This Second Edition of the Lawyer’s Guide to Mentoring could not be more well timed. The relatively conservative, slow-to-change legal profession is being challenged by disruptive forces and ideas, ranging from globalization to increasing market transparency and technologies like artificial intelligence and predictive coding. Even as the market for clients has become more competitive, the market for talent is becoming even more so. This book is critical because the legal profession is beginning to experience a serious talent drain: even the most prestigious law schools are receiving fewer and fewer applications, particularly from top students.

Why is this happening? I strongly believe that a key driver is the fact that through technology and social media, the world’s labor market is the most transparent it has ever been in all human history. Top talent can much more easily seek and compare potential career avenues and jobs (and on a global basis!), and job seekers can much more easily locate and cultivate relationships with top talent. The result? If you aren’t providing a great place to work and your profession is viewed as one that underinvests in developing people, people with options will opt out.

Thus, if you are a leader of any legal institution — public or private or academic — you need to be very concerned and you need to act now to stem the flow of brilliant young people away from the practice of law. Ida Abbott’s call to action here around mentoring should be the first book you read because mentoring is at the very core of providing a great work environment and helping people to develop their strengths and find their best paths to have impact in the world.

Two aspects of this book make it the only one you need to read to be able to experiment with and advance mentoring in your organization and to significantly enhance your own ability to mentor or be mentored: this book is both comprehensive and practical.

First, as a comprehensive resource, this Second Edition offers the most detailed, thoughtful analysis available across historical dimensions of lawyer mentoring. More importantly, it explores new and emerging models for mentoring that have direct applicability to our rapidly changing profession, such as episodic, reverse, and virtual mentoring. These new models are appearing and have already been developed by industries and institutions that directly compete to hire top talent away from the legal profession. This book will help us catch up.

Second, “practical” is a word that has such loaded meaning for lawyers. In any legal practice setting, lawyers are task-driven, pressed-for-time people who can brilliantly and efficiently execute any task but will quickly lose patience if they are told to execute some-
thing unclear, messy, or poorly designed. Even very senior, experienced lawyers and professional development leaders will find the solutions in *The Lawyer’s Guide to Mentoring* to be clear, well-structured, and implementable. Ida Abbott has cleared the path by applying her years of first-hand experience and the incredible breadth of her understanding of the research and science behind mentoring.

Apart from being an expert on the craft and practice of mentoring for lawyers, Ida Abbott is herself a distinctly wonderful mentor. That is important to note because, as lawyers, we are always highly skeptical of people who don’t “walk the talk.” Ida passes that test with flying colors. She effectively mentored the legal profession itself through her groundbreaking work in professional development. At an individual level, she has mentored countless people across her decades of service, offering her optimism, inspiration, wisdom, and consistently thoughtful advice to guide lawyers in their professional growth.

On a personal note, I am particularly honored to author a foreword to this insightful and practical book because I am one of the fortunate lawyers who has experienced the privilege and benefit of Ida’s mentorship. In early summer 2004, I was at a crossroads in my career. I was then leading professional development in McKinsey & Company’s Washington, DC, office. One of the main reasons I had joined McKinsey after ten years of legal practice was that the structure and culture of large law firms at the time did not value mentoring. I received little and was never rewarded for working hard to mentor younger associates. I didn’t expect to return to a large law firm after McKinsey, but that summer of 2004 I was approached and offered the opportunity to lead professional development at a prestigious law firm. It sounded like a great opportunity but I was naturally quite skeptical.

A colleague of mine at McKinsey, herself a former lawyer, suggested that I speak with a woman she had heard of in San Francisco who was working to transform lawyer development. I sent an email and received a cheerful, enthusiastic response from Ida Abbott, agreeing to connect with me. Later that week, I called Ida, who spent an hour mentoring me — and convincing me — to join the law firm professional development revolution. Ida was so thoughtful, charming, funny, positive, and inspiring — I truly will never forget that phone call and will always be in her debt.

