; see [Know that Legislative Staffers Have Your Back](#) (*Capitol Ideas*, Jan/Feb 2014).
- Offer your insight and experiences in dealing with the executive branch and lobbyists.
- Discuss “tips of the trade” such as commenting on your experience in getting a bill scheduled to be heard in committee, what the mentee can expect when presenting his first bill, and how to navigate the opposite chamber.
- Provide time management advice such as how to juggle being in two committees at the same time and getting a bill through the process in a short, fiscal session.
- Provide explanation when witnesses or colleagues start using acronyms or jargon.

## **Be Candid**

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- **GENERALLY**
  - The responsibility of a mentor is greater than that of a friend; it requires candor, sometimes in tough situations.
- **LEGISLATIVELY**
  - Legislators, by nature, like to be liked but a good mentor has to be willing to examine actions of his mentee and, at times, counsel the mentee on behavior that is detrimental to the mentee or the body.
  - Candor is easier when the behavior or action is of a legislator other than your mentee; utilize those times as teachable moments by explaining to your mentee the conduct and the problem with the conduct and discussing alternatives, if any.
  - Caution your mentee that just because he can, doesn’t mean he should.... that includes routinely making a motion to end debate on the subject or utilizing the House Rules to circumvent committee or otherwise pull a “fast one” on the body. There is a time and

place to utilize the rules to ones full advantage but not at the expense of the body as a whole or at the expense of one's own reputation.

## ***Provide a Fresh Perspective***

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- **GENERALLY**

- Remember that to understand another person one must walk a mile in his shoes.
- Having the clarity of distance will allow the mentor to provide objective feedback to his mentee on an issue or problem.
- Do not be afraid to hold up a 'mirror' to your mentee to, for example, let the mentee see what his behavior looks like to others.

- **LEGISLATIVELY**

- Model behavior that demonstrates your humbleness and reminds your mentee that it is important to keep political ambitions in check.
- Point out examples of proper legislative behavior, such as a particularly civil exchange in the committee or on the House floor or the bodies' restraint in prematurely cutting off debate; see [Dialogue is the Better Way to Solve Problems](#) (*Capitol Ideas*, Jan/Feb 2014).

## ***Acknowledge Achievements and Demand Accountability***

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- **GENERALLY**

- Highlight for your mentee any achievements he may have forgotten or not realized was an achievement.
- While a model mentor gives permission, encouragement, and applause, he also demands accountability of his mentee.

- **LEGISLATIVELY**

- When a situation occurs that results in less than ideal behavior from a mentee, encourage your mentee to examine his own behavior to discover what he learned from the experience, what he could have done differently, or what were possible alternatives.
- If and when necessary, inform your mentee that apologies are appropriate in the legislative arena and have, on occasion, been made on the House floor to a particular member and/or the body.

## *Allow Yourself to Seek Guidance from Others*

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- **GENERALLY**
  - Maintain regular contact with your mentoring support group to ensure effective mentoring practices.
  - If your mentee comes in believing that he doesn't need help from anyone, allow him time and space while still letting him know you are available.
  - Understand that some mentor/mentee relationships are not successful and discuss your concerns with the mentoring support group for a possible change.
  
- **LEGISLATIVELY**
  - Seek guidance and support from the Mentors' work group and other mentors.
  - Brush up on being a good mentor:
    - [10 Ways on How to be a Good Mentor](#) (*Blue Sky Coaching*)
    - [20 Ways to be a Better Mentor](#) (*Mentor Michigan*)
    - [Guide on How to be a Mentor](#) [Five Useful Takeaways]
  
  - Read hints and tips published in journals by legislators and legislative historians:
    - [15 Tips for Being an Effective Legislator](#) (*State Legislatures*, Jan. 2011)
    - [Advice for New Lawmakers](#) [Tools of the Trade] (*State Legislatures*, Feb. 2013)
    - [The "Good" Legislature](#) [by Alan Rosenthal] (*Council of State Governments*)