



### MENTORSHIP AWARD FINALISTS: Kahlil Yearwood



Courtesy photo

**Kahlil Yearwood, with Gibson,  
Dunn & Crutcher.**

Kahlil Yearwood is co-partner in charge of the San Francisco office of Gibson, Dunn & Crutcher.

#### **How would you describe your mentorship style?**

My mentorship style is rooted in meeting each individual where they are and understanding what success means to them. My primary goal is to help them achieve success as they define it, rather than imposing my own or the firm's definitions of success on them.

Authenticity is another cornerstone of my mentorship approach. I am open about

my own journey, including my differences and failures. By sharing my authentic self, I try to create an atmosphere where my mentees feel comfortable being themselves. Openness about failure is particularly important. It allows them to see that setbacks are a natural part of growth and provides a platform for discussing their own challenges without fear of judgment.

One of my tricks is to try to develop two-way mentoring relationships. When I am mentoring a more junior lawyer, I

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try to find a subject of mutual interest where they can mentor me or at least we are equals in our knowledge. It can be anything—playing pickleball, cooking barbecue, fashion, music. This breaks down barriers and helps me to be a much more effective mentor on the subjects where I have wisdom to impart.

### **What can individuals and law firms do to develop better mentors?**

I love this question and talk about it a lot.

Almost all senior lawyers say that they want to be mentors and would like to do more mentoring. Almost all junior lawyers say that they would like more mentoring. So why doesn't more mentoring happen?

When talking to junior lawyers, I ask them if they want more mentoring. They say yes. I ask them how many mentees they have. They look at me confused and say none.

I remind them that to a high school student, a law student appears as a fully fledged lawyer, and to their families and in their communities, a first-year associate is a legal expert.

So why don't they mentor? They don't realize how much they have to offer and/or are unsure how to start a relationship with someone who feels so distant from them. The mindset of the senior lawyer is no different.

Someone needs to go first, either the more junior person or the more senior person. It can be either, but it can't be nobody. I push both junior and senior lawyers to see this. It's easy, just be yourself, develop a genuine relationship and either offer or seek wisdom. One of my "tricks" is this regard is to get a junior person to act as a mentor, because once they see how it works, they are more likely to consider taking the leap and seek mentorship from others.