

I'm Thinking: Partner and Associate

Perhaps the following two articles will help. The first is written by a partner in a large firm. He tells associates how to achieve success. The second is written by a former first-year associate who is now an educator. She tells partners what their new associates need to be successful.

... and From the Associate

by Myriam E. Gilles

Doing well on the LSATs, getting into a top law school, acing exams, and landing a job at a premier law firm is the easy part. The hard part is being a first-year associate.

You walk into your firm feeling that you have finally made it; everyone treats you like you have. Nice office, network computer, secretary, keys to a desk (which must mean that you will someday be the keeper of important documents). New suits, ties or pantyhose, fancy shoes. You are a working, productive member of society. You are important. You are an attorney.

Then the reality sets in.

Everyone seems to think that you know how to practice law, but you have no clue what is going on. You have never done a document review. You do not even know what that means. You have never written a memorandum of law; except for Moot Court, you have never written a brief. You have never litigated anything. You feel like a fraud.

The sexy image of being an associate and the reality of knowing nothing about how to practice law are on a collision course. And if a crash occurs, the first year of associate-dom becomes a nightmare of insecurity and frustration. In clinical terms, this is called cognitive dissonance, and it can lead to feelings of self-doubt, confusion, and shame. In layman's terms, this is called a living hell, and it can lead to sleepless nights, ulcers, and thoughts of running away to join the circus.

Based on my experiences and those of many friends who have made it through the first year, here are four ways that a firm can help its new associates forget the circus and join the ranks of productive lawyers.

1. Take a New Approach to the First Assignment.

Associates all have different war stories to tell about their first year, but they share one common experience: The First Assignment.

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It is your first or second day at the firm. You have admired your new office, said hello to your secretary, and filled out myriad forms. The most difficult thing you have done is compute how many deductibles to claim on your W-2 form.

Suddenly, the honeymoon is over. There is work to be done.

You are called to a partner's office to receive The First Assignment. It takes you ten minutes of walking through the carpeted, serpentine hallways to find the office to which you have been summoned, only to be told by a secretary that the partner is on a call and you must wait. You make small talk with the secretary, gushing about how much you have enjoyed your first few hours at the firm. You imagine that she sees through your too-cheerful chitchat, that she senses your fear and confusion. Just then, her phone buzzes, and she tells you to go in.

You walk into an office six times as large as your own, filled with 18 times as much paper—all of which, no doubt, is vital to some ground-breaking litigation. The partner smiles warmly and beckons you to sit down. She asks you how you like the firm so far, and you repeat your spiel about how happy you are and how nice everyone seems. Your practiced speech is cut off, however, when the secretary reappears and hands you a large stack of still-warm, recently photocopied paper. You wonder immediately whether you will actually have to read all this, or whether it is just some sort of lawyer's prop.

The partner, suddenly all business, begins to tell you about the case on which you will be working. She starts somewhere in the middle of a story about an agreement for sale of a business; then, noticing your look of complete confusion, she starts again. She tells you a little about the client, but forgets to mention what business the client is in. She tells you a little about the lawyers on the other side and a case she had against them three years ago. You wonder whether the prior case has any relevance to the present litigation. Because it might, you take notes on everything she says.

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royal, at the levee. Sir Bob, I said . . .

MRS YELVERTON BARRY

(In lowcorsaged opal balldress and elbowlength ivory gloves, wearing a sabletrimmed brick quilted dolman, a comb of brilliants and panache of osprey in her hair.) Arrest him constable. He wrote me an anonymous letter in prentice backhand when my husband was in the North Riding of Tipperary on the Munster circuit, signed James Lovebirch. He said that he had seen from the gods my peerless globes as I sat in a box of the Theatre Royal at a command performance of La Cigale. I deeply inflamed him, he said. He made improper overtures to me to misconduct myself at half past four p.m. on the following Thursday, Dunsink time. He offered to send me through the post a work of fiction by Monsieur Paul de Kock, entitled *The Girl with the Three Pairs of Stays*.

