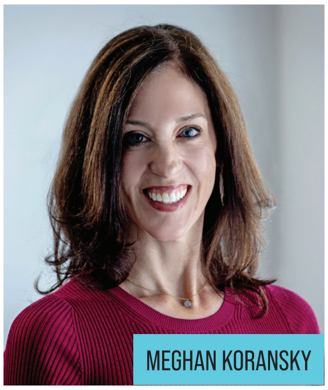

THE POWER OF MENTORING: INTEGRATING PEOPLE AND CULTURES

By Meghan Koransky

It has been said that law firm mergers begin with spreadsheets and end with PowerPoint presentations. When mergers look great on paper and fail to succeed, what went wrong is nearly always about people. Post-merger strategies need to focus on the human element of integration. Mentoring can play a key role in this effort by bringing together people, practices, and cultures. Here is how:

Morale + Workplace Satisfaction. Mergers are unsettling. Employees have lost a familiar workplace and may feel powerless about what is to come. Mentors can help mentees feel more valued for their contributions and more satisfied at work. This reduces feelings of uncertainty and builds optimism for the future of the combined firm.

Cascading Communication. Communication is the glue that holds mergers together. An effective strategy ensures the right messaging is communicated and reinforced. Mentors can overlay formal communications with informal messaging from leadership. They can also channel themes they are hearing back to leadership.

Cultural Alignment. Mergers often fail because of cultural misalignment. Pairing mentors and mentees across legacy firms fosters unity and helps employees navigate cultural norms, such as:

- What is the best way to solicit feedback?
- What are the unspoken expectations about availability and responsiveness?
- Is it okay to reach out to partners in other offices and ask for work?

Skill Development + Client Expansion. Mentoring provides a low-cost path to skill development and the transfer of institutional knowledge. Pairing mentors with mentees across legacy firms also builds awareness for new opportunities and synergies. This enhances the combined firm's skills and service offerings.

Leadership Development. The word "mentor" comes from *The Odyssey*, where Mentor was a guardian entrusted with shaping the future of a young leader named Telemachus. Serving as mentors does not just help mentees; it also helps leaders reimagine what is possible. This shapes the next generation of leadership of the combined firm.

"Telemachus and Mentor" by Pablo Fabisch

Here are high-level considerations when developing a mentoring program:

Develop a Mentorship Strategy. Mentoring programs require structure, clear expectations, and consistent support. Administrators should specify how sessions are structured and equip participants with tools and resources, such as:

- Techniques on mentoring and being mentored
- Monthly messaging and access to educational materials
- Recognition from leadership for participating in the program

Create Impactful Pairings. The success of any mentoring program depends on solid pairings. The best approaches include questionnaires, allowing firms to pair attorneys based on complimentary traits and development needs. Merging firms should overlay this data with suggestions from team leaders of each legacy firm. The matching process should also promote inclusion and connectivity.

Provide Support + Resources. Gaining buy-in from mentors and mentees is essential; if either is unwilling to dedicate the time the program is unlikely to get off the ground. It is also critical to have support from firm leadership as well as administrative support running the program. Firms should provide a budget for lunches, happy hours, and coffees.

Evaluate + Revise. Even the best mentoring programs can benefit from participants' feedback. Administrators should routinely ask participants what is working and where the program can be better. They should also provide periodic opportunities for participants to opt-out or change pairings.