

Mentorship Resolutions For The New Year

By **Kelly Galligan and Andra Greene** (January 24, 2025)

The start of the new year is a perfect time for reflection and goal-setting. January is typically when people make resolutions for a new goal, habit or intention.

Attorneys tend to focus on personal achievements or career milestones when they set yearly goals. One important area often gets overlooked in this process: mentoring relationships. Ironically, mentorship is one of the most effective tools for professional growth, and its success is based on deliberate planning and follow-through.

For mentors and mentees alike, the key to a thriving mentoring relationship lies in setting and tracking goals, both for the relationship itself and for the professional objectives the mentor and mentee tackle together. The start of the new year is the ideal time to do this work.

Goal-setting in mentorship serves two purposes. First, it ensures that the mentorship relationship has a clear structure, fostering accountability and alignment between mentor and mentee. Second, it creates a shared vision for professional development, empowering both parties to chart a path toward specific achievements. Whether it's improving oral advocacy skills, expanding a professional network, or developing a niche expertise, crafting goals together helps the mentorship remain relevant and results-driven.

Effective mentorship doesn't just happen like magic. Rather, it is built through effort, intentionality and collaboration. This year, consider making resolutions for your mentorship relationships. By setting actionable goals and tracking progress, mentors and mentees can transform their partnerships into engines of growth, achievement and mutual success.

The Dual Nature of Mentorship Goals

When discussing mentorship goals, it's important to distinguish between two types: relationship-focused goals and professional development goals. Both are essential but serve distinct purposes.

Goals for the mentorship relationship itself establish the foundation for effective communication, trust and collaboration. As discussed more below, these might include defining the frequency and format of meetings or communications, identifying preferred feedback styles, or setting boundaries so that the partnership is respectful and constructive.

Professional goals, on the other hand, focus on the tangible skills, achievements or milestones that the mentee hopes to accomplish with the mentor's guidance. These might include mastering a specific area of law, building a broader professional network, or preparing for a career transition. Professional goals are often more specific and measurable, tied to the mentee's aspirations and the mentor's expertise.

By focusing on both types of goals, mentors and mentees can create partnerships that are



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both purposeful and meaningful. Clear relationship goals provide the structure needed for effective collaboration, while professional goals offer direction and purpose.

Building the Foundation: Goals for the Mentorship Relationship

Effective mentorship relationships are built on trust, communication and shared understanding. Early in the partnership, it's important to establish what each party hopes to gain and how they plan to work together.

For example, a mentor and mentee might agree to meet monthly for one hour, alternating between in-person and virtual meetings. They might also set expectations for how feedback will be delivered — whether it's during meetings, via email or through informal check-ins. Defining these logistical details reduces misunderstandings and helps both parties feel supported and engaged.

As noted, it's also important to address the tone and boundaries of the relationship. For instance, some mentees may prefer a highly structured approach with defined agendas for each meeting, while others may value a more conversational style. Similarly, mentors may want to set limits on their availability to keep the relationship manageable. Communication is the key to success here. These discussions help create a relationship that works for both parties and fosters long-term success.

Another crucial aspect of relationship goals is trust-building. This might involve the mentor committing to confidentiality, ensuring that sensitive discussions remain private. The mentee, in turn, might agree to take proactive steps to implement feedback and share progress honestly. These commitments lay the groundwork for a partnership rooted in respect and mutual accountability.

Once the relationship is established, revisiting these boundaries and goals every year is a valuable tool for ensuring the relationship is dynamic and continues to meet the current needs of each party. For example, the frequency of meetings can be adjusted based on the past year's experience.

Professional Goals: A Road Map to Success

Once the foundation of the mentorship relationship is established, the focus shifts to professional development goals. While mentors often play a guiding role, the mentee should take ownership of identifying their priorities and articulating what they hope to achieve. These goals must be specific enough to provide clear direction.

A corporate attorney mentee might set a goal of becoming proficient in drafting complex purchase and sale or operating contracts. With the mentor's guidance, the mentee could outline a plan to review the mentor's redlines to purchase agreements, shadow the mentor during client negotiations and draft a contract for feedback. The mentor provides expertise and perspective, while the mentee takes active steps to build their skills.

Litigators might have different professional goals, such as improving oral advocacy skills or gaining trial experience. A mentee could set a goal to deliver three mock arguments within six months, with the mentor providing feedback and suggestions for improvement. Alternatively, the mentor might invite the mentee to observe depositions or hearings, offering insights on courtroom strategy and decorum.

