



THE ADVOCATES' SOCIETY

# Mentoring Guide

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[www.advocates.ca](http://www.advocates.ca)

# Introduction

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Mentorship is a long-standing tradition and has always been an important part of the life of an advocate.

The Advocates' Society (TAS) has always embraced mentorship as one of its core objectives. TAS strives to promote and foster mentorship through its educational programs and other initiatives to create a variety of mentorship opportunities for its members.

The recent pandemic disrupted our lives, both professionally and personally. The ongoing effects have weighed heavily on all advocates, but particularly on our newest and more junior advocates. The use of technology has allowed advocates to work remotely and we have seen fundamental changes in the way in which advocacy is now practiced. A great deal of our advocacy before the Courts is now done remotely. These changes have impacted the ability of our members to access the mentoring, networking and social interaction previously enjoyed by advocates in their day to day activities. We have lost the opportunity to “walk down the hallway” and speak with a colleague or mentor, or to have a conversation with opposing counsel outside of the courtroom or in the robing room. Despite these changes in the way advocacy is practiced, mentorship for advocates remains as important as ever; if not more so.

This guide is intended to assist both mentees and mentors in finding and developing mentorship relationships that are most meaningful to them. Mentorship does not come in any one form, size or shape: it can be a formal program within a firm or organization or a casual arrangement between acquaintances. It does not require a formal long-term relationship or agenda. It can consist of periodic communications and can even be a one-time conversation. It is also not uncommon for an advocate to have more than one mentor. The Advocates' Society strongly encourages and supports all forms of mentorship. Mentorship gives us a practical tool to embrace and promote diversity among our members. Essential to our success is an openness to a diverse range of legal experience and expertise, along with diverse personal characteristics. We strive to create an environment that is open and welcoming to all advocates.

Mentorship is ultimately about connection and community, and how we nurture that relationship for our professional and our own personal development. This greater sense of community and connectivity amongst advocates also benefits our clients and the judicial system. We hope this guide can be a valuable resource as you navigate your next mentoring relationship.

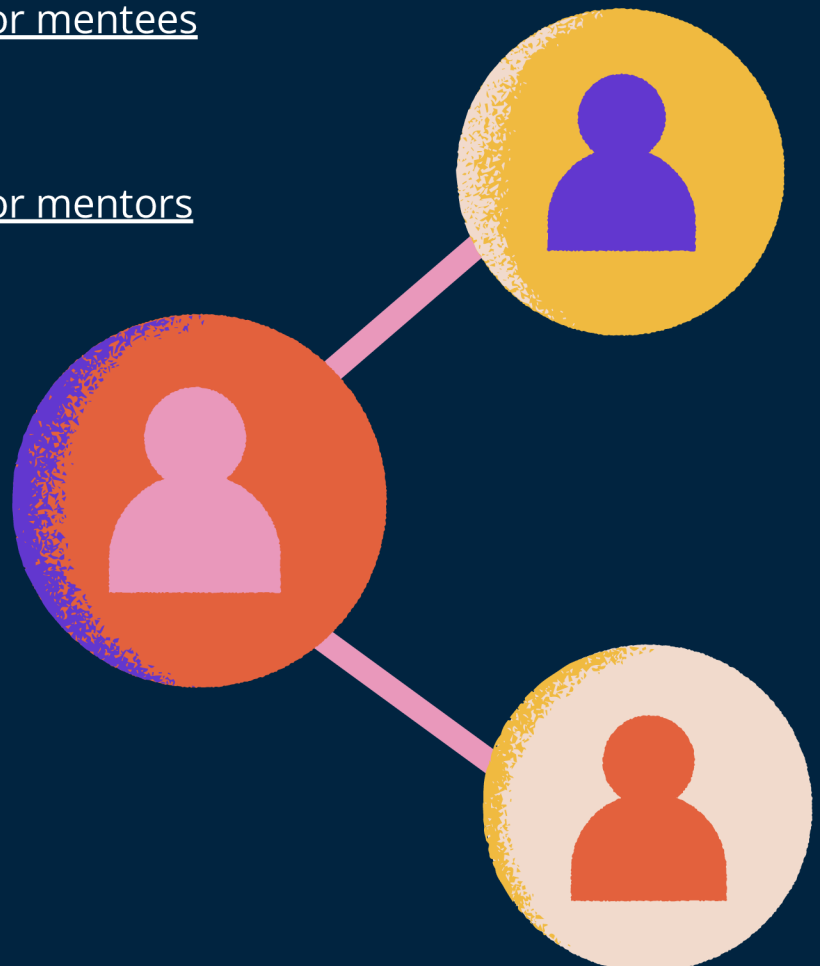
Peter W. Kryworuk  
President, The Advocates' Society (2022 – 2023)



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# Why embark on a Mentoring relationship?

