THE BRIDGE TO PRACTICE TOOLKIT

Designed for 3L Law Students Entering Practice

Five Modules · Practical Tools · Real-World Application

APEX
Colorado Office of
Attorney Professional Excellence

APEX

BRIDGE TO PRACTICE

Toolkit

Designed for Third-Year Law Students Entering Practice

Five Modules · Practical Tools · Real-World Application

How to Use This Toolkit

This toolkit is designed to support 3L law students as they move from law school into practice. The goal is to make expectations more visible, reduce unnecessary ambiguity, and provide practical tools that support professional judgment and day-to-day practice.

Many of the linked resources in this Toolkit are found in the American Bar Association's "Essential Career Toolkit for New Lawyers" and an ABA membership is required to view these resources. Law students at ABA accredited law schools receive free ABA memberships. To join the ABA as a student member visit https://www.americanbar.org/groups/law_students/about/membership/

Each module contains three components:

- **Checklist** — Ongoing standards and practices to internalize and apply regularly.
- **Worksheet** — A fillable planning tool to use before, during, or after a specific task or situation.
- **Professionalism Tools** — Curated resources, articles, and guidance to deepen your professional development.

MODULE 1

Navigating the Transition to Practice

Building habits, asking the right questions, and managing early expectations

What This Module Is About

The move from law school to professional practice is one of the most disorienting transitions a lawyer makes. You are no longer evaluated on exams. You are evaluated on output, judgment, and reliability. The first weeks and months are not just about the quality of your legal analysis; they are about whether people can count on you.

This module focuses on the practical mechanics of functioning well in a new environment: how to receive and execute assignments, how to manage your time, how to surface questions appropriately, and how to communicate your progress. These habits, established early, become the foundation of your professional reputation.

Checklist

Daily & Ongoing Practices

- ◻ Clarify the assignment before beginning work — confirm the purpose, deadline, format, and intended audience
- ◻ Identify who is supervising the work and understand how and when questions should be raised
- ◻ Track all active deadlines in a single, reliable system and review it at the start and end of each day
- ◻ Communicate early if you encounter obstacles, conflicting priorities, or unexpected delays
- ◻ Respond to emails and messages within a reasonable timeframe, even if only to acknowledge receipt
- ◻ Read every document you work on carefully before submitting or forwarding it

Weekly Practices

- ◻ Review any feedback received that week and identify one specific adjustment you will make going forward
- ◻ Note questions that arose during the week and identify who can best answer them
- ◻ Confirm that tasks you believe are complete have been communicated as complete to the relevant supervisor
- ◻ Reflect briefly on a situation that was handled well and one that could have gone better

When Uncertainty Arises

- ◻ Pause before assuming you are failing or that something is wrong — uncertainty is a normal feature of early practice
- ◻ Determine precisely what information is missing before asking a question
- ◻ Frame your question around what you have already tried or considered, not just what you do not know
- ◻ Ask a focused, single question rather than presenting a broad topic for your supervisor to define
- ◻ Document the guidance you receive for future reference — a brief note in your files is sufficient
- ◻ If uncertain whether to raise an issue, err toward transparency; supervisors prefer to be informed early

⚠ Common Pitfall: Waiting Too Long to Ask

New attorneys often wait too long before raising a question because they fear looking unprepared. In practice, however, supervisors are far more frustrated by discovering at the deadline that a project went in the wrong direction than by being asked an early, specific question. The rule of thumb: if you have been stuck on the same issue for more than 20–30 minutes without progress, ask.

WORKSHEET

Practice Execution Planner

Use this worksheet each time you receive a new assignment. Complete it before you begin work. The act of writing it out will surface questions you did not know you had.

Step 1: Define the Task

Assignment or task description

Deadline (date and time)

Supervising attorney or point of contact

What does a successful completed product look like?

Step 2: Clarify the Output

Type of work (draft / research memo / court filing / review / client communication / other)

Format or length (if specified)

Who will read or use this work product, and what do they need from it?

Step 3: Identify the Next Three Actions

Action 1

Action 2

Action 3

Step 4: Question Gate

Before beginning, surface any questions. Write each as a single focused sentence.

My question (one sentence)

Who to ask and when

Step 5: Completion Check

- ◻ Assignment completed as requested, including format and length
- ◻ All deadlines met
- ◻ Proofread for substance, clarity, and tone
- ◻ Submission confirmed or delivery acknowledged by the recipient
- ◻ Any follow-up tasks identified and logged

Professionalism Tools & Recommended Reading

→ How New Lawyers Can Jump-Start their Courtroom Exposure
→ Key Pointers to Help You Get Started as a Transactional Lawyer
→ Understanding Courthouse, Judge, and Courtroom Culture

MODULE 2

Developing Professional Credibility

Role clarity, credibility, judgment, and reputation in a professional setting

What This Module Is About

Professional credibility is not a fixed trait — it is built through repeated, consistent behavior. How you show up in day-to-day interactions, how you treat colleagues at every level, and how you respond when things are hard will define your reputation far more than any single impressive performance.

Credibility in practice is earned incrementally. It comes from being someone who is prepared, who does what they say they will do, who admits what they do not know, and who treats everyone in the building with genuine respect. This module gives you the framework to build that reputation deliberately.

