

MENTORS

APPRECIATIONS OF GUIDANCE & SUPPORT

Legal professionals write about their mentors

Brett Dick

JONES DAY

I have been privileged to work with Brett Dick for eight years. While Brett is unquestionably a master of a technical subject — international tax — the best lessons I've learned from him are not the ones you can cite by reference to the Internal Revenue Code. Rather, they are the ones that can be gleaned by observing a master at his craft, for while a good mentor may instruct, the best mentors do more; they show.

I've reduced some observations into what I'll call "Brett's Rules of Lawyering."

1. Be responsive.

If your client contacts you, get back to them promptly, preferably within the hour. Even if you're too busy to give them your full attention now, it's important to let them know that you will get back to them soon. Brett has the knack of making each of his clients feel like his top priority, in no small part due to his responsiveness.

2. Great lawyers are great communicators.

An attorney who cannot communicate well cannot lawyer well. This maxim is especially true when you practice in a field that, to many, is nearly a foreign language. I recall a complicated question that once was posed by a colleague, and I penned a lengthy response for Brett's consideration. Brett instead sent a two-sentence reply that captured every point I had made in four paragraphs.

3. Ensure the work justifies the expense.

Junior lawyers are seldom privy to client

ills, and often this is a mistake. Very early in my career Brett asked me to research something, and later asked that I review the pre-bill. He wanted to know if I believed my detailed memorandum on what was a fairly minor issue justified the expense. Clients deserve value for their money, and in the case of my memo, got more than they needed. (I also got the point.)

4. Have fun.

A sense of humor helps — a lot. A joke isn't appropriate in every situation, but it's amazing how a well-timed witticism can help defuse tension and build rapport with clients, colleagues and even adversaries. Brett's natural charm and wit have served him well, helping him forge strong client relationships and achieve professional success.

5. Always take your spouse's calls.

No matter how busy or stressed he may be on a client matter, Brett always takes his wife's calls. I am amazed by how well he can switch gears. One moment he can be a passionate advocate, deep in debate, yet the next he can be the patient spouse discussing matters of everyday life. Brett makes sure those who work with him maintain work-life balance, too. As an example, Brett has a long-standing policy that his associates won't work over Thanksgiving weekend. It's been eight Thanksgivings so



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Babak Nikravesh, left, and Brett Dick

far, and his policy has held up every time.

6. Loyalty matters.

Brett and I were once attorneys at Heller Ehrman, and had the misfortune of witnessing the firm's demise firsthand. Heller's failure coincided with the 2008 financial meltdown, and not all attorneys and staff