

THE **RECORDER**

June 22, 2026

BEST MENTOR FINALIST: JESSICA VALENZUELA, GIBSON, DUNN & CRUTCHER



Jessica Valenzuela, partner at Gibson, Dunn & Crutcher, is one of the finalists of The Recorder's Best Mentor award. Read a Q&A with her and her mentee, partner Jeff Lombard, below.

How would you describe your mentorship style?

Mentorship is so central to how I practice law that I often don't think about it as "mentorship." I simply view it as the practice of law. I believe it is my responsibility to ensure that junior lawyers who I work with always understand what final work product I am asking for, why the task is necessary, and how it fits into the broader case strategy. If they understand the overall goal, it empowers them to think outside the box, contribute their own ideas, and feel comfortable asking questions to

better develop their knowledge. When I provide guidance and feedback, I strive to help them understand why I made those changes and what they can do to enhance their skills. I also invite associates to client meetings and professional events so that they can develop relationships, be comfortable participating in bar association and other organizations, and help establish their network.

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

Recognizing and rewarding mentorship can encourage busy lawyers to take the time needed to develop their team. Gibson Dunn's free-market system – which empowers associates

BEST MENTOR FINALIST

to choose which partners they want to work with—itself promotes good mentorship. Firms should also consider mentorship as a necessary skill required to be promoted to partner. Formal mentorship programs can be helpful but not sufficient as organic mentor relationships tend to be most effective. Thus, it is critical that firms create a culture that fosters meaningful interaction between lawyers.

Mentee Q&A:

How has this mentor made an impact on your career?

Jessica's been more than a "mentor" my entire career; she's been an ally and a confidante. From my very early days as a baby lawyer, she took me under her wing and always

made herself available to answer questions, explain a new concept, or provide advice. Jessica's great at a lot of things, but her biggest gift is her ability to connect on a personal and professional level with everyone she works with. She takes time to get to know you and she genuinely cares about the people she works with. As my career has evolved, her mentorship has evolved too. She's always had my back and pushed me. I'm beyond proud to call her my friend and my partner.

What is one lesson you have learned from your mentor?

Don't be afraid to ask questions and to question the work you are receiving—great lawyers do both.