Looking back, when you sort through the noise, you can see clearly that the large law firm professional development revolution began with Ida Abbott and her mentoring work. Ida was the first to address a systemic law firm professional development issue and offer a framework for both individual and organizational change. She wrote the first edition of this book and was off to the races, counseling and mentoring newly appointed professional development leaders like me about how to jumpstart mentoring at their law firms. In a very short time, the Professional Development Consortium, of which Ida was a founding member, transformed from a small, informal roundtable into a prestigious association of hundreds of law firm professional development leaders. Ida led the fight and courageously pointed out to powerful law firm leaders that they needed to invest in mentoring. These leaders listened to Ida because she was (1) incredibly knowledgeable and
convincing, and (2) a highly experienced law firm lawyer who understood that law firms’ rapid growth would have serious implications for their ability to develop their next generation of leaders — unless they focused on mentoring. She connected the dots for these leaders, pointing out that the traditional Cravath apprenticeship model was collapsing under the weight of billing pressures and escalating associate-to-partner ratios.

For context, the modern legal profession developed out of an apprenticeship model that looked a lot like mentoring. Those who wanted to become lawyers found an established lawyer, paid a fee, and gained both technical instruction and practical experience. Paul D. Cravath changed this model in the early 1900s by rejecting old traditions in favor of a system where his law firm hired new lawyers out of law school, paid them a good salary, and then trained them while they worked hard toward the opportunity to become a partner in his firm. Cravath institutionalized apprenticeship.

Cravath’s solution was well-tailored to the markets for clients and talent at that time, but is now sadly out of tune with those markets, as discussed in the June 2017 Stanford Law Review article that my Harvard Law School colleague and mentor Professor David Wilkins and I published, entitled “The Leadership Imperative: A Collaborative Approach to Professional Development in the Global Age of More for Less.” We show, as Ida foresaw, that large law firms dramatically underinvest in mentoring and lawyer professional development, and that the gap is widening as law firms confront globalization and competitive pressures to pay top dollar for talent and meet client demands for competitive, more predictable fees.

Professor Wilkins and I propose a new model for lawyer development that requires investment in three critical areas. We assert that to be successful, lawyers must develop (1) technical legal skills and expertise, (2) professional skills that are adaptable to any professional context, and (3) opportunity-generating personal and professional networks. We are thrilled at the timing of the publication of the Second Edition of The Lawyer’s Guide to Mentoring because Ida clearly demonstrates how mentorship significantly supports all three of the critical capabilities that Professor Wilkins and I identify. More importantly, this book provides details and a path forward: specific frameworks, tools, and suggestions that can be applied to achieve successful mentoring relationships and an organizational culture that sustains effective mentoring across generations of lawyers.

There is one more reason that I find this book to be particularly important and relevant. As the faculty director of the leadership programs provided by Executive Education at Harvard Law School, I have observed an interesting phenomenon. Lawyers, as a population, are arguably the least self-aware professionals in the world. Legal education and practice continually reinforce to lawyers that the clients’ needs come first. Intense focus on the needs of clients creates an unfortunate dynamic that causes lawyers to lose sight of the importance of caring for ourselves first. We need to steal a page from the flight attendants’ manual and realize that putting our own oxygen masks on first is the only way to ensure that we can competently grow to meet our clients’ increasingly sophisticated demands.
The profession’s resistance is a result of our own training and culture. We are trained to try to be the smartest persons in the room rather than to admit any vulnerability — or that we don’t know the answer or where to find it. We thus operate in a culture where we often feel very uncomfortable asking for help, and don’t see helping ourselves as fundamental to helping our clients.

Mentoring is the key to interrupting this myopic, I-can-do-it-alone and only-the-client’s-needs-matter perspective. Lawyers caring for and mentoring each other will serve our clients and advance our own careers more effectively. Mentoring also forces lawyers to confront critical organizational development gaps, including the need for legal institutions to embrace and reap the rewards of diversity and inclusion. (It is thus no wonder that Ida’s other most impressive contribution to our profession is her relentless, fearless efforts to help advance women lawyers as leaders.)

What we need — and Ida has given us — are comprehensive resources to break through the legal profession’s resistance to greater investment in and focus on mentoring. As noted above, lawyers are facing increasing pressures in a competitive, rapidly changing global market for legal services and talent. We are facing unprecedented change and do not have a playbook with the answers. Whether lawyers will admit it or not, we are vulnerable. Mentorship is a key connection point — a critical method of professional development — to prepare rising lawyers with the skills and cognitive abilities necessary for success in the changing profession. Ida’s work — this book — is a great gift at a time of great need.

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