



# The Harry V. Booth Judge Henry A. Politz American Inn of Court

## **Booth-Politz Inn of Court Mentoring Program: A Multi-Faceted Approach**

Our Inn uses a multifaceted approach to mentoring to provide new lawyers and new Inn Members with the tools and skills they need to be successful attorneys, avoid common pitfalls, and become active and engaged participants in our Inn. We have created a team that is dedicated solely to our mentoring efforts and is not responsible for producing any CLE programs. Through these efforts, we have ensured that mentoring has become an emphasis of our Inn experience.

### **Level One: Basic Legal Training**

**The Goal:** *To provide one-on-one mentoring to first year attorneys who were recently admitted to the Louisiana bar.*

**Background:** These new attorneys may or may not be members of our Inn. In addition to teaching ethics and professionalism, the program seeks to make sure that newly admitted lawyers have learned basic legal skills. Toward that end, the program provides a checklist of activities that must be accomplished by the mentor-mentee pair. This may include not just relationship building activities such as visiting the mentor's office, but also skill building activities such as attending a deposition and a hearing and others listed below.

**The Concern:** Due to the current economy, some new lawyers cannot find jobs with firms, so they are forced to set up shop on their own or with a group of similarly situated young lawyers. Even lawyers fortunate enough to work at established firms have gaps in their legal education that are not revealed until they actually begin to practice.

**The Difficulty:** The Shreveport area was selected by the Louisiana Supreme Court as a test case for the new lawyer mentoring program designed by the Louisiana State Bar Association. In particular, the state bar selected the Shreveport Bar Association and our Inn as organizations that would implement the program in our area. But that mentoring program is voluntary on the part of new lawyers, and for each of the last two years, only about a dozen or so new lawyers have signed up. Far more mentors volunteered for the program than did new lawyers. Additionally, this program does not center on Inn participation or relationships.

**The Solution:** Our Inn wants to reach the other young lawyers who also could benefit from mentoring, but did not sign up for the state bar's program or did not sign up for it during their first year out of law school.

**The Program:** For Level One, our Inn partners with the Louisiana State Bar Association and the Shreveport Bar Association to provide mentor training to the Master members of our Inn. CLE credits are provided to the mentors for the training and for being paired with a mentee. Each

year, our Inn reviews the lists of the new lawyers and pairs them with a Master who share similar interests. The Masters meet regularly with their mentees to accomplish numerous tasks and goals which were set by the Louisiana Supreme Court. These include:

- attending depositions, hearings, and trials;
- visiting at the Master's office;
- discussions regarding Lawyer Trust Accounts, client confidentiality, and local unwritten customs and rules; and
- learning the do's and don'ts of negotiating settlements; and how to be an effective legal writer.

**The Team:** The Inn mentoring team is made up solely of Masters who have been trained by the state bar to serve as mentors for their program. Mentoring duties are rotated each year to give other Masters the opportunity to serve.

**The Post-Mortem:** At the conclusion of the Level One mentoring year, the Louisiana State Bar Association hosts simultaneous receptions at the pilot program locations. All attendees are able to participate in a video conference program in which mentors and mentees share their success stories and offer suggestions for improvement to the program. One of more Supreme Court Justices may attend as well as the leadership of the state bar. A further and more concrete evaluation tool is the written checklist of program requirements and evaluation completed at the end of the year.

## **Level Two Mentoring: Success in the Inn and the Legal Community**

**The Goal:** *To ensure that new Associates (first and second year) are actively engaged in our Inn, that they receive mentoring that they otherwise would not have received, and to offer an enhanced Inn experience for our established members through the building of new relationships.*

**Background:** Unlike the Louisiana State Bar Program, this Level Two mentoring centers on Inn participation and relationships. There are forty Associates in our Inn, twenty-five of which are first or second year members. We have paired those twenty-five with Masters or very experienced Barristers for a one year mentoring program.