MRS BELLINGHAM

(In cap and seal coneymantle, wrapped up to the nose, steps out of her brougham and scans through tortoiseshell quizzing-glasses which she takes from inside her huge opossum muff.) Also to me. Yes, I believe it is the same objectionable person. Because he closed my carriage door outside sir Thornley Stoker's one sleety day during the cold snap of February ninetythree when even the grid of the wastepipe and ballstop in my bath cistern were frozen. Subsequently he enclosed a bloom of edelweiss culled on the heights, as he said, in my honour. I had it examined by a botanical expert and elicited the information that it was a blossom of the homegrown potato plant purloined from a forcingcase of the model farm.

MRS YELVERTON BARRY

Shame on him!

(A crowd of sluts and ragamuffins surges forward.)

THE SLUTS AND RAGAMUFFINS

(Screaming.) Stop thief! Hurrah there, Bluebeard! Three cheers for Ikey Mo!

SECOND WATCH

(Produces handcuffs.) Here are the darbies.

MRS BELLINGHAM

He addressed me in several handwritings with fulsome compliments as a Venus in furs and alleged profound pity

for my frostbound coachman Balmer while in the same breath he expressed himself as envious of his earflaps and fleecy sheepskins and of his fortunate proximity to my person, when standing behind my chair wearing my livery and the armorial bearings of the Bellingham escutcheon garnished sable, a buck's head coupé or. He lauded almost extravagantly my nether extremities, my swelling calves in silk hose drawn up to the limit, and eulogised glowingly my other hidden treasures in priceless lace which, he said, he could conjure up. He urged me, stating that he felt it his mission in life to urge me, to defile the marriage bed, to commit adultery at the earliest possible opportunity.

THE HONOURABLE
MRS MERVYN TALBOYS

(In amazon costume, hard hat, jackboots cockspurred, vermilion waistcoat, fawn musketeer gauntlets with braided drums, long train held up and hunting crop with which she strikes her welt constantly.) Also me. Because he saw me on the polo ground of the Phoenix park at the match All Ireland versus the Rest of Ireland. My eyes, I know, shone divinely as I watched Captain Slogger Dennehy of the Inniskillings win the final chukkar on his darling cob *Centaur*. This plebeian Don Juan observed me from behind a hackney car and sent me in double envelopes an obscene photograph, such as are sold after dark on Paris boulevards, insulting to any lady. I have it still. It represents a partially nude seniorita, frail and lovely (his wife as he solemnly assured me, taken by him from nature), practising illicit intercourse with a muscular torero, evidently a blackguard. He urged me to do likewise, to misbehave, to sin with officers of the garrison. He implored me to soil his letter in an unspeakable manner, to chastise him as he richly deserves, to bestride and ride him, to give him a most vicious horsewhipping.

MRS BELLINGHAM

Me too.

MRS YELVERTON BARRY

Me too.

(Several highly respectable Dublin ladies hold up improper letters received from Bloom.)

(Stamps her jingling spurs in a sudden paroxysm of sudden fury.) I will, by the God above me. I'll scourge the pigeonlivered cur as long as I can stand over him. I'll flay him alive. ☐

. . . From the Associate

(Continued from page 9)

Almost in mid-sentence, the partner shifts gears and tells you about how long the case has been in the office and how it was dumped on her when another partner left the firm. Being naive and apolitical—at least at this point in your tenure—you are not quite sure what to make of this information. You write it down anyway.

The partner mentions that other, more experienced associates have also been assigned to the case, and you feel a momentary rush of hope. Perhaps someone with less paper in her office can explain things to you more slowly. But you have no idea what the "working group list" is or where to find it in your small mountain of paper.