Checklist

Professional Conduct Standards

- ☐ Deliver all work that is complete, organized, and proofread before submission
- ☐ Respond to emails and requests within a reasonable timeframe; acknowledge receipt even when a full response is not yet ready
- ☐ Confirm receipt of important assignments or instructions so supervisors know the work is moving
- ☐ Treat court staff, opposing counsel, colleagues, and support staff with respect and professionalism at all times
- ☐ Be on time — to court, to meetings, and to internal deadlines
- ☐ Use a professional tone in all written and verbal communications, even informal ones

Credibility Builders

- ☐ Prepare thoroughly before every meeting, hearing, or client interaction
- ☐ Know the relevant rules, court procedures, filing deadlines, and applicable law before you walk into a room
- ☐ Offer solutions or options, not just identification of problems — supervisors value analysis that moves the work forward
- ☐ Admit clearly and promptly when you do not know something, then propose a next step
- ☐ Follow through on every commitment, no matter how small
- ☐ Demonstrate curiosity — ask substantive questions about the law, the client, or the strategy; show that you are engaged
- ☐ Avoid speaking with false confidence; it is far better to say “I will confirm that” than to guess wrong

ℹ On Treating Support Staff as Professionals

Legal assistants, paralegals, court clerks, and administrative staff hold significant institutional knowledge and influence. New attorneys who treat them with condescension or disregard often find themselves without critical informal assistance when they need it most. More importantly, it is simply the right way to work. Make it a habit to say thank you, ask for names, and recognize the expertise that support staff bring.

WORKSHEET

Credibility & Reputation Builder

Use this worksheet before any significant professional interaction — a hearing, a client call, an internal review, or a high-stakes meeting.

Step 1: Identify the Context

Upcoming situation (hearing, meeting, client call, internal review)

My role in this situation

Who else will be present and in what capacity?

Step 2: Preparation Plan

What rules, procedures, or governing documents must I review beforehand?

What questions am I likely to be asked?

What is the most important thing I need to communicate or accomplish in this interaction?

Step 3: Professional Conduct Check

- ◻ I am prepared to offer options or solutions, not just a list of issues
- ◻ I am clear on my role and will not overstate my authority or knowledge
- ◻ I am communicating respectfully with all staff, colleagues, and opposing parties
- ◻ My written materials are complete, accurate, and proofread
- ◻ If I do not know something, I have a plan for how I will handle that in the moment

Professionalism Tools & Recommended Reading

→ Great Lawyers Don't Only Point Out Problems—They Offer Solutions
→ Incorporating Interpersonal Skills in Everyday Law Practice
→ Judge Jessica Fehr on Credibility, Courtroom Prep, and Career Advice
→ Treat Your Legal Support Staff Like the Professionals They Are
→ How to Defuse Bullies in the Legal Profession

MODULE 3

Practice Readiness & Early-Career Expectations

Understanding realistic first-year expectations, managing workload, and recovering from mistakes

What This Module Is About

Most new attorneys will make mistakes in their first year. This is expected, and it is not, in itself, a disqualifying event. What distinguishes successful junior attorneys is not whether they make mistakes, but how they handle them: with honesty, speed, and a clear plan for correction.

This module also addresses workload management. In practice, you will almost always have more work than you can comfortably complete. Learning to prioritize, communicate capacity constraints, and track active matters is a core professional skill — not a sign of weakness.

Checklist

Performance Standards

- ◻ Meet internal deadlines, not just external or court filing deadlines — supervisors set internal deadlines for a reason
- ◻ Track all active assignments in one organized system; never rely solely on memory
- ◻ When you are managing multiple tasks, proactively clarify priorities with your supervisor
- ◻ Communicate progress on longer projects without being prompted — a brief weekly update is often sufficient
- ◻ Flag any conflicts between deadlines before they become a crisis, not after
- ◻ When accepting a new assignment, confirm whether it can realistically be completed alongside your existing work

When a Mistake Occurs

- ◻ Identify what happened and gather the objective facts before reacting
- ◻ Resist the impulse to minimize, conceal, or over-apologize; a clear and factual account is more useful than either
- ◻ Notify the appropriate supervising attorney promptly — the sooner the better
- ◻ Come to that conversation with a proposed corrective action, not just a description of the problem
- ◻ Implement a concrete prevention step so the same mistake does not recur
- ◻ Document the situation and your response in your own notes for professional learning purposes

ℹ On Asking for Feedback

Many supervisors will not volunteer feedback unless something goes wrong. As a first-year attorney, it is both appropriate and professionally impressive to solicit it. A good prompt: “Is there anything I could have done differently on the [project] that would have made it more useful to you?” This signals self-awareness and a commitment to improvement. Ask after each major assignment, not only after you suspect something went wrong.

WORKSHEET

Performance & Mistake Response Planner

Part A is for ongoing workload tracking. Part B is to be completed promptly if a mistake or problem occurs.

Part A: Assignment Tracking

Current active matters (list each)

Priority order (1 = highest urgency or soonest deadline)

Any conflicts or capacity concerns to raise with a supervisor?

Part B: Mistake or Problem Response

Complete this promptly. Do not wait until the end of the day.