**The Concerns:** We had Inn-centric concerns that are not addressed in the state bar program.

- First, many of these Associates are not being reached by the state bar's program in Level One. This program reaches the other young lawyers who could benefit from mentoring, but who did not sign up for the state bar's program or who are no longer eligible for that program because they did not sign up for it during their first year out of law school.
- Second, due to the large size of our Inn (164 members, including 40 Associates), a new Associate may feel overwhelmed or lost in our Inn. This is especially true for our minority and women members.
- Third, we want the new members to "buy-in" to the Inn to ensure that we have a continuing membership. We see our goals as encouraging leadership and professionalism in these new members. But we also want to make sure we have trained future leaders for the Inn.

**The Difficulty:** We want to provide additional mentoring, but we do not want to duplicate what we are already doing in Level One with the state bar. Instead, we want to continue our active partnership with the state bar in Level One. We need to maintain full engagement in that

program as it continues to expand across the state and, perhaps in the future, becomes mandatory for all new lawyers.

**The Team:** This team is organized similarly to the Level One team, and is comprised of Inn Masters who have been formally trained in the state bar's mentoring program or who have considerable experience in the operation of our Inn. However, service as a Captain is not limited to those masters. We invite Barristers who have demonstrated a strong commitment to the Inn to serve as Captains as well. And, of course, the mentee must be an Associate of our Inn.

**The Plan:** We will achieve our goal of making sure each Associate is active and engaged in our Inn and receives appropriate mentoring as follows:

1. At our new member orientation at the beginning of our Inn year, this mentoring program is explained and each new member is told that they will be assigned a Captain. This new member orientation is followed by a reception for all members which is our opening event for the year. We stress to our new members the importance of developing this relationship.
2. Each first and second year Associate is assigned a Captain, who is a Master or Barrister with several years of experience in our Inn. Selections are made to ensure diversity among the Captains and Associates.
3. The Captains introduce themselves to their Associate/mentee and makes sure their Associate attends the Inn meetings and functions.
4. In addition to our usual lunch meetings, our Inn has several evening meetings to allow more opportunities for networking and introductions. Younger members may not feel as rushed during an evening meeting.
5. Our Inn hosts an Annual Captain-Associate Cocktail Party to welcome the Captains and Associates to the new Inn year. The party is not open to the entire membership - you must be a Captain or Associate to attend.
6. The Captains introduce their Associates to at least three other Inn members during each meeting.
7. The Inn arranges brown bag lunches with local, state and federal judges to permit Associates to meet the judges in a less formal setting.
8. The Inn arranges guided tours for Associates of the Fifth Circuit Court of Appeals Satellite Library in Shreveport.
9. Because our mentoring program is less structured than the state bar's program, each Captain and Associate has the flexibility to focus on intangibles in the practice of law that may be of importance to the Associate. These may include lunch meetings to discuss work-life balance, acting professionally without being a push-over, managing client expectations, etc. We had considered making a checklist of requirements, but opted not to do so.

**The Post-Mortem:** Captains and Associates are asked to rate their experiences and provide anonymous suggestions on how to improve our mentoring program.

### **Level Three Mentoring: Making it a Team Sport**

**The Goal:** *To ensure that new Associates (first and second year) are actively engaged in our Inn, that they receive mentoring that they otherwise would not have received, and to offer an enhanced Inn experience for our established members through the building of new relationships. (These are the same concerns as with Level Two, but we decided another approach was needed to capture all aspects of mentoring.)*

**The Concern:** They are all very much the same as for our level two program, basically “Inn-centric” concerns not being addressed through the bar program.

**The Plan:** Another method by which we accomplish our mentoring goals is at the Team Level. We do this in two ways. At our Team Leader meeting at the beginning of our Inn year, we stress to the leaders:

1. That it is the Associates and Barristers who will actually present the programs with the guidance and leadership of the Masters; and
2. That the job of the Leaders is not complete when the program has been presented. The Leaders are encouraged to host additional Team “meetings” in the form of casual social events such as getting together for lunch or after work drinks. Last year, in order to encourage this behavior, we gave an award at our end of the year dinner for outstanding Team Leader to the person who had hosted the most informal get-togethers for his Team.