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BEST MENTOR FINALIST:

KAREN BOYD, THOMPSON HINE



Karen Boyd, partner at Thompson Hine, is one of the finalists of The Recorder's Best Mentor award. Read a Q&A with her and her mentee, partner Keeley Vega, below.

How would you describe your mentorship style?

I hadn't really thought about my "mentorship style" until asked this question. Reflecting now, I think it is about meeting people where they are. Seeing their strengths and encouraging them to develop those strengths—I think that's much more effective than identifying weaknesses. You build a better team by having each person do what they are good at and recruiting to build that team of complementary strengths. I also try to approach every working relationship with openness and curiosity about what I can learn from everyone on the team. Something that on first pass seems like a bad idea may be brilliant once you understand why your colleague approached it the way they did. Or maybe it was the wrong way to go, but understanding where the idea came from is going to help the whole team in thinking through approaches critically.

Encourage everyone on your team to approach problems with curiosity and the willingness to suggest solutions that are "so crazy they just might work." And model that behavior yourself—maybe even suggesting something that you're pretty sure is a bad idea. You want a team who is comfortable telling anyone on the team when they think they see a problem. Great lawyers with great judgment are forged by finding creative solutions to challenging problems.

Mentorship and support for colleagues goes well beyond client work. Supporting others in business development, building a network, and having a full life outside of the practice of law is just as important.

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

Value mentorship. Intentionally align your culture—and your compensation system—around the actions you want to encourage (and discourage). Recruit and reward people who genuinely like other people and value them as whole people and not just fungible billing units. And use language that reflects the value of building careers throughout your communications in your practice. If the only thing you talk about, measure, and reward is billable hours, that's all anyone will focus on. But when you talk about, measure, and reward supporting others on your team with the primary goal of excellent client service, that's what everyone will focus on.

And value learning. Almost 18 years ago, Julie Turner—with whom I co-founded Turner Boyd—established a standing agenda item for our biweekly all-hands meeting that we still call "TurBoPalooza." That agenda item is "Something I've Learned Since the Last TurBoPalooza." In roundtable

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format, each person shares something they've learned. Sometimes it's serious and work-related; often it's not. My next "something I've learned" is going to be that the terms dumpster, escalator, zipper and thermos were all once trademarked (thanks, NYT "Strands" game!). Valuing and modeling curiosity and continuous learning builds a culture where mentorship happens naturally and in all directions.

Mentee Q&A:

How has this mentor made an impact on your career?

Karen Boyd has profoundly shaped the trajectory of my legal career. From when I met her in the summer of 2006 as a 1L summer associate at Fish & Richardson, and she was assigned as my partner mentor, Karen invested in my growth with generosity and intentionality. She guided me through unfamiliar assignments, helped me navigate increasing responsibilities, and offered candid, practical advice on how to build a successful career as a young female attorney in a large law firm. Her mentorship gave me the confidence and skills I needed to thrive.

Even after Karen left to start Turner Boyd, she remained a steady and reliable presence. We stayed in contact, exchanging career updates and industry insights, and her continued interest in my development reminded me that true mentorship does not end when circumstances change.

In 2015, Karen invited me to join Turner Boyd, giving me the opportunity to practice at the highest level in an environment that better aligned with my values and goals. That invitation was itself a reflection of Karen's impact—she saw potential in me that I might not have fully recognized on my own and created a path for me to realize it.

What has meant the most, however, is Karen's deep understanding of the challenges women face in balancing a demanding litigation career with a fulfilling personal life. As a fellow mother of two, she has offered me invaluable advice on striking that balance while also modeling it herself, building a firm culture where attorneys feel

empowered to prioritize their families without sacrificing professional growth. Her example has shaped not only how I practice law but how I lead.

Today, Karen and I are colleagues and partners, frequently trying and winning cases together, and having fun doing it. I can say unequivocally that I would not be where I am today without her two decades of mentorship.

What is one lesson you have learned from your mentor?

I cannot limit this to just one lesson, as there are many that profoundly shaped my work and career.

One is to be curious. Karen has taught me that the best legal practitioners are perpetual students. They ask questions, they challenge assumptions, and they are constantly seeking to deepen their understanding. Karen approaches every matter with a contagious intellectual curiosity. She proves that curiosity is not a sign of inexperience but rather a hallmark of excellence. The willingness to ask "why" or "what if" often leads to the most creative solutions and the strongest arguments. Because of Karen, I have learned to embrace what I do not yet know and to treat every new matter as an opportunity to learn something, whether it is about a novel area of law, an unfamiliar industry, or a different perspective on a problem I thought I already understood.

Another lesson is to have fun. Karen exemplifies the notion of taking your work seriously, but not yourself. She demonstrates that we can do important and meaningful work while also genuinely enjoying the process. Karen brings her full personality and wit to every situation, whether it is a high-stakes negotiation, a team meeting, or a casual conversation in the hallway. She has shown me that humor and warmth are not at odds with professionalism; in fact, they make us better at what we do. People want to work with someone who brings positive energy to the table, and Karen is living proof of that. Her example has taught me that sustaining a long and fulfilling career in the law requires more than technical skill. It requires finding joy in the journey and building genuine relationships along the way.