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ABI's Mentoring Program Seeking Mentors and Mentees



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ABI has launched a new mentoring program to connect active and recently graduated business and law students to bankruptcy and insolvency professionals who will provide guidance to mentees on career and professional development. In today's legal market, having mentors for young professionals is of the utmost importance. Mentors can provide invaluable insight to young professionals in navigating the complex geography of our profession.

The ABI Mentoring Program is the passion project of **Patricia Redmond** and was one of the main initiatives promoted during her term as ABI president (2013-14).² Mentoring has always been an important part of her career. In her words, the mentoring program's aim is "to help guide someone on a path that's not always so clear. This program [offers] ABI members an opportunity to make a difference. Mentoring someone takes very little [time], but has an extraordinary payoff. For me, it puts the bad days in perspective." What follows is a summary of the program's guidelines.

The Mentor Qualifications

ABI seeks volunteer mentors from all areas of the bankruptcy and restructuring world. Each mentor must (1) be an ABI member in good standing and, if an attorney, be admitted in a state bar in good standing with no disciplinary actions in the past 10 years; (2) have at least seven years of practice experience in the bankruptcy and insolvency area; (3) possess a reputation in the professional community for competence and ethical and professional conduct; (4) agree to adhere to the requirements of the ABI Mentoring Program; and (5) maintain these qualifications at all times while serving as a mentor. Anyone who desires to serve as a mentor but does not satisfy all of these requirements is encouraged to contact ABI and discuss whether he/she possesses other experience that qualifies him/her to serve as a mentor.

¹ Ms. Redmond is ABI's Immediate Past President. Mr. Gavin is a Lifetime and Century Council ABI member and currently serves as ABI's Vice President-Development. Ms. Chavez-Ruark and Mr. Gavin are co-chairs of ABI's Mentoring Program Committee, and Mr. Bow is a member of the committee.

² ABI appreciates the efforts of the ABI Mentoring Program Committee in establishing the program. Committee members also include **Steven M. Berman** (Shumaker, Loop & Kendrick, LLP; Tampa, Fla.), **Natalie B. Daghbandan** (Bryan Cave LLP, Irvine, Calif.), **Jessica D. Gabel** (Georgia State University College of Law; Atlanta), **Paul R. Hage** (Jaffe Raitt Heuer & Weiss, PC; Southfield, Mich.), **Jerry M. Markowitz** (Markowitz, Ringel, Trusty + Hartog, PA; Miami) and ABI President-Elect **James P. Shea** (Armstrong Teasdale LLP; Las Vegas).

Goals

ABI encourages each mentor to strive to build a professional and personal relationship with the mentee and provide the mentee with the advice, guidance, support and insight that is critical to a career in a bankruptcy-related profession. The mentor should regularly meet with the mentee and provide substantive feedback and support on professional-development matters. The mentor should also expose the mentee to all aspects of the profession, which includes introducing the mentee to other ABI members, the bankruptcy community and the mentor's peers.

Commitment

A person serving as a mentor is expected to commit to participating in all aspects of the ABI Mentoring Program, which includes meeting with the mentee and having substantive discussions with the mentee at least once per calendar quarter, either at a group function, a mentor/mentee function, an ABI event, or a private meeting by telephone or in person. A mentor is encouraged to provide advice to the mentee regarding job prospects, review and provide feedback on the mentee's resume and cover letter, assist the mentee in developing a mentoring plan, and maintain confidentiality of all communications with the mentee.

Tips

ABI recommends that each participating mentor undertake the following eight steps to ensure a meaningful experience for both the mentor and the mentee:

1. make himself/herself available to the mentee so that the mentee can derive the greatest possible benefit from the relationship;
2. treat the mentee as he/she would treat an important client by being responsive and respectful;
3. build trust for the relationship by encouraging the mentee to be open with the mentor and maintain confidences with the mentee;
4. put himself/herself in the mentee's shoes and treat the mentee the way that the mentor would like to have been treated by a mentor when he/she was in school;
5. offer guidance to the mentee, help him/her gain insight into a professional practice and introduce him/her to real-life experiences;

6. invite the mentee into the mentor's professional world by taking the mentee to professional and firm functions and introducing the mentee to other professionals;
7. create a safe environment for the mentee by being accessible and nonjudgmental, keeping confidences and inviting open and frank conversations; and
8. have a plan for the mentor/mentee relationship and plan at the outset of the relationship regarding what the mentor would like to accomplish during the year.

The Mentee Qualifications

A prospective mentee may apply to participate in the ABI Mentoring Program if he/she (1) is an ABI student member³ in good standing; (2) is an active full-time or part-time candidate for a Juris Doctor or Master of Business Administration degree or has graduated from a Juris Doctor or Master of Business Administration program within the preceding 12 months; and (3) agrees to adhere to the requirements of the ABI Mentoring Program while participating as a mentee. A mentee may continue to participate in the ABI Mentoring Program more than 12 months after graduation if he/she was assigned a mentor through the program within 12 months of graduation, is an ABI member in good standing and agrees to continue to adhere to the requirements of the ABI Mentoring Program while participating as a mentee.

Goals

A mentee should strive to build a professional and personal relationship with the mentor and seek from the mentor the advice, guidance, support and insight that is critical to a career in a bankruptcy-related profession. The mentee will regularly meet with the mentor and solicit substantive feedback and support on professional-development matters. In addition, the mentee should seek opportunities for exposure to all aspects of the profession, which includes becoming actively involved with ABI, the bankruptcy community and the legal community in general.