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In legal practice, a mentor is often a more experienced lawyer practicing in the area in which we are involved, whether in the same firm or organization or elsewhere. But a mentor can also be a peer or someone just a few years ahead, so do not discount the value of the advice that can be offered by those closer to your vintage. Mentoring can take a variety of forms, from a formal program within a firm or organization, to a casual arrangement between acquaintances. Whatever the form, the relationship of a mentor and mentee involves the passing of knowledge, experience and skills from one advocate to another.

There are many elements to a good mentor-mentee relationship. It may be unrealistic to think that one individual will be able to fulfill all the roles and functions of a mentor and you should be open to the idea that you will have more than one and that they will change over time. What you are seeking in a mentor may evolve over time, so not all mentoring relationships are long in duration.

## **A mentor may be able to help a mentee:**

- Analyze specific or general legal issues;
- Explore ways to expand or narrow your practice area;
- Connect with other practitioners in a particular practice area, geographic region, or demographic;
- As a sounding board for ethical dilemmas;
- Navigate transitions (return to work after parental leave) or changing career paths; improve practice management skills; with advice on work-life balance; or
- Develop their advocacy style and the skills you need.



# How to get started

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The legal community has a number of organizations whose members are committed to giving back to the profession, and, as a member of **The Advocates' Society**, you can look to your fellow members for mentoring support.

Programs like the **TAS Mentoring Portal** can help you find another advocate who can help you with one or more of your practice challenges. TAS members span the country, working in firms of all sizes, in government, and as in-house counsel. You may also connect with a potential mentor at collegial events like mentoring dinners, and Bench and Bar socials. Many TAS members are also trained as skills instructors to give helpful feedback in a productive and non-judgmental manner, so stay attuned to who you meet at CPD programs.

When looking through the TAS mentoring portal, do not feel confined in your search. A suitable mentor may be a senior member of the bar, or he or she may be a peer you wish to learn from. Do not underestimate your junior colleagues—peer mentoring can often resolve routine procedural or administrative problems.



# Tips for Mentees

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Bring a learn-from-anyone mindset to your mentoring search. Don't be locked into a too-short list of mentors, because you can learn from many lawyers with different backgrounds and skill sets. Most mentors have valuable experience they are willing to share.

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Mentors want and deserve that you communicate efficiently and effectively. If you set up a mentoring meeting with someone, be respectful of the mentor's time and manage it well. Be engaged, energetic, and focused.

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Set a few goals! Consider what you wish to gain from a mentoring session, in terms of specific, measurable, and achievable goals. For shorter sessions (less than one hour) aim to focus on two or three topics you want a mentor to talk about, so when you leave each session, you will have gained the knowledge that is most helpful to you.

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Be prepared and organized. There is great value in a mentee preparing an agenda or questions in advance of a mentoring session. Perhaps even share this with your mentor prior to the mentoring session.

# Tips for Mentees

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Help your mentor guide you. Begin questions with “what”, “how” or “where” rather than “do you ...” so you will elicit an explanation, not a simple “yes” or “no.” To provide you with some guidance, Part [IV] below contains a sample of the kinds of questions a mentee may seek guidance on from a mentor. Do not feel confined by the sample list.

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Be open to new ideas. Seek different points of view from your own. Embrace all feedback while remaining honest and responsive.

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Mentors have reserved their valuable time to share their knowledge and experience. They trust that mentees will approach the mentoring sessions in the same spirit of mentorship. Refrain from viewing mentoring sessions as sales presentations or job interviews. Close your session with a thank-you and follow up with an email or letter.

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Review your mentoring relationships periodically. Ideally, mentors work themselves out of a job. The relationship develops to the point where the mentee has less of a need for the mentor or the mentee develops a need for a different kind of mentor.

# Sample List of Questions or Topics for Mentees

Below are some questions or topics to consider for kicking off the session and steering the conversation in the direction you want. Make sure to listen for openings to dive deeper into subjects of specific importance to you.

1. What is the best career advice you ever received? What action did you take as a result?

2. Who were your mentors and how did they help you?

3. What do you wish you knew, or wish you had done differently at my stage in your career?

4. How do you juggle family/work balance?

5. How do you deal with stress?

6. How do you deal with losing a case?

7. How do you deal with difficult people? Judge? Client? Colleague? Boss?

8. If \_\_\_\_\_ happened to you, how would you navigate it?

9. Do you have any suggestions for how to get on my feet in court more often?

10. What makes a junior lawyer stand out to you?

11. I am looking to accomplish \_\_\_\_\_ with my career. What do you think I should do to get there?

12. How would you recommend I get into \_\_\_\_\_ (insert a specific specialization/role/sector, etc.)?

# Tips for Mentors

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Be approachable. Respond quickly and enthusiastically to mentees who seek your advice. Ask each mentee to share information about themselves before you meet with them.

