

Gibson Dunn Mentor Program Sets Up Attys For Success

By Tracey Read

Law360 (January 28, 2026, 11:06 AM EST) -- When corporate associate Jocelyn Shih was a student at New York University School of Law, she did a résumé workshop with one of the school's affinity groups, and her assigned mentor was a Gibson Dunn & Crutcher LLP attorney.

That mentor-mentee relationship proved so valuable that it convinced Shih to join Gibson Dunn in 2019 after law school. She's been there ever since.

"My assigned mentor was just so helpful and so kind," she said. "He went out of his way to give me really good feedback, and introduced me to some of his other colleagues at the firm. And in the end, I was like, 'I want to work at a firm where people are this kind and this generous with their time.' So that's why I came to Gibson."

Shih is a member of Gibson Dunn's practice groups in strategic sourcing and commercial transactions, and technology transactions. She is based in New York, and has also practiced in the firm's Hong Kong office, where she represented clients throughout the Asia-Pacific region on technology-driven transformations, privacy and cybersecurity.

She currently serves as the vice chair of the firm's global associates committee. In addition, she is actively involved in diversity and mentorship programming, serving as co-chair of the firm's Asian American Affinity Group in New York.

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JOCELYN SHIH
Corporate associate
Gibson Dunn

Ingrained in the Culture

Gibson Dunn has had a formal mentoring program for about 20 years, Barrie Dnistrian, the firm's director of professional development, said. While it started out as just for Los Angeles attorneys, almost all the firm's offices now have a formal mentoring program.

Mentorship happens every day firmwide, both formally — through initiatives such as circles and buddy programs — and informally, through day-to-day interactions on teams and in offices.

The firm assigns mentors to mentees as they arrive at the firm, either as first years or lateral associates, or as they change practice groups. The firmwide mentor program consists of both mentor circles — groups that include other associates and of counsel, and are led by a partner — and individual pairings.

In New York alone, there are almost 30 mentor circles just for litigation, and each circle has six to eight people in it.

Shih's current mentor is Ryan Oringer, a fellow corporate associate in Gibson Dunn's New York office and a member of the technology transactions and the strategic sourcing and commercial transactions practice groups. Oringer, who joined the firm in 2015, was one of two 2025 Gibson Dunn Mentor of the Year Award recipients.

"I had a mentor who was just wonderful," Oringer said. "He would relate to me on a personal level. He would teach me about work. He would guide me in my career. And so, seeing how positive and how great the work experience could be with a really good mentor showed me the type of mentor that I wanted to be, and particularly the type of attorney that I want to be working in a law firm like this."

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Oringer called the mentor program a win-win for everyone.

"Because your group is more social, people are more personal, people are happier, people are learning more," he said. "People are better at their jobs. To me, creating this kind of happy work environment where people are learning and growing is probably my favorite part of doing it."

The Firm's Investment

Oringer noted that a lot of mentorship can happen organically, such as giving feedback on a phone call while you're in the office together. In addition to such built-in opportunities, he noted that the firm has a budget to encourage lunch meetings when work isn't too busy.



RYAN ORINGER
Corporate associate
Gibson Dunn

Most associates receive a budget of \$40 per person individually to meet with other associates, and \$75 per person when it's with a partner or a partner mentor group, Dnistrian said. For partners, the lunch budget is unlimited.

"Our partners throw their arms around mentoring in a way I hadn't seen at my prior firms," Dnistrian said. "And our associates get so much out of it, for that reason. They come and they ask for particular mentors, or if they can use their budgets with particular groups. We really do see the value in it from both sides."

Besides group lunches, each Gibson Dunn office has a budget to facilitate gatherings both in pairs and in larger groups, which are encouraged to get creative. Mentoring group activities have included cooking classes, axe throwing, chocolate tastings and happy hour meetups, she said.

Hazel Granada, a litigation associate in Gibson Dunn's Palo Alto, California, office, said she has enjoyed being paired up with her mentor, securities litigation partner Jessica Valenzuela.

"From the beginning, Jessica has been so proactive about providing feedback and teaching me what it is

she does, and also communicating her enthusiasm for that," Granada said. "And it was definitely effective. I caught on, and now I am in the same practice group that she practices in. And ever since then, we've had a really close relationship."

One of the highlights of working with Valenzuela was joining her on a trial team and getting to second-chair a deposition with her as a first-year associate.

"We work on matters together, but at the same time, we have informal interactions where we're just catching up on life, and we go to networking events together, where she introduces me to people she knows, and we also mentor together," Granada said, noting they mentor junior associates together and are in touch with Stanford prelaw students.

About a year and a half ago, she and Valenzuela went to trial together, and Granada got to work directly with her in developing an examination outline for a witness, as well as being responsible for compiling all the documents and figuring out what they needed to ask that witness.

"And when it came time for Jessica to examine the witness at trial, she asked me to be in the courtroom there to see it and to talk about it afterward. Jessica brings me on to things all the time, and has me see how they play out, so that I can learn from that and that I can take a witness later when I get to that point," Granada said

Valenzuela is the firm's other 2025 Mentor of the Year. She said the work that goes into mentoring is not always visible.

"It's sort of the unsung work that we all do, and I don't do it for the recognition, but I do think it's really refreshing that Gibson Dunn does notice and does value that kind of contribution," she said.

Mentorship Comes in Many Forms

As a smaller office, Palo Alto has five mentor circles with two to three partners in each circle and a range of associates from different year levels who are mixed with different practice groups across the firm.

"And the idea there is that mentorship comes in many forms, and we can all learn different skill sets from different people, and it really is designed to give sort of a broad set of resources to associates," Valenzuela said.

Another thing that Palo Alto partners do is host twice monthly mentor office hours in a conference room, with food as an encouragement to join.

"It does create that opportunity for associates across practice groups to get insight from partners, and they're very well attended. I think it's a popular feature in our office, and my morning is always full when I'm posting those mentor hours," Valenzuela said.

Valenzuela said her favorite part of mentoring is watching associates develop new skill sets and blossom into really strong, confident attorneys who are able to take the lead in calls with clients or opposing counsel, or with presentations.

"The better I can train and mentor my associates, the less oversight they need, and the more they can then turn around and ... train the associates junior to them."



JESSICA VALENZUELA
Securities litigation partner
Gibson Dunn

As for time constraints for taking on such volunteer work, "I don't even think about it. It is so much an ingrained part of how I operate day to day," she said. "And I think there's such a tremendous return on investment, because the better I can train and mentor my associates, the less oversight they need, and the more they can then turn around and mentor and train the associates junior to them."

She added that she learns from her mentees all the time.

"The way that we practice law has been transformed by technology," Valenzuela said. "I didn't practice as a junior associate the same way that my mentees are practicing. And so, I have to understand the challenges and the resources available to associates to do my job effectively. The younger generation is just going to be so much closer to technological advancements, and they're going to be more facile about using those in the day-to-day."

--Editing by Robert Rudinger.