Commitment

A person participating as a mentee commits to participating in all aspects of the program, which includes meeting with the mentor and having substantive discussions with the mentor at least once per calendar quarter, either at a group function, a mentor/mentee function, an ABI event or a private meeting by telephone or in person. During the relationship, the mentee should develop, with the mentor's assistance, a mentoring plan that delineates the topics to be discussed and the progress the mentee wishes to make during his/her participation in the ABI Mentoring Program, and should create a resume and cover letter with the mentor's assistance. The mentee should also attend at least one CLE or CPE event, optimally an ABI event, with the mentor.⁴ The mentee is expected to maintain confidentiality of all communications with the mentor. The mentee will bear the primary responsibility for contacting his/her mentor to schedule interactions,

calls, meetings or other events for the mentor and mentee to meet or speak (although mentors and mentees may contact each other as often as they wish).

Tips

ABI recommends that each participating mentee:

- honor all commitments, be on time and be respectful to the mentor;
- maintain regular contact with the mentor by checking in and promptly responding to all communications;
- take an active interest in the mentor's work and become familiar with the mentor's practice and client base;
- take responsibility for the mentor/mentee relationship by seeking out opportunities with the mentor and the professional community;
- be willing to learn new things and obtain other perspectives by being responsive to the mentor's suggestions and constructive criticisms and seeking advice from the mentor;
- manage his/her own expectations by remembering that the mentor serves to offer guidance based on his/her experiences but may not be able to solve the mentee's problems or help the mentee get a job;
- follow through on any instructions or suggestions from the mentor and keep the mentor informed of the mentee's progress; and
- begin each meeting by discussing the mentee's progress since the last meeting.

Mentoring is perhaps one of the most significant ways that we can guarantee the ongoing development and progress of our profession and, thereby, our future as an organization.

Duration and Process

ABI will match each mentee to a mentor after consideration of any stated preferences such as geographic location and type of bankruptcy (*e.g.*, consumer vs. business). Each mentor/mentee assignment will last one year, but the mentor and mentee may continue their relationship on a more informal basis after the initial year if they so choose.

Every participant will submit quarterly progress reports to ABI during the first 12 months of each mentor/mentee relationship. Each report will include a description of all contacts during the quarter, including the date, method and length of the contact. These reports will also provide an opportunity to give feedback about the mentor/mentee assignment and the ABI Mentoring Program in general. Progress reports are required only for the first year of each mentor/mentee relationship. Through the reporting process, ABI will assess whether the program participant successfully contributed to the mentor/mentee relationship, fulfilled his/her commitments and contributed to the program's success.

³ Students receive a discounted membership rate; contact ABI at (703) 739-0800 for more information.

⁴ Upcoming ABI functions are listed at events.abi.org.

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Benefits of Program

In appreciation of the mentors' participation in the program, each mentor will receive ABI recognition at events and in the *ABI Journal*. Each mentee will receive a reduced annual membership fee, a copy of ABI's *Bankruptcy in Practice* manual at a reduced cost, electronic access to ABI newsletters, access to career-development support through the development of a mentoring plan, reduced registration fees for ABI events and valuable networking opportunities.

Key Mentoring Plan Components

Each mentee will draft, with the assistance and supervision of his/her mentor, a mentoring plan that will include discussion of each of the following (where applicable):

- the mentee's career goals, ways to meet those goals and resources available to the mentee;
- civility in practice and the Final Report of the ABI Civility Task Force;
- ethical issues and possible support avenues for addressing questions related to the Rules of Professional Conduct and/or applicable nonattorney codes of ethics, as well as appropriate ways to address conduct by another professional that the mentee believes may have violated such rules;
- disclosures required by Fed. R. Bankr. P. 2014;
- methods of client development and relevant ethical issues;
- client confidentiality;
- the importance of good client communication;
- important points about negotiating with other parties;
- common malpractice risks and traps;
- substance abuse and mental health issues, help that is available to professionals impacted by such issues (both directly and indirectly), and possible warning signs of substance abuse and mental health problems;
- techniques for maintaining a work/life balance;
- management of student loans and related debts; and
- maintenance of good timekeeping and client billing records.

Program Prohibition Regarding Client-Related Matters

A mentee, in the context of a mentor/mentee relationship, may not participate in any activity that might be characterized as legal or other professional work. This includes attending confidential client meetings, researching and writing with respect to legal issues, or providing any support with respect to a client-related matter. However, a mentee is encouraged to observe his/her mentor's practice by attending a nonconfidential meeting, deposition, court proceeding or other similar activity.

Conclusion

The ABI Mentoring Program provides benefits not only for the mentees, but also the mentors and ABI. Mentoring is perhaps one of the most significant ways that we can guarantee the ongoing development and progress of our profession and, thereby, our future as an organization. The bankruptcy community benefits from each new generation of bankruptcy professionals that are supported by guidance from their mentors. In addition, by choosing to mentor law or business students and helping them connect in the community, the mentor can also become or remain involved in ABI and the bankruptcy community.

As Ms. Redmond notes, the ABI Mentoring Program gives mentors the "opportunity to influence the professionalism and ethics of young attorneys. Just as bad habits die hard, so do good habits. It's a great experience to work with someone at this crossroads in their life. During this time in students' lives, things change so dramatically. A few words of wisdom can mean a huge difference in someone's life and professional career."

Please visit mentor.abi.org or the ABI website (abi.org; click on the Mentoring Program link) and sign up to serve as a mentor. Mentees will be able to sign up soon. You will make a difference in a young professional's life, and you may find that he or she makes a difference in yours as well. **abi**

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