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Silence your devices. Prevent distractions during your mentoring sessions. The most beneficial meetings are two-way exchanges in which both sides are fully engaged: the mentor sees new perspectives and the mentee takes away helpful knowledge and advice.

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Enjoy the experience! Embrace the opportunity to give back in an informal, conversational style. It can be fulfilling to know you are helping make a difference.

**4**

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Consider mentoring sessions as a chance to learn and see the legal profession through the eyes of the next generation of leaders. You can gain as much as you give.

# Tips for Mentors

**5**

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Be a good listener. The mentor's role is to fill in knowledge gaps and offer common sense and strategic insights based on their experience. To do this effectively requires gauging what the mentee knows and does not know by using active listening and questioning. At the same time, it can be counterproductive if you approach the role as an instructor and dominate the mentoring session. Certainly, share your knowledge and insights; also listen well to the questions and concerns of the mentee. To provide some guidance, Part [VI] contains a sample of the kinds of questions a mentor may ask a new mentee to understand their particular circumstances, goals, priorities and challenges. Do not feel confined by the sample list.

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In addition to sharing knowledge, help mentees examine and reflect on their needs and goals.

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Offer constructive feedback. Constructive feedback is crucial to maintain trust. Mentors should highlight something the mentee did well, and then focus on areas in need of improvement.

# Sample List of Questions or Topics for Mentees

Below are some questions or topics to consider for kicking off the session and steering the conversation in the direction you want. Make sure to listen for openings to dive deeper into subjects of specific importance to you.

1. Tell me about yourself. Where are you from? What drew you to law? Etc

2. Tell me about your practice. How would you describe your advocacy style?

3. What do you like best about your practice? What's the best part of a typical day at work for you? What are the biggest challenges you face in practice? Are you dealing with any chronic irritations that keep you from enjoying your work?

4. Tell me about your firm/ organization. How many people are you working with? Who do you work most closely with? Do you have an assigned or informal mentor at your firm? If so, how is that relationship working for you?

5. Are you wrestling with an acute issue now that needs priority attention?

6. What are you looking for in a mentor?

7. Who do you currently turn to for guidance? What do you value most about the guidance you receive from that person?

8. Where do you see yourself and your practice in 5 years?

9. What's your definition of success?

10. What are your top priorities right now?

11. What do you see as the primary obstacles to achieving your goals. What have you tried so far to overcome those obstacles? What worked? What didn't work? Why?

# Resources

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## The Advocates' Society

The Advocates' Society (TAS) is committed to the development of the profession and offers a number of ways for members to find a mentor or become a mentor. Some of these include:

- An online **Mentoring Portal** where members can connect for micro-mentoring sessions;
- Opportunities to network with peers and other members of the Society by getting involved with the **Young Advocates' Standing Committee** (YASC) and the **10+ Standing Committee**;
- **Advocacy skills workshops** facilitated by seasoned members of the bar that help advocates of all vintages hone their skills in a supportive and encouraging environment;
- Mentoring events and mentoring roundtables at conferences allow advocates the chance to have intimate discussions with more experienced counsel and make lasting connections;
- Member-only **Practice Groups** keep members connected with other TAS members in their practice area;
- The opportunity to become a trained instructor for TAS advocacy skills programs;
- Mentoring articles in **TAS Newsletters**;
- Mentoring program archives in **TAS Member Resource Library**.

**For more information on TAS mentoring opportunities and membership, please contact Robin Black, Director of Marketing and Membership at [robin@advocates.ca](mailto:robin@advocates.ca)**



# Additional Mentoring Resources for Advocates

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- Law Society of Alberta: Mentor Connect Program - <https://www.lawsociety.ab.ca/resource-centre/programs/mentor-connect/>  
(Also serving Law Society of the Northwest Territories and Nunavut)
- Law Society of Ontario: Coach and Advisor Network - <https://lso.ca/lawyers/practice-supports-and-resources/coach-and-advisor-network>
- Legal Aid Ontario: Mentoring program - <https://www.legalaid.on.ca/lawyers-legal-professionals/mentoring-opportunities-at-legal-aid-ontario/>
- The Bar of Montreal: Mentoring program - <https://ajbm.qc.ca/services-aux-membres/mentorat/>
- Law Society of Newfoundland: Mentoring Program - <https://lsnl.ca/lawyers-students/insurance/managing-risk/mentoring-program/>
- Nova Scotia Barristers' Society: Various mentoring programs available - <https://nsbs.org/legal-profession/resource-search/firm-management/ed-training-mentorship/nsbs-mentorship-programs/>



[WWW.ADVOCATES.CA](http://WWW.ADVOCATES.CA)



[MAIL@ADVOCATES.CA](mailto:MAIL@ADVOCATES.CA)



[1-888-597-0243](tel:1-888-597-0243)