What happened? (Objective facts only — not interpretation or blame)

Who needs to be informed, and by when?

Proposed corrective action

Prevention step going forward (what will you do differently?)

Professionalism Tools & Recommended Reading

- → How to Manage Your Workload as a New Law Firm Associate
- → How to React and Respond to Mistakes in the Legal Profession
- → How to Solicit Feedback as a First-Year Associate
- → Time Management Is of the Essence for New Lawyers
- → How New Lawyers Can Find Career Success by Developing Self-Worth

MODULE 4

Thinking Like a Practicing Lawyer

Translating legal reasoning into day-to-day work: assignments, analysis, judgment under uncertainty

What This Module Is About

Law school teaches you to identify issues, construct arguments, and analyze authority. Practice demands something more specific: you must answer the actual question that was asked, in the format that was requested, for the audience that will use it, by the deadline that was set. This requires translating legal thinking into practical output.

The most common failure mode for first-year attorneys is producing work that is legally accurate but practically unusable — too long, insufficiently organized, not tailored to the question, or disconnected from what the supervising attorney or client actually needs. This module focuses on the habits that close that gap.

Checklist

Assignment Intake

- ◻ Confirm the precise objective of the assignment — not just the topic, but the specific question to be answered
- ◻ Confirm the audience: partner, client, court, or opposing counsel — the answer to the same legal question may look different for each
- ◻ Confirm format, length, and any structural expectations before you begin
- ◻ Identify the relevant governing authority early — do not draft extensively before you know what law applies
- ◻ Identify any procedural rules or deadlines that are embedded in the assignment

Before Submitting Work

- ◻ Confirm that your analysis directly answers the question that was asked — not just the question you found interesting
- ◻ Verify every citation and check that every authority you cite supports the proposition for which you cite it
- ◻ Simplify complex explanations wherever possible; clarity is a professional skill, not a compromise
- ◻ Remove information that does not advance the objective of the assignment, even if it is accurate
- ◻ Consider the tone: is this appropriate for the audience and purpose?
- ◻ Read the work aloud or away from the screen before submitting — errors become more visible with distance

⚠ A Note on AI Research Tools

Generative AI tools can accelerate research and drafting, but they introduce real professional responsibility risks. AI-generated citations have appeared in court filings and turned out not to exist. Before citing any case, statute, or authority — however it was located — you are professionally responsible for verifying that it exists and stands for the proposition you claim. Additionally, uploading client information to any AI platform raises serious confidentiality concerns. Understand your firm's policies on AI use before using any such tool for client work.

WORKSHEET

Assignment Breakdown Tool

Use this worksheet at the start of any significant research, drafting, or analysis assignment.

Step 1: Clarify the Question

What is the specific question I must answer? (One or two sentences)

Who is the audience, and what will they do with this work product?

Step 2: Identify Governing Authority

Primary authority (jurisdiction, statute, controlling case, regulation)

Procedural rules, if applicable

Are there any exceptions, open questions, or circuit splits I need to flag?

Step 3: Draft Structure

Section or argument 1

Section or argument 2

Section or argument 3

Anything I am omitting and why?

Step 4: Final Review

- ◻ Does this directly and completely answer the assignment question?
- ◻ Is the reasoning clear, organized, and logically supported?
- ◻ Have all citations been verified for accuracy and current validity?
- ◻ Is the tone appropriate for the audience?
- ◻ Is unnecessary information removed?
- ◻ Would a thoughtful senior colleague be satisfied with this product?

Professionalism Tools & Recommended Reading

→ How Active Listening Can Aid Attorney-Client Relationships
→ How to Optimize Your Focus: Lessons Lawyers Can Learn from Athletes
→ Understanding the Risks of Uploading Client Information to Generative AI Platforms

MODULE 5

Using Mentoring Effectively & Building Relationships

Preparing for mentoring conversations and building a sustainable professional network

What This Module Is About

Mentoring and professional relationships are not optional add-ons to a legal career — they are among the most important career infrastructure a lawyer builds. The attorneys who thrive over time are almost always people who were willing to seek guidance, offer value to others, and invest in relationships before they needed anything from them.

This module focuses on how to approach mentoring conversations with intention, how to maintain professional relationships over time, and how to build a network that is genuine rather than transactional. Effective networking does not require being extroverted — it requires being prepared, being curious, and following through.

Checklist

Preparing for a Mentoring Conversation

- ◻ Identify one to two specific questions or topics in advance — do not arrive without an agenda
- ◻ Provide context for the issue or decision you are facing; mentors cannot advise well without it
- ◻ Clarify what type of input you are seeking: strategic, experiential, or general perspective
- ◻ Research your mentor’s background and practice area before the conversation; demonstrate that you value their specific expertise
- ◻ Keep your questions focused and respect the time you have been given

Maintaining the Relationship Over Time

- ◻ Follow up on advice you received and share what happened as a result — mentors appreciate knowing their guidance was useful
- ◻ Express appreciation genuinely and specifically, not generically
- ◻ Offer value where appropriate: share a relevant article, make an introduction, or provide a professional update
- ◻ Keep communication periodic but purposeful; you do not need a formal meeting to maintain a relationship
- ◻ Do not contact a mentor only when you need something — make some contacts that are not transactional
- ◻ Stay in touch through transitions: a brief note when you start a new role or complete a significant matter goes a long way
- ◻ Consider enrolling in the Colorado Attorney Mentoring Program (CAMP), a free program that matches law students and new attorneys with experienced mentors for structured, ongoing support during the transition to practice — visit https://coloradoattorneyexcellence.org/ for more information

ℹ Networking for Introverts

You do not need to be the person working every room. Effective professional relationship-building is not about volume — it is about quality and follow-through. A few genuine, well-maintained relationships are more valuable than a large number of superficial connections. Introverted attorneys often build exceptionally strong professional networks by focusing on depth, preparation, and authentic follow-up rather than breadth.

