

Mentor as...Friend

By Rose M. Huelskamp, Barrister

After I graduated from law school in San Diego, I accepted a job at a small, yet busy, insurance defense firm in Fresno, California. I only knew one person when I moved to Fresno. Within my first year of working as an attorney, a female partner invited me to join her and some of her female law school friends for happy hour. These women met monthly to visit and discuss various issues related to their cases. I fit in well with the group and was invited to join their monthly meetings. I particularly hit it off with one of the attorneys, Eileen Deimerly, and we became close friends. At the time, she was in-house counsel for an insurance company and had tried approximately 10-15 cases. She had an exceptional reputation in the Fresno legal community and was known for her strong work ethic and attention to detail.

A few years later, I had my first case going to trial. At the time, I did not have much guidance on preparing the case for trial from the lawyers within my firm. I read various materials related to trial preparation but still felt overwhelmed and anxious. I knew Eileen had a lot of trial experience so I contacted her to see if she would meet with me to provide some insight based on her personal experience. She agreed and shared her views on jury selection and how she develops a theory of the case, prepares opening statements and closing arguments, and presents evidence during the trial. The information Eileen provided was invaluable and helped focus my efforts. As with most cases, the matter settled before it went to trial. However, I felt my trial preparation up to that point was in decent shape as a result of having had Eileen as a resource.

Over the years, Eileen and I have maintained a strong friendship and mentoring relationship, despite the 500 miles that separate us. Her continued guidance, advice, and friendship, have had a significant impact on my growth as an attorney. I am fortunate to have a mentor that takes an active interest in my professional development.

Approximately two years ago, I had the pleasure of returning the favor. Eileen applied to become an Administrative Law Judge in Sacramento. Without my knowledge, she put me down as a reference. I received a call from a judge asking me about what I thought of Eileen as a lawyer and to elaborate on our professional relationship. After I got over my initial shock, I explained that while we never directly worked together, she had a great reputation in the Fresno legal community and was an outstanding mentor. Around that same time, Eileen asked me to write her a letter of recommendation for the same position. I was honored to do so and was thrilled at the opportunity to assist her on a professional matter. Eileen is now an Administrative Law Judge in Sacramento.