Apparently believing that she has now given you sufficient background, the partner returns to the subject of the sale agreement. She speaks quickly. You try to write down everything, but you discern only words that seem vaguely familiar: contract, breach, damages. Suddenly, she is silent and looks at you expectantly. You smile and nod, unsure what reaction she is looking for. Luckily—or perhaps not—the large phone on her desk buzzes and she takes what is clearly an important call. You stand up with your two-foot-tall stack of paper. As you struggle to open the door, she calls out for you to "feel free to call with any questions." But then she adds ominously, "You should find all you need to know in those papers." Right. Sure. Great.

What happens next differs from associate to associate. Some go back to their offices and sob silently into the sleeves of their brand-new suits. Others, perhaps those with more confidence, head straight to the library and begin working on The First Assignment, without any clue of what The First Assignment really is. These associates often are not seen for the remain-

der of the first year. Still others—at least, I have fantasized that such people must exist—leave the partner's office, walk to the elevator, and exit the building, never to return.

But all associates are overwhelmed by confusion, self-doubt, stress, anxiety, and a tinge of anger when they receive The First Assignment. After all, brand new associates know nothing about actually practicing law. So why did that partner assume that you knew how to litigate? Why did she speak to you as though you were as intimately involved with the case as she is? And why, after 30 minutes in her office, did you leave knowing so little about what she wants you to do?

At this point, a small bell goes off in the associate's head; "I've been here before," the associate thinks. Remember the first year of law school? You had no idea about what you were supposed to be doing, what the professor was talking about, and what exactly he wanted from you. Perhaps, like the first year of law school, the stress-producing confusion of first-year associate-dom is meant to weed out those who "can't cut it"—and to toughen up those who can. Or maybe, like first-year law students, first-year associates are bound to endure some level of panic and stress because they are in a new environment, being judged by new standards.

Clearer Communication

But just as law schools are beginning to recognize that the traditional first-year trial-by-fire may not be the most efficient—let alone humane—method of educating law students, so law firms should reconsider the treatment of first-year associates. There are basic categories of information and certain methods of conveying that information that would give first-year associates a far better sense of what they are supposed to be doing and how they are supposed to do it.

Of course, the moral of the "story" recounted above is that partners should communicate assignments more clearly to first-year associates. But what exactly does this mean, and how can it be accomplished? I asked a number of second- and third-year litigation associates at different law firms in New York, Chicago, and Los Angeles what they wish they had been told about The First Assignment. Most said that they had not been given enough background about the case, and confessed that they

felt stupid asking what seemed like basic questions. A few associates (mainly law review types) complained that they had no idea how much time to devote to a particular research assignment. Not surprisingly, they often ended up writing Corbin-like volumes on even trivial or simple issues. In general, the associates polled believed that they could have been better first-year associates had they simply been given more information.

One associate recalls that on her first day at a large New York firm, she was told by a partner that she was to help out on "a brief." She diligently read the prior pleadings in the case, researched and wrote memoranda on various issues, and even participated in conference calls and meetings with the client. She viewed herself as an important part of the "team" and felt lucky to be working on a case that enabled her to have so much input. Then, a month or so into her tenure as a first-year associate, a more senior associate asked her what she was working on. She responded with the client's name, and even rattled off the now memorized client-matter number. But when the senior associate asked her what kind of brief was being filed, the first-year sat in stunned silence, trying desperately to stave off the fear that slowly crept up her spine. Summary Judgment? Motion to Dismiss? The first-year associate had no idea what kind of brief she was working on. And, as she thought about all the research she had done and all the memoranda she had written, this first-year's heart began to beat wildly: What if all her research was worthless because of the procedural posture of the case? What if all the cases she had found were completely off-point?

Telling this story, now two years after the fact, this associate's eyes fill with the same fear she must have felt that day. This fear—unnecessary, counterproductive, and silly as it may seem—is an overwhelming part of life for first-year associates. They are afraid to ask questions, lest they look stupid; afraid to not ask questions, lest they do something wrong; afraid to act afraid, lest they appear human. Indeed, the associate who did not know what type of brief she was working on admits to being so full of fear that she never actually got up the nerve to ask the partner this very basic question. (She finally saw the title of the brief on an early

draft in a recycle bin. It was a Motion for Judgment on the Pleadings.)

