

PUBLICATION

Common Ground

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Summer 2023

Stefanie Doyle: I have been an associate at Baker Donelson for three years, and in that time, I have met a number of very smart, accomplished people, many of whom I have not had the chance to know beyond a work capacity. This article presented me with the opportunity to get to know someone whom I've always respected, but have not spent much time with – Alison Schurick, shareholder and Women's Initiative (WI) Office Leader in Baltimore. During our conversations, Alison and I discussed the important role of personal and professional mentors, including how they encourage and inspire us to succeed.

Stefanie: The goal of the Firm's WI is to help women attorneys support and elevate each other in all aspects of their lives. I've found my mentors at the Firm – both male and female – to be invaluable in helping me learn my field and better understand the Firm's business and operations. Do you have mentors at the Firm? Why did you become involved with the WI?

Alison: Like you, I am fortunate to have a cast of mentors and friends who have contributed to my success (and continue to do so). Some of my mentors were "assigned" through formal mentorship programs, but many just came about organically. Mentorship is what played a big role in my interest and motivation to take on a leadership role with the WI last year. Our Firm is filled with such kind, successful, and genuine women from whom I believe we all can learn something.

Stefanie: What is the most valuable lesson that you've learned, both in being a mentee and a mentor?

Alison: Take care of yourself. It can be so easy to run yourself down and burn out, so give yourself some grace and recognize the need to step back, take a break, and reset before it is too late.

Stefanie: Have you ever had a mentor/mentee relationship not work out? How did you handle it?

Alison: Yes. A few years ago, I participated in the mentor program at a local law school and was assigned a 1L law student. We met once or twice in the beginning, but things fizzled pretty soon thereafter. My mentee was very busy and did not seem too interested or invested in taking advantage of the mentor program, which in turn caused me to lose motivation for it. I made it a point to reach out to my mentee throughout the first year but rarely received a response. I was disappointed that it did not work out the way that I hoped it would for both of us, but I think it just wasn't a good fit at a good time. I haven't let that experience sour my interest in other mentorship opportunities.

Alison: What is one piece of advice you would give your younger self?

Stefanie: One of my favorite quotes is, "Life is not about finding yourself. Life is about creating yourself." When I was younger, I wish I had known that becoming the best of the person that I wanted to be personally and professionally would not just happen. Over time and experience, I realized that there is an extra step involved.

You have to know who you want to be and trust in your confidence, your courage, your resourcefulness, and your persistence to get you there. It doesn't mean being pushy or anything like that; it's about expecting that you can *make* your life happen and then seeing your steps through, even when things don't go according to plan. Another quote that I like is, "In the long run, you only hit what you aim at."

Stefanie: How would you advise your younger self?

Alison: I would tell myself that it is OK to not be the absolute best version of yourself every day. (In fact, I don't think it's even possible). But if you keep showing up, do the best you can, and learn from your mistakes and the mistakes of others, you will go far.

Alison and I differ in many ways: race, family structure, age, and practice area. However, we've both experienced and benefitted from the growth and confidence that can be sparked by true mentorship. Our conversations emphasized for me that your background does not matter; everyone has something to learn; and everyone has something to give.