★ Colorado Attorney Mentoring Program (CAMP)

CAMP is a free program offered through the Colorado Supreme Court that pairs law students and newer attorneys with experienced mentors for structured mentoring over the course of a year. If you are entering Colorado practice, CAMP provides a ready-made framework for the kind of mentoring relationship this module describes — with built-in guidance on how to make the most of it.

Learn more and apply at: https://coloradoattorneyexcellence.org/

▶ Bridge to Practice Mentoring Plan

A Bridge to Practice Mentoring Plan is included with this toolkit. The Mentoring Plan is designed to structure your mentoring relationship from the outset — setting shared expectations, identifying goals, and creating a record of your conversations and commitments over time.

Consider sharing the Mentoring Plan with your mentor at or before your first meeting. Using it together will help ensure that both you and your mentor have a clear, mutual understanding of the purpose and structure of the relationship.

WORKSHEET

Mentoring Conversation Planner

Complete this before each mentoring meeting. The preparation itself clarifies what you actually need.

Identify the Mentor

Name and current role

Area of practice or career experience most relevant to this conversation

Define the Purpose

- ☐ Career path insight
- ☐ Practice area strategy or substantive question

- ◻ Handling a specific professional or workplace situation
- ◻ Navigating a transition or new role
- ◻ Other:

Specific question(s) I want to raise (write them out fully)

Context the mentor will need to give useful advice

Follow-Up Plan

What action will I take based on this conversation?

When and how will I follow up with this mentor?

What will I share with them about the outcome?

Colorado Attorney Mentoring Program (CAMP)

If you have not yet connected with a formal mentor, CAMP offers a structured, supported path to do so.

- ◻ I have visited https://coloradoattorneyexcellence.org/ to learn about the program
- ◻ I have applied to or enrolled in CAMP, or identified a reason I am pursuing mentoring through another channel

Bridge to Practice Mentoring Plan

The Mentoring Plan included with this toolkit is designed to be used alongside — not instead of — this worksheet. It provides a longer-term record of your mentoring relationship.

- ◻ I have reviewed the Bridge to Practice Mentoring Plan
- ◻ I have shared or plan to share the Mentoring Plan with my mentor before or at our first meeting
- ◻ My mentor and I have discussed and agreed on the structure and goals of our mentoring relationship

Professionalism Tools & Recommended Reading

→ Creating and Maintaining Supportive Relationships in the Legal Profession

→ Fantastic Legal Mentors and Where You Can Find Them

→ How to Build a Supportive Community as a New Lawyer

→ Relationship-Building in the Legal Profession is Not a Side Hustle

→ Navigating Introvert Hell: You Don't Have to be Hard-Charging to Be an Effective Legal Networker

A Final Note

The transition from law student to practicing attorney is a process, not an event. The attorneys who thrive are not those who arrived knowing everything — they are the ones who showed up prepared, stayed curious, admitted what they did not know, and kept building. These tools exist to support that process. Use them.

Mentoring Plan For Bridge to Practice

1. Initial Planning Meeting, Personal and Professional Development

Action	Mark completed items
Meet in person (where practical) or virtually to prepare the customized mentoring plan based on Mentee's needs and interests. Utilize the CAMP [Initial Goal Plan & Meeting Guide] to assist your Mentoring pair in developing goals for the Mentoring relationship.	
Discuss best communication methods for each participant and consider scheduling all remaining meetings/activities for the Mentoring term.	
In tailoring the Mentoring plan to Mentee's interests, discuss long-term professional and career goals and identify ways to achieve them.	
Mentor should introduce Mentee to their office's attorneys and staff (if not already done) if practical.	
Include in the meeting a day-in-the-life discussion, including discussion about work-life integration, mental health and substance abuse issues facing lawyers, and the services available to attorneys regarding these health issues.	
Focus on building rapport with your mentoring partner through the following steps: 1. Shift Your Mindset to "I Am Worthy of Mentoring" 2. Look for Indicators of Shared Humanity With Your Mentoring Partner 3. Identify One Thing You Can Appreciate About Your Mentoring Partner 4. Listen to Understand 5. Be Open...Not Transactional	
Discuss the transition from law school to practice, including changes in pace, supervision, responsibility, and expectations for independent execution.	
Review the Bridge to Practice Toolkit Module 1 Checklist and discuss how to clarify assignments, identify supervising attorneys, track deadlines, and communicate questions or uncertainty in a professional setting.	
Complete Module 1 Worksheet (Practice Execution Planner) to define a task, clarify the expected work product, identify next steps, and determine when and how to raise questions.	