It is not enough simply to ask that those responsible be clearer and more forthright in giving The First Assignment to first-year associates. Instead, firms must establish a better procedure for conveying information to the new recruits. The Socratic case method of teaching law provides a useful analogy for finding what this "better procedure" might be.

Installments, Not Bulk

Law students are expected to read a vast number of cases without understanding, at least at first, what they are looking for. In class, the professor focuses on a single case and questions individual students about various aspects of the court's legal analysis. She posits hypotheticals and alternative arguments, and asks for the students' analyses of these. Finally, if the method works, students come to understand not only the substantive law, but also the different components of a case and the various ways of conducting legal analysis. Through this method, law students are slowly taught to "think like lawyers."

Law firms should establish a similar method of acclimating first-year associates to the practice of law. Information about the assigned case should be communicated to first-year associates in installments, not in bulk. And the first-year associate should play an active role in figuring out the significance of the information he receives.

The first step involves a senior lawyer writing a short synopsis of the procedural and substantive history, open issues, and strategy of the case. All documents referenced in this descriptive memorandum should be attached, like exhibits to a motion. The assignor tells the first-year associate to read through the packet of information carefully, to reread it, and to write down any questions he might have.

Next, the assignor answers the first-year associate's questions. These answers may well lead to more installments of information, more questions, and more answers. Only when it appears that the first-year associate has an adequate understanding of the case should the assignor give the associate a written description of the assignment. Accompanying the assignment should be an approximate date of completion and a suggested

length in terms of pages or time spent.

This installment system should be used until it is no longer needed for the associate's development. Over time, as the first-year associate becomes more comfortable with the history, facts, and issues of a particular case, the installments will no longer be necessary. Similarly, over time, the first-year associate will become able to approach a new case with a better understanding of what questions need to be answered at the outset. The installment system will have accomplished its purpose.

Partners should not bemoan the additional time and work required to provide a first-year associate with these installments of information. In the long run, the firm will save time and money.

Writing the synopsis of the case will itself be a productive expenditure of time. It will force senior litigators, who have perhaps become overly involved with the details of the trees, to step back and describe the contours of the forest.

In addition, because the associate will not know, at first, what he is looking for or what his assignment is, he will approach the information with an open mind. The questions he will ask after reading the synopsis of the case may themselves be useful to the senior litigators because the associate may spot previously unnoticed issues or problems (i.e., "from the minds of babes").

Finally, as these questions are answered, as more documents are read, and as more knowledge of the case is gained, the first-year associate will become more comfortable speaking and thinking about the issues in the litigation. When the assignment is finally revealed, the first-year will be primed to work through the issues efficiently.

Another important aspect of this system is that the final installment—the actual assignment—clearly identifies the issues that the first-year associate is expected to research, the date the assignment is due, and approximately how long it should take. Of course, the estimated expenditure of time can only be a rough guess; legal research is not an exact science, as one issue often tends to lead to another. But giving a first-year associate some sense of what is expected of him is far better than allowing the associate to try to figure it out for himself.

The installment system should go a long way toward reducing anxiety among first-year associates. Most first-

years want desperately to do good work and to be helpful to the attorneys they work for; most long to feel that they are part of a team and that they have a good grasp of the issues in the litigation. Just as important, most first-year associates are bright, ambitious, and accomplished people who are completely unaccustomed to doing poorly or, even worse, not knowing what they are doing at all. It is therefore not surprising that first-year associates are frustrated when they do not understand an assignment or cannot even grasp the issues.

Implementing the installment system means that some additional burden will be heaped on the plates of senior litigators. But that's life—or, more precisely,



that is the price the firm must pay to raise a better crop of young lawyers. Providing information in bits rather than in chunks may require more time and effort by senior litigators, but the result will be better not only for the associates, but also for the firm and its clients.

