

Mentors

My esteemed editor and boss, Kerry Hoxie, recommended that I write about how I got to where I am. She said it was sort of a Presidential tradition to do so at some point during the year. And so, it got me to thinking about mentors. A “mentor” is defined as “a wise and trusted counselor or teacher” or “an influential senior sponsor or supporter.” Kerry’s suggestion caused me to reflect upon the importance of mentors in the law. We both rely upon mentors and are mentors ourselves. Some mentors we may know; some we may not. And often we are “mentors” by way of example without even knowing it.

I suppose my first law mentor was my good friend Michael Attanasio. I met Mike one summer through a mutual friend I met bussing tables at Marie Callenders in La Mesa. At the time, I was playing football at Grossmont Junior College. Mike played soccer at Princeton. He had attended Grossmont High School (rich, white school for me). I had graduated from El Cajon Valley. We ran, lifted weights and trained together all summer. We soon became the best of friends.

A few years later, Mike was attending Stanford Law School and working as a summer clerk at Luce Forward. By then, I was playing football at the University of San Diego. We were roommates. Mike talked to me about law school and his job. It seemed like he liked it. And they paid him a ridiculous amount of money that summer. So, I figured that I would give it a try.

After my senior year, I took a year off to work and study for the LSAT. I did well and was admitted to every school I applied to. Mike gave me one piece of bad advice – he told me to go to Harvard. Instead, I went to Yale. From there, and like Mike, I applied to be a federal court law clerk. Mike clerked for Judge Brewster. I clerked for Judge Huff. Funny how the world works. Judge Brewster was a mentor to Judge Huff at both Gray Carey and then at the District Court. As my friend and role model, Mike taught me I could do what I set out to do – no matter how unlikely it might seem at the outset. As my supervising judge, Judge Huff taught me the value of hard work and careful legal analysis. Today, Mike is the managing partner of Cooley Godward’s San Diego office. Along with me, he was recently named a “Top 10” San Diego Super Lawyer. We often joke about our unlikely and parallel paths.

My next stop was Latham and Watkins in downtown Los Angeles. There, renowned litigator and trial lawyer Ernie Getto took me under his wing. He taught me not to be scared; that I was good at what I did and could handle what was in front of me. I always remember that today when times get a little tough or the task seems a little daunting. We tend to get through things and survive in the end.

One of my law school mentors, Phil Halpern, was an important leader in the United States Attorney’s Office in San Diego and he helped me get a job there. At the United States Attorney’s Office, I had a number of mentors. Alan Bersin, Chuck LaBella, Michael Dowd, Gregory Vega and (now judge) Gonzalo Curiel all helped me discover how to do justice and try a case. When it came time for me to move on and become a trial lawyer for people, Judge Irma Gonzalez mentored me by giving a list of the best of the best.

Craig McClellan, of course, was just that. He took me in and taught me the craft. From him, I learned that the client is always the most important thing,

by John H. Gomez

A graduate of Yale Law School and Gerry Spence’s Trial Lawyer’s College, John H. Gomez is CASD’s President for 2012. John believes passionately in improving our world though both the law and community service. John’s community passions are the Latino community, kids at risk, drunk driving prevention, foster children and legal services for the indigent. CASD has twice named John “Trial Lawyer of the Year” and has awarded him six “Outstanding Trial Lawyer” awards. His Gomez Law Firm is an eight-attorney consumer law firm dedicated exclusively to community service, catastrophic personal injury and mass tort litigation. Most importantly, John is the devoted husband of Lisa and the proud father of son “J.D.” and twins Michael and Analise.



Continued on page 4

to never compromise principle and to represent the profession with civility and professionalism. I was so happy to see him just recently named as this year's Daniel Broderick award recipient. He, of all the lawyers I know, most richly deserves the recognition.

I still have mentors. While I don't know him exceptionally well, I consider Gerry Spence a mentor. Likewise, Jude Basile, Rick Friedman and Brian Panish have all mentored me at some level although they may not even realize it. I watch what they do, try to learn what they teach and study whatever they say or write. David Casey, Vince Bartolotta, Denny Schoville . . . may not realize it, but they teach me all the time. I would also say I learn a ton from my contemporaries. Joel Bryant was the President of this organization before me. From him, I learned to be fair and even and measured.

The beauty of the law and life is that we never stop growing. The wonder of today's digital access is that there is an abundant wealth of knowledge available to each of us. Last night, I watched a Rick Friedman video at home. I have all the videos and all the books by all the great ones. They teach and mentor me even when I don't know them exceptionally well. We don't have to be in their "club", a "white male" or otherwise qualify for "mentoring" any more. That is something new and exciting I think. I sometimes hear from people that they learn from me. It's both humbling and surprising. There are people out there watching everything we do.

While my journey as President is almost over, I feel like I have a long way to go as a trial lawyer. I also have lots of work to do as both a husband and father. I hope I can continue to

improve as a human being with each breath I take. Life is amazing. Mine has been blessed. Thank you to all the mentors that have helped me get here. I hope I can "pay it forward" just a little bit in the years to come. **TBN**



VALUE-ADDED DISPUTE RESOLUTION

							
Hon. Mac Amos (Ret.)	Robert Coviello , Esq.	Hon. Patricia Cowett (Ret.)	Jobi Halper , Esq.	Hon. Charles Hayes (Ret.)	Hon. Yuri Hofmann (Ret.)	Hon. Anthony Joseph (Ret.)	Hon. Edward Kolker (Ret.)
					<div style="display: flex; justify-content: space-between;"> <div> <p>225 Broadway, Ste. 1400 San Diego, CA 92101 619.233.1323</p> </div> <div style="text-align: right;">  <p style="font-size: 8px;">Scan with a smartphone to view Our Panel</p> </div> </div>		
Hon. Gerald Lewis (Ret.)	Hon. Lillian Lim (Ret.)	Hon. Wayne Peterson (Ret.)	Hon. Sheridan Reed (Ret.)	Michael Roberts , Esq.	www.ADRSERVICES.org		