2. The Colorado Bar and Legal Community

Action	Mark completed items
Complete at least one of the following:	
Attend a meeting of an organized bar association or other attorney networking event together, either in person or virtually. Introduce Mentee to other attorneys in attendance. Discuss the advantages of bar association involvement and discuss the many local, state, and national associations available, including any in Mentees specific practice area.	
Meet at the local courthouse(s), particularly the one in which Mentee may be appearing, and make introductions to members of the judiciary, court personnel, and clerks of court. Discuss customary rules of civility or etiquette in court and among lawyers and judges in the community.	
Attend a Term Day (or similar activity) which involves a gathering of judges and attorneys of the local bar.	

3. Developing Professional Identity & Lawyer Well-Being

Action	Mark completed items
Complete at least two of the following:	
It is envisioned that this component of the Mentoring Plan should be creatively tailored for the individual mentee's needs. The discussion should focus on understanding "why" Mentee chose the profession of law and what Mentee seeks to accomplish in their professional role. • How does Mentee define "professional success" and whose input/feedback did they utilize in developing this definition? • What characteristics, skills, and attributes does Mentee have that will allow them to find professional success? • Who are the people in Mentee's personal and professional community who will support them in finding professional success? Assist Mentee in articulating their "Professional Identity" as a lawyer. Utilize John Bliss' The Professional Identity Formation of Lawyers to assist your mentoring pair in facilitating this discussion.	

Engage Mentee in a self-reflective exercise to determine whether Mentee believes they are thriving in all dimensions of “well-being” including: **Emotional:** Recognizing the importance of emotions; developing the ability to identify and manage our own emotions to support mental health, achieve goals, and inform decision-making; seeking help for mental health when needed. **Occupational:** Cultivating personal satisfaction, growth, and enrichment in work; financial stability. **Intellectual:** Engaging in continuous learning and the pursuit of creative or intellectually challenging activities that foster ongoing development, monitoring cognitive wellness. **Spiritual:** Developing a sense of meaningfulness and purpose in all aspects of life. **Social:** Developing a sense of connection, belonging, and a well-developed support network while also contributing to our groups and communities. **Physical:** Striving for regular physical activity, proper diet and nutrition, sufficient sleep, and recovery; minimizing the use of addictive substances; seeking help for physical health when needed. Assist Mentee in developing well-being objectives and a plan to address Mentee’s self-identified deficiencies in these dimensions of well-being. Consider the ABA Well-Being Toolkit for Lawyers and Legal Employers in building a well-being action plan.	
Engage Mentee in a reflective exercise regarding resilience. How does Mentee assess their own resiliency? What factors account for Mentee’s measurement of resilience? Assist Mentee in developing a plan to improve their resiliency. Consider the following resources: • Three Ways Lawyers Can Become More Resilient • Survival Skill No. 1 for Lawyers: Emotional Resilience	

Defining Professional & Personal "Success"

Work with Mentee to create a sustainable and fulfilling definition of professional and personal success for themselves. To assist in this discussion, follow the steps below:

Traditional Concepts of Success
Defining success may seem easy at first. When asked to define success, most people cite conventional ideas of success, such as achieving independence, attaining a position of power, or amassing wealth. Pop culture is filled with characters who have achieved one of these traditional goals for success, but who are unsatisfied with it, from Ebenezer Scrooge to Charles Foster Kane. These are hyperbolic illustrations, but they serve a valuable lesson about the illogical appeal of wealth and power. They're alluring goals, but they are often not actually what make people feel happy and fulfilled. It's impossible to set good goals unless you know which ones are going to truly make you happy. Figuring out what's truly important to you and filtering out the influence of traditional concepts of success, is the first step to creating a goal structure and ultimately forging a path to that success.

Unconventional Definitions of Success
History is ripe with individuals who have earned great respect because they followed an unconventional path, usually inspired by an unconventional definition of success. To many of these entrepreneurs and mavericks, that level of respect doesn't matter because they've found ultimate satisfaction in the work they do on a regular basis.

Finding Your Definition of Success
You may find it difficult to define your version of success and, if you do, you aren't alone. Figuring out what your definition of success is early on is the best way to create goals that will result in true satisfaction—not just money or power.

Picture yourself with all the money and time you could ever want. What would you do? Would you help promote a specific cause? Would you pursue a certain hobby or try to solve a major problem in the world? How would you find satisfaction? If you can answer these questions, you may have just found your definition of success. If not, look outward for inspiration. Speak with your mentors to get their insights on what success is and what's most important in their lives.

A Foundation for All Your Goals
Once you've figured out what success means to you, you can build the rest of your goals from there. Usually, you'll have two or three primary goals that allow you to achieve your definition of success, each of those goals will have several smaller goals it depends on, and so on.

The key to staying motivated in the face of adversity or unanticipated challenges is contextualizing those shortcomings. Your definition of success also dictates your definition of failure—you've only failed if you've given up on achieving success.

Assessment Of Current Professional Identity

Ask Mentee to answer the question "what do you do" to initiate the conversation about professional identity. Work with Mentee to expand the answer to the question to include a broader definition of Mentee's strengths, interests, and professional passions.