2. Establish or Restructure Real Mentoring Programs.

Many firms have instituted formal or informal "mentoring" programs, in which a first-year associate is assigned to a partner. The associate is invited to turn to the partner for guidance about, and answers to, all sorts of questions. The associates with whom I spoke, however, gave a universal thumbs-down to these mentoring programs. In fact, many claim not to have laid eyes on their mentor since being taken to a fancy lunch on their first day of work.

An associate at a major Chicago firm tells a particularly poignant tale about his mentor. At the end of this associate's first week at the firm, his mentor called him up and invited him out for drinks with a few other litigation associates and partners. The first-year arrived late to the local watering hole and spotted a

table of loud-talking lawyers from his firm—including his mentor, whose picture he had looked up in the firm directory. Approaching the table, the first-year tapped his mentor on the shoulder to tell him that he had arrived. Without turning around, his mentor simply waved his hand and said "Sure, we'll have another round of beers." The other lawyers at the table, seeing the first-year blush with embarrassment, began to laugh. When the mentor realized his mistake, he only joined the laughter, failing to apologize or even to make room for his mentee at the table.

This Chicago associate, now in his fourth year of practice, recalls leaving the bar close to tears. For months, he avoided his mentor and all the other lawyers at the table.

This story—albeit extreme and, with any luck, unique—nevertheless highlights the problem of pairing an insecure, unsophisticated, and easily embarrassed first-year associate with a tenured, potentially insensitive, and busy partner. Under most circumstances, the power, age, and life differences inherent in such a relationship doom it to failure.

There are other problems with traditional mentoring programs. Few young associates feel comfortable speaking with a partner during their first few days, weeks, or even months of practice—exactly the time that they most wish to ask questions. A first-year associate is particularly loath to approach a partner when the associate's questions run toward the mundane ("Should I bluebook my memos?" or "How do you use the conference call function on these phones?").

Moreover, many mentoring programs try to avoid work-related conflicts by pairing the associate with a partner from another area of practice or another department. But randomly pairing a first-year litigation associate with someone with whom he is not working on a day-to-day basis, particularly a partner in another department, does not work. In fact, it all but guarantees that the first-year will never turn to his mentor for answers to the questions that plague the associate's days and nights. There may be exceptions to this rule where mentor-partners and first-year associates share personal interests (the football team of an alma mater), but staking mentorship on this possibility is a crap-shoot.

Finally, most partners, though well-intentioned and eager to participate in mentoring programs, simply do not have the time to be real mentors for first-year associates. These partners generally start off well enough: they call their mentees, have lunch a couple of times during the first month, and try to stop by the mentee's office to "check



up." But eventually, busy mentor-partners fall out of touch. The first-year associate, unsure of why he is being ignored, is bound to be disappointed. He may view it as a personal slight or, worse, as a comment on how much the firm values him. He may well feel more marginalized than ever.

But there is a solution: assigning the first-year associate to a third- or fourth-year associate mentor, preferably one who is also working on at least one case with the first-year. Because first-years are closer in age and experience to other associates, and because other associates are not viewed as power brokers at the firm, first-year associates will be less reluctant to ask questions of fellow associates. Indeed, rather than call these people mentors—a word that suggests a personal closeness and the power to guide the younger person's career—law firms should use a more appropriate term, such as "handler." A handler could field the first-year associate's questions, address her concerns, and deal with her problems, no matter how mundane or silly. A handler might read and edit the associate's memoranda and other written work product before the assigning partner does, and may advise the associate on issues of style and substance. A handler could help the first-year associate navigate

the tricky political terrain of the law firm, with advice ranging from how much *not* to drink at the firm's Christmas party to how to schmooze the administrative staff to get things done.