For in-house attorneys, professional goals might focus on navigating corporate dynamics,

building relationships with key stakeholders, or learning more about the company's business operations. A mentee could work with their mentor to develop a strategic plan for fostering cross-departmental collaboration or preparing for a presentation to the board of directors. The mentor's experience within the organization can provide invaluable context and advice.

Regardless of the specific goals, it's important to ensure they are realistic and aligned with the mentee's broader career aspirations.

Tracking Progress: Turning Goals Into Achievements

Of course, setting goals is only the first step. To keep mentorship relationships productive, it's important to regularly track progress and make adjustments as needed. Regular check-ins provide an opportunity to assess what's working, address challenges and celebrate milestones.

For instance, a mentor and mentee might agree to review progress at the end of each quarter, using a shared document to track achievements. This method fosters accountability and keeps both individuals actively engaged. It also allows for flexibility. If a goal proves too ambitious or becomes irrelevant, the mentor and mentee can recalibrate and set new objectives.

Tracking progress isn't just about measuring outcomes — it's also an opportunity to reflect on the relationship itself. Are the mentor and mentee communicating effectively? Is the partnership meeting each party's expectations? These conversations help maintain a dynamic and rewarding relationship for everyone involved.

Overcoming Challenges in Mentorship

Like any relationship, mentorships can encounter challenges. Common issues include mismatched expectations, communication breakdowns or competing priorities. Addressing these challenges proactively is essential for maintaining a healthy and productive partnership.

If a mentee feels that meetings are becoming unproductive, they should communicate their concerns and propose solutions, such as setting more focused agendas or increasing the frequency of check-ins. Similarly, if a mentor feels overwhelmed by their commitments, they might suggest delegating certain responsibilities or adjusting the scope of the mentorship.

It's also important to acknowledge that mentorships are not one-size-fits-all. What works for one mentor-mentee pair may not work for another. Being open to feedback and willing to adapt ensures that the relationship remains effective and fulfilling.

The Mutual Benefits of Goal-Setting

Mentorship is often viewed through the lens of the mentee's growth, but the reality is that setting and achieving goals brings significant benefits to mentors as well. A structured and goal-oriented mentoring relationship not only helps mentees progress professionally, but also reinforces the mentor's expertise, sharpens their skills and provides a profound sense of fulfillment.

By contributing to someone else's success, mentors often rediscover their own sense of purpose and enhance their professional legacy.

One of the most tangible benefits for mentors is the refinement of their own abilities. For instance, when a mentor works closely with a mentee on preparing for a major presentation, the mentor is often required to revisit key communication techniques, consider alternative approaches and articulate their methods more clearly. This process can reinforce the mentor's confidence and reveal new insights into their own work.

Similarly, guiding a mentee through a complex transaction or litigation strategy may deepen the mentor's understanding of their practice area and open doors to fresh perspectives.

Beyond skill refinement, goal-setting strengthens the mentor's leadership capabilities. Developing a plan, providing constructive feedback, and motivating a mentee toward achieving their objectives cultivates essential leadership traits such as empathy, strategic thinking and adaptability. These are qualities that mentors can carry back into their own roles, whether it's managing teams, guiding clients or contributing to their firm's growth.

Mentorship also provides an opportunity for mentors to reflect on their own journeys and accomplishments. Sharing their experiences and lessons learned with a mentee can rekindle a sense of pride and purpose. It reminds mentors of how far they've come, and in doing so, can reignite their passion for their own work. Moreover, helping a mentee overcome challenges or achieve milestones creates a sense of satisfaction that few other professional experiences can match.

Ultimately, the mutual benefits of goal-setting in mentoring relationships underscore the value of a structured approach. Mentors and mentees who embrace this framework not only maximize the potential of their relationship, but also enrich their own professional journeys in the process. When both parties grow together, the mentoring relationship becomes more than a tool for development — it becomes a legacy of shared success.

Turning Resolutions Into Results

As we embrace 2025, let's resolve to approach mentorship with intentionality and purpose. By setting clear goals for both the relationship itself and professional development, mentors and mentees can create partnerships that are structured, impactful and fulfilling. Regularly tracking progress and staying adaptable allows these relationships to continue to evolve and thrive not only during 2025, but also for many years to come.

Mentorship is one of the most powerful tools for growth in the legal profession, but its success depends on effort, alignment and accountability. This year, take the time to invest in your mentorship relationships, setting resolutions that reflect your aspirations and commitment to mutual success. Together, mentors and mentees can achieve extraordinary things.

Here's to a year of meaningful mentorship and achieving goals that matter!

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