4. Colorado Rules of Professional Conduct, Professionalism, and Civility

Action	Mark completed items
Required (to be completed with an activity elected from list below)	
Review the Bridge to Practice Toolkit Module 2 Checklist and discuss how professional conduct, preparation, and communication shape credibility and reputation.	
Work through the Module 2 Worksheet (Credibility & Reputation Builder) and discuss how the mentee prepares for professional interactions such as meetings, hearings, or client communications.	
The pair should discuss the distinction between the Colorado RPC and professionalism; the attorney's obligations to the court, the client, and opposing counsel; common ethical issues and resources for how to resolve difficult ethical questions; common grievance and malpractice "traps" and how to avoid them; the benefits of carrying malpractice insurance and the ramifications for failing to do so.	
Engage Mentee in a reflection on "bullying" and "toxicity" in the legal profession. Define what these terms mean to Mentee and reflect on whether Mentee has experienced these issues or has contributed to these issues at various points in their legal career. Develop with Mentee a personal plan for avoiding and responding to bullying or toxic behavior. Consider the following resource: • Dealing with Lawyer Bullies	
Complete at least two of the following:	
Discuss how to screen for, recognize, and avoid conflicts of interest.	
Work with Mentee to develop communication and leadership skills necessary to establish professional working relationships with support staff, associates, and partners. Consider the following resources in your discussion: • Fire & Ice: An Associate's View of Partners • Six Ways to Work Successfully With Support Staff	
Discuss competency and professionalism during discovery.	
Discuss how to prepare for negotiation of a legal matter, when and how negotiation is initiated, how to involve the client, ethical and professionalism obligations of negotiators, skills needed to be an effective negotiator and how to acquire them.	
Discuss appropriate ways to handle situations where a lawyer believes another lawyer has committed an ethical violation or otherwise acted unprofessionally or uncivilly; the obligation to report misconduct; and the appropriate way to handle a situation where Mentee is asked by a senior member of the firm/organization to do something that is unethical or unprofessional.	
Discuss the grievance process and a lawyer's duty to cooperate with a disciplinary investigation.	
Discuss client development and marketing, appropriate procedures, and ethical implications.	
Have coffee with opposing counsel to practice discussing different points of view and objectives of both sides.	
Discuss the benefits of the Colorado Bar Association Ethics Hotline. *Certain members of the Colorado Bar Association Ethics Committee are available for BRIEF discussion of attorneys' own immediate ethical dilemmas or questions. Attorneys are asked to do their own research prior to calling the Hotline. Hotline inquiries are handled by individual members of the Committee to help identify ethical issues and do not necessarily reflect the thinking of the Committee as a whole. To contact the Hotline call the Colorado Bar Association office at 303.860.1115, or 800.332.6736 (in-state only).*	

5. Practice Readiness & Early-Career Expectations

Action	Mark completed items
Review the Bridge to Practice Toolkit Module 3 Checklist and discuss how early-career lawyers are evaluated in terms of reliability, communication, and responsiveness.	
Review the Module 3 Worksheet (Performance & Mistake Response Planner) and discuss how to track assignments and respond appropriately if mistakes occur.	
Complete at least two of the following:	
Discuss realistic expectations for the first year of practice, including workload management, internal deadlines, and performance standards.	
Discuss common early-career missteps and appropriate response strategies when mistakes occur.	
Review Mentee's system for tracking assignments and deadlines.	
Discuss how to request, receive, and implement feedback.	
Review a hypothetical or real mistake scenario and walk through appropriate notification and mitigation steps.	
Discuss time management strategies and the importance of proactive communication regarding workload.	

6. Litigation and Transaction Experiences

Action	Mark completed items
Review the Bridge to Practice Toolkit Module 4 Checklist and discuss how to approach assignments by identifying the objective, audience, and governing authority, and ensuring that the work product directly answers the question presented.	
Complete Module 4 Worksheet (Assignment Breakdown Tool) using a real or hypothetical assignment to practice clarifying the question, identifying applicable authority, structuring the analysis, and conducting a final review for clarity, accuracy, and tone.	
Discuss how to clarify assignments, raise focused questions, and communicate uncertainty professionally.	
Discuss how to approach legal assignments with clarity regarding purpose, audience, and format.	
Discuss competency under the Colorado Rules of Professional Conduct and the importance of maintaining confidentiality, including appropriate use of technology.	
Discuss appropriate use of generative AI tools and the obligation to protect client information.	
Complete at least two of the following:	
Discuss types of alternative dispute resolution (ADR) such as mediation, arbitration, early neutral evaluation, summary jury trials, collaborative law practice.	
Mentee attends one of the ADR proceedings listed above. The pair discusses and evaluates what was observed.	
Mentee attends a deposition. The pair discusses and evaluates what was observed.	
Mentee attends part or all of a trial, whether civil or criminal, bench or jury, state or federal. The pair discusses and evaluates what was observed.	
Mentee attends an appellate oral argument before the Colorado Supreme Court, Colorado Court of Appeals, or the Tenth Circuit Court of Appeals. The pair discusses and evaluates what was observed.	
Mentee attends a hearing conducted by a state or local administrative body (e.g. local zoning board, tax equalization board hearing; state licensing or regulatory body). The pair discusses and evaluates what was observed.	
Mentee attends a planning/strategy meeting regarding a business transaction or estate planning. The pair discusses and evaluates what was observed.	
Mentee attends a meeting, hearing, or other proceeding specific to their or Mentor's practice area. The pair discusses and evaluates what was observed.	
Review JDF's applicable to Mentee's practice area. Discuss the drafting of motions, briefs, client letters, and conducting research specific to the practice area.	