Of course, the firm's commitment to promoting and maintaining the program as a priority is vital to any such handling program. For example, handlers should be allowed to "bill" time spent helping their assignees; for this purpose, the firm might use a special matter number, akin to pro bono or firm development. And firms might consider picking up the tab for monthly handler/first-year lunches or dinners to encourage interaction outside the office. In short, the atmospheric are almost as important as the substance of what a handler is assigned to do, and the success of any such program requires a firm to pay attention to these details.

Many of the associates with whom I spoke thought that pairing slightly senior associates with first-year associates would be helpful; in fact, some noted that, as first-years, they regularly sought out third- and fourth-year associates to answer questions, edit memoranda, and explain the politics and personalities of the firm. A small minority suggested that third- and fourth-year associates simply do not know enough to help first-year associates. My response is that these third- and fourth-year associates would know much more if *they* had been given handlers during their first year.

3. Facilitate Meaningful and Helpful Client Contact.

Young lawyers yearn for client contact. Partners, on the other hand, sometimes secretly wish that their clients could never contact them at all. It is easy for partners to dismiss the repeated requests of young associates for more client contact, perhaps with the knowledge that in a few years they will be singing a different tune. But honoring these requests in an appropriate way could make associates far more productive—to the benefit of the client and the firm.

One partner at a national law firm remembers his first year being taken up, for the most part, by a massive document production. From all of the client's documents, he was to cull and produce only those relating to a single product. As he began going through the documents, one by one, he looked for any mention of the product in question. But it soon became apparent that the vast majority of the

documents were written in "product-code-ese." No one had told him whether an XFTY*(#!Q or a UPBIMNVF was a component of the product in question, and there was no one to ask.

Should the associate have called the partner in charge with each question? Should he have compiled a list of every indecipherable term that turned up in hundreds of boxes of documents and presented that list to the partner? If the partner could answer the questions, should the associate have returned to the hundreds of boxes with his newfound knowledge in hand? Or should he simply have taken it upon himself to call the associate general counsel listed on the "Contact Sheet," to whom he had never been introduced?

None of those "solutions" is ideal; all included unnecessary work or questions posed to those with more important things to do with their time. But the problem would have been avoided entirely if the associate had a "contact" at the client who knew the product codes and who was sufficiently junior to view the associate's seemingly endless questions as something other than an interruption.

Providing first-year associates with much-coveted client contact, in the form of a lower-level manager or a junior executive, would allow law firms to kill the proverbial two birds with one stone. First, it would save time. The client contact would presumably be able to answer basic questions about business and internal procedures, and would certainly be able to find answers to more difficult questions far more quickly than the associate could. Second, providing a young associate with the opportunity to call someone in the client's business, ask questions, and ferret out information would be a valuable business development teaching tool: many first-year associates have very little business contact with anyone outside their firm. Picking up the phone and speaking with a client, without worrying about wasting that person's valuable time, would enable first-year associates to feel more comfortable dealing with non-lawyers and businesspeople. And as an added benefit, new connections will be forged between the firm and the client.

4. Help the Associate Adjust to Firm Life.

One of the most startling aspects of being a first-year associate is how much

other attorneys think you know about being part of the work force. NEWS-FLASH: many first-year associates have never worked in a formal business setting, have never had a secretary or an office, have never even seen hanging files, and have never used a photocopier that requires numbers to be punched in before the blessed thing will work. Most first-year associates are young, right out of school, eager, and probably a little wet behind the ears.

Firms generally try to acclimate first-year associates to the work environment through a half-day orientation on their first day of work. Good idea; poor execution. Rather than try to tell first-years everything they need to know in the first four hours of their careers as practicing attorneys, firms should hold all-day retreats prior to the first day of work.

First-years would arrive at their new firm mid-morning on Saturday or Sunday. (Tell them that dress is casual or they may arrive wearing a tie or high heels.) Give them the usual orientation information. And then let these new, eager attorneys spend the day practicing—and thus learning—everything from how to work fax machines and photocopiers to how to get reimbursed for late-night cab fares home from work.

