

How Well Do Mentors Know Mentees?

I maintain that law firms too often distinguish associates by billable hours, class, practice group and office. We don't get to know them as people and without doing so we can't know what buttons to push. John Wooden, the most successful coach of any sport ever, coached two of the best centers to ever play in college-Lew Alcinder and Bill Walton. They played the same position and they played it the same way, but as people they could not have been more different. John Wooden recognized that and coached and motivated them differently.

Here is an exercise you might consider giving to your mentors and/or supervising attorneys.

For each lawyer they supervise or mentor, answer the following:

1. Name of spouse and how long married.
2. Names of children and ages
3. Their most important non-work, non-family activity
4. Why they joined the firm
5. What work they have done that they enjoyed the most
6. What they want to accomplish in their career
7. Their number one goal for this year
8. What non-monetary thing motivates them the most
9. Who their best friend is in the firm.
10. What career development activities they want to pursue.
11. What he/she has told the more junior lawyer about his/her own career.

Knowing associates as people and not just by their statistics, class and work product, gives a mentor an opportunity to figure out which buttons to push and how to push them to best help the associate achieve his or her career goals. It is also the first step towards building the trust which must precede the coaching.