

Mentor as...Pacesetter

By Lindsey Stevens, Associate

It was an early fall morning that I met my mentor. I had spent weeks nervously preparing to meet him. I had studied his impressive resume, met with his colleagues, and even tried a Google search. After our first handshake and introduction, I ambitiously launched into my prepared interview points and marched purposefully towards our unknown destination. Despite the intensity I had planned for, I realized that we were just walking... and talking... "What's your hurry?" the Judge asked, "We are just out for a walk."

It only took a moment for the Judge to slow me down. As we walked, the Judge offered anecdotes from his life, some far more serious than typical interview fare. In turn, I found myself sharing personal stories that I'd never planned to include in an interview. What I had imagined would be an intense formal clerkship interview progressed instead as a casual saunter downtown. When we finally looped back to our starting point, the Judge advised me to stop talking, recommending that I learn to "quit while ahead."

A few weeks later I was busy preparing the Judge's new chambers. Inevitably, as the case transfers matriculated, the chambers was challenged to keep up with the volume of cases that demanded judicial attention. By December, our schedule was consistent - chambers was running from 8 a.m. straight through until 6 or 6:30 in the evening. Our windowless environment, coupled with the waning season, caused the short days to seem sunless. We hardly noticed. At the height of our busiest days, the Judge would come out of his personal chambers just to share a story or a joke. He seemed to be reminding me - what's your hurry? This is the practice of law! Slow down and enjoy it. In the longest working days, the Judge always appeared confident, light hearted, and unwavering in his work ethic. His characteristic modesty and self-deprecating humor only provided further inspiration. His example left me no room to attempt the rumored nine to five schedule of government employment. Rather, I began to hear his maxims "if you're on time, you're late" and "if you can do it now, why wait" shadow me not only in my professional obligations but in my personal life. Most important however, was the dialogue that the Judge allowed to flow between us. While trust laid the foundation, and personal anecdotes provided the entertainment, the core of our relationship was built on the free conversation we shared.

While I met the Judge in his transition from prosecution to the judiciary, now I am in mine. At this moment, I am preparing to leave this clerkship and begin practice. The more subtle effects of the Judge's mentorship are mostly unknown to me as of yet, and will only be realized when I am tested in my next position. Nonetheless, what the Judge has really taught me along the way, through all of the mutual trust, respect, and personal example, was to enjoy my work, take pride in my assignments, and to slow down to enjoy the practice of law.