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Mentoring can benefit career and clients

Mentoring has been central to my success as a litigator and counselor to my clients. When I began my career, I found mentors who worked with me to improve my abilities in the practice of law and the marketing of my practice. I am lucky still to have attorneys, including clients, who serve as my mentors. What I did not anticipate, as I transitioned to the role of a more senior attorney and a partner at a law firm, was that the process of becoming a mentor to other attorneys would impact my career in such a positive way.

First and foremost, mentoring other attorneys keeps my legal abilities sharp and up to date. Helping attorneys with the mechanics of practicing law requires me to examine regularly what it takes to be an effective lawyer. When reviewing briefs and documents drafted by other attorneys, I take the time to explain what works for me in terms of persuasive writing. Deposition practice and oral arguments are also learned skills that I endeavor to teach other attorneys. Interacting with attorneys whom I mentor requires a dialogue and the exchange of ideas, which in turn benefits my clients. It also enables me to put together the

best possible team for client matters. Learning how to be a good teacher to other attorneys also has honed my skills as a counselor on the prevention of litigation and best employment practices.

Mentoring also has resulted in stronger client relationships. As a mentor and counselor to my clients, I work to communicate the how and why of what I do, whether it be strategy in litigating a large case or a clear explanation of why certain steps will help prevent future litigation. Mentoring gives me insight to the pressures and issues facing in-house counsel, which results in my ability to be a better advocate for the client.

Cristina Hawilo, senior litigation counsel at Videojet Technologies Inc., articulated how the act of mentoring can bring value to a legal career. When asked about our working relationship, Hawilo stated, "Nearly eight years ago, Margo

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Margo Wolf O'Donnell is a shareholder in the litigation and employment practice groups at Vedder, Price P.C. She successfully represents clients at all stages of litigation and regularly acts as a business advisor on the prevention of litigation. She is a past recipient of Law Bulletin's "40 Lawyers Under 40" publication and Leading Lawyer Network recognized her as one of the "100 Leading Women Lawyers in Illinois."

and I formed a mentor-mentee relationship when I began my career as a litigation associate in Chicago. Over the years, Margo has mentored me on everything from the valuable resources available to promote my career growth, to helping me hone my legal skills — at times, sentence by sentence, to giving me the confidence to take risks in my career. It was also through her mentorship that I was able to learn the very important skills of delivering client excellence. Throughout

our work together, I heard the phrase "Is it perfect? Is it perfect?" from Margo before anything was submitted to a client for a review, or to a court for consideration. Even today, I still operate under those same principles of striving to achieve excellence and perfection, thanks to what was instilled in me by Margo. When I left law firm practice to become senior litigation counsel for Videojet Technologies Inc., Linx Printing Technologies and Esko, Margo was right there supporting me. Now, as outside counsel for my employment matters, Margo has advised our companies in numerous complex employment issues, from employment discrimination matters, to conducting internal investigations, to facilitating internal harassment and discrimination prevention training."

The prospect of mentoring other attorneys may seem daunting and unnecessarily time-consuming to attorneys who already juggle a busy legal career. Taking precious nonbillable time to advise other attorneys is a commitment. But the relationships that form from mentoring may play a positive and integral role in the continued successes in a long legal career. It also makes the job of lawyering more fun and ultimately more rewarding.