Every form an associate may need should be put in a binder for future reference; every function the phones can perform should be put on a sheet of paper attached to the phone itself; and every important phone number (car services, restaurants that deliver, security) should be placed on a list somewhere in the associate's office. Someone should be on hand to explain how to fill out the tax forms and medical insurance applications, give advice about whether to participate in the firm's 401K and life insurance plans, and provide general information about compensation, bonuses, and vacation time.

But the firm's support should not stop at the purely professional. As these young lawyers struggle to acclimate to their new jobs, they are also trying to settle into their new lives. Some are decorating the apartments they will rarely see during their first year of practice. Some are trying to learn a new city—from how to get to work every morning, to where to buy groceries, to how to find a decent (cheap) place to eat dinner. Some are dealing with relationships, children, and a host of other personal issues in a new environment.

Remember that these are people who have spent the past three years in school—that wonderful place where all you do is go to class occasionally, hang out with friends, do a little reading around exam time, and watch television. The whole getting-up-early, putting-on-a-suit, and working-all-day thing is new to many. And it is quite hard for some.

Finding a Home

There is much that a firm can do to help ease the first-year associate's transition into her new life. First, big-city firms should help out-of-town associates find apartments. I mean REALLY help. Hire licensed real estate brokers, clip real estate sections, get on the Internet, look in the obituaries for recently vacated apartments. In some cities (New York comes to mind) finding an apartment is such a daunting, difficult task that many associates never really recover from the experience.

One associate, born and raised in the Midwest, told me the story of arriving in the Big Apple a few days after taking the bar exam. She stayed at a hotel while she looked for an apartment with a broker whose name she found in the newspaper. Knowing nothing about New York City apartments, this associate told her broker that she wanted to spend about two to three hundred dollars a month. Not surprisingly, the broker took her to a relatively dangerous area on the upper, upper westside of Manhattan, where she was shown a series of dilapidated, roach-infested, noisy apartments in buildings surrounded by crack dens.

This associate was not naive, but she also realized that she had never seen the apartments of other associates at the firm. Maybe they all lived like this at first? At least until their student loans were paid off?

(You can sleep easy tonight; the story has a happy ending. The associate was fortunate enough to call a friend who told her to keep her head down to avoid stray bullets and to get out of there. Two weeks later, she was comfortably ensconced in a studio apartment—more expensive, of course—six blocks from the firm.)

There are too many stories like this one to recount them all here. The point is that some associates need all kinds of help—from finding apartments, to buying a bed, to figuring out how the pub-

lic transportation system works. Firms should provide this help through the recruitment coordinator or some other accessible person. Out-of-town associates will arrive in a new city—often alone and knowing no one—before they start their jobs; they need immediate help finding shelter, clothing, and other necessities of life. How much easier it would be if the firm had someone available to help these needy associates before their start dates.

In the end, it is in the best interests of law firms, partners, senior associates, and administrators to do as much as they can to help the fresh recruits who arrive each fall. Though I have no statistics to prove this, common sense tells me that associates who have positive first-year experiences remain at the law firm longer than those who do not. If this intuition is true, then law firms that train first-year associates to become better lawyers and support first-year associates so they may live better lives will keep these young attorneys, who will someday become partners and leaders in the firm. Law, after all, is the study and practice of the rules that regulate society. It makes perfect sense, then, that those new to the law should be given a full understanding of their immediate society and its workings. □

From the Bench

(Continued from page 4)

the disposition that led us into law—that everyone has a story and that every case has many stories. We listen, we find patterns, we compare one story with another, we improvise, we shape our law to fit the real-life stories of our time.

We are problem solvers. Our job is to study the conflicts of our time, to place them in the context of the conflicts of other times, and to improvise sensible solutions. That is good work. It is sometimes even noble work. It will always be there for us.

And that is why, to switch from Twain to Dickens, every time will be the worst of times and the best of times for those who practice law. □