7. Thinking Like a Practicing Lawyer/Law Office Management and In-Office Procedures/

Action	Mark completed items
Required (to be completed with the activity elected from list below)	
Discuss law office management best practices (preferably including a tour of Mentor's office), and the importance of maintaining organized procedures: • Time records; • Records of client-related expenses; • Billing system; • Client retainer and/or payment schedules, types of fee agreements; • Escrow and trust account, establishing a COLTAF, accounting, auditing, use of interest proceeds, proper procedures for handling client funds and other property; • Filing system and procedures; • Document retention plan; • Calendar reminder systems; • Information technology systems; • Library and research systems; and • Other resources (publications, seminars, equipment).	
Complete at least two of the following:	
Discuss role and responsibilities of paralegals, assistants, and other office personnel, and how to establish good working relationships with others in the same office who are support staff, colleagues or senior partners. Discuss the "care and feeding" of support staff.	
Discuss practices to maintain client confidentiality.	
Discuss good time management skills and techniques.	
Discuss how to screen for, recognize, and avoid conflicts.	
Discuss how to prevent issues of unauthorized practice of law with staff.	
Discuss office politics, including appropriate networking, socializing, and personal behaviors.	
Discuss the importance of planning ahead for handling the practice in the event of retirement, disability, or death.	
Discuss the issues surrounding leaving a firm, such as how to protect oneself, advising clients, and withdrawing from cases.	
Discuss evaluation and compensation procedures, and professional advancement within a firm.	
Discuss what should go into a fee agreement – for example, see RPC 1.16A Client File Retention.	
Discuss ways to organize the day.	

8. Professionalism in Working With Clients

Action	Mark completed items
Complete at least three of the following:	
Review the Colorado Principles of Professionalism as a pair and select at least three principles for further discussion as to their application to Mentee's practice of law.	

Discuss the initial meeting and interaction with a potential client, tips for gathering information about a legal matter, appraising the credibility and trust of the potential client, evaluating whether to accept the representation, and how to decline representation. Discuss making and accepting referrals.	
Discuss importance of client communication and strategies to maintain appropriate ongoing communication (returning telephone calls, email, etc.) to keep clients informed, including use of fee agreements, timeliness, written communication, etc. Evaluate any policies adopted by Mentee's organization or discuss the benefits of adopting a formal communication policy.	
Discuss proper legal counseling, including the duties and responsibilities of advising clients and the respective responsibilities of the client and the lawyer in decision-making.	
Assess best practices for communicating with clients regarding the business aspects of the relationship, including billing and other business procedures. Evaluate Mentee's collections policies and communication mechanisms related to those policies.	

Discuss proper legal counseling, including the duties and responsibilities of advising clients and the respective responsibilities of the client and the lawyer in decision-making.
• Consider the following resources in your discussion:
   ○ Do You Have a Client Centered Law Practice?, Sullivan, 2016
   ○ Who is My Client? Client Centered Lawyering With Multiple Clients, Lawton, 2015	

Discuss how to deal with a "difficult" client. Include in this discussion tools for evaluating when it is time to withdraw from representation, avoid ethical pitfalls, and professionally and responsibly terminate a client relationship. • Taming the Beast, How to Manage Difficult Clients, Lowentheil, 2017	
Discuss the termination of the attorney-client relationship, issues with terminating mid-representation, necessary steps and documentation.	
Discuss maintaining communication with client concerning updates in the law, articles, and check-ins if the matter is still live.	
Discuss terminating representation. See RPC 1.16. Discuss rules and procedure for withdrawal specific to the area of practice.	
Discuss the idea that clients are the best marketing for a law firm. Good representation goes a long way.	
Discuss how to handle mistakes made in representation.	

9. Developing a Competent Practice

Action	Mark completed items
Evaluate how Mentee assess their legal competencies. As an outcome to this discussion, Mentee might develop an analysis of practice areas, matter types, client types, and Colorado judicial districts in which they feel "competent" to practice law. Create a plan for Mentee to routinely visit and update this "Zones of Competency" analysis.	
Highlight areas where Mentee may not feel competent today but wishes to improve competency over time. Generate a long-term plan for Mentee to obtain necessary competencies in these areas of interest.	

Assist Mentee in developing a short-term “Competency Plan” in the event that Mentee is approached to take on a matter or client outside of their scope of Zone of Competency. Included in this plan should be the educational resources, mentors, co-counselors, etc. Mentee can access to timely acquire the competency required.	
Discuss the advantages of bar association involvement and discuss the many local, state, and national associations available, including any in Mentee’s specific practice area, as a means to develop referral relationships and networks.	
Add Other	
Add Other	

10. Public Service & Using Mentoring Effectively & Building Professional Relationships

Action	Mark completed items
Review the Bridge to Practice Toolkit Module 5 Checklist and discuss how to prepare for mentoring conversations, including identifying specific questions, providing context, and maintaining professional relationships over time.	
Complete Module 5 Worksheet (Mentoring Conversation Planner) to identify a mentor, define the purpose of a mentoring interaction, develop specific questions, and establish a follow-up plan.	
Complete at least one of the following:	
Acquaint Mentee with legal aid programs, local pro bono programs, volunteer boards, and other opportunities for engaging in pro bono activities and civic and charitable work. Discuss the reasons for making time to engage in volunteer legal service to the public and any impediments to undertaking such work.	
Mentee attends a civic club of which Mentor is a member or some other community service activity in which Mentor participates. Discuss the reasons for making time to engage in volunteer legal service to the public.	
The pair participates in a bar-sponsored or other volunteer program aimed at delivering legal services to the public. Discuss the reasons for making time to engage in volunteer legal service to the public.	
Discuss how to build and sustain professional relationships beyond transactional networking.	

11. Diversity, Equity, Inclusion, and Accessibility (Complete at least two)

Action	Mark completed items
Discuss what diversity, equity, inclusion, and accessibility mean to both Mentee and Mentor and how these concepts manifest in the legal profession. This exercise is designed to create a safe space for conversation and the sharing of different perspectives on how the legal profession is incorporating these concepts and how it can continue to improve. Describe what an ideal practice and legal profession would look like based on these concepts.	
Discuss the dimensions of identity for the Mentor and Mentee. Which identities are most salient for each person? Why? How have these identities served you in the legal profession? How have these identities led to challenge or limitation in the legal profession?	

Discuss roadblocks and challenges the Mentee and Mentor may have experienced because of their underrepresented identities. What methods were taken to address these challenges? What resources were helpful? If there were any resources that would have been helpful but were not available, discuss what those are and how to best implement them in the future.	
Engage one another in a reflective exercise to assess cultural empathy. Use the Cultural Competence Self-Assessment Checklist as a guide in your discussion. Discuss the ways in which cultural empathy are important to the practice of law and the building of community within the legal profession.	
Attend a diversity awareness or training workshop or CLE together. Discuss the takeaways and next steps in applying what each participant learned. • CBA-CLE Equity/Diversity & Inclusion courses	
Discuss various career paths such as Big Law, small firm, government, corporate, legal aid, and nontraditional legal positions and how they related to the Mentee's personal and professional identities and professional goals. 1. Examine resources for underrepresented attorneys in the organizations or companies appropriate to Mentee's career path. 2. Discuss how these paths might influence or support Mentee's professional identity and goals.	

Resources

Videos

- Reimagining Law: DEI in the Legal Profession – What's Working and What Isn't
- Reimagining Law: Systemic Racism in the Legal Profession
- Reimagining Law: Supporting LGBTQ Legal Professionals
- Reimagining Law: Creating a Sense of "Belonging" in the Legal Profession
- Reimagining Law: How Lawyers Can Combat Discriminatory Behavior

Articles

- Commission's most recent DEI news and articles
- Implicit Bias: Cloaked in Color-Blind Clothing
- Addressing Diversity Challenges in Law Firms
- What Kids Can Teach Lawyers About Diversity and Representation
- 5 Things to Know About Lawyers with Disabilities
- 3 Ways Lawyers Can Promote DEI and More with the CBA Racial Justice Coalition
- Inclusive Language is Allyship
- Unconscious Bias in Mentoring Relationships
- Four Reasons You Need a Mentor

American Bar Association

- Bias Interrupters Project - You Can't Change What You Can't See: Interrupting Racial and Gender Bias in the Legal Profession
- Model Diversity Survey from the Commission on Racial and Ethnic Diversity in the Profession

- Implicit Bias Videos and Toolkit from the ABA Diversity and Inclusion Center

12. Integration and Development of "Whole-Person Lawyering"

Action	Mark completed items
Complete at least two of the following:	
This component of the Mentoring Plan addresses the unique contribution of the mentee to the legal profession while working with the mentor to shape an approach that expresses the whole person as a lawyer. The discussion should focus on how the unique interests, history, and talents of the mentee influence the mentee's perspective and how this perspective affects their practice of law. Suggested discussion topics are below:	
• What are your values and how do these fit with your choice to become an attorney? How is this expressed in your practice?	
• Do you have a spiritual context, such as a particular religion, nature or the outdoors, or philosophy? How does this impact why and how you practice law?	
• What are your hobbies and how do they connect with your professional life? Do you use them to offset stress? Do your hobbies directly relate to your practice? How do your hobbies reflect why and how you practice law?	
• What are your talents that express the most essential parts of your personal identity? Do you feel like you are fully expressing all the components of your perspective and experience in life? How do you think doing so would affect why and how you practice law?	
• What are the key relationships in your life? How are they integrated into your professional life?	
• What would be your ideal in integrating your personal life with your professional life? Or are these interests best served separately? Or a combination of both?	
• How does your history affect the reason why you chose to be a lawyer? How does it affect your practice today?	
• How do your hopes and dreams for the future affect your professional decisions?	
• At the end of your career, what would you like to have accomplished? Has this changed over the duration of your practice? If so, how?	
• Do an activity related to the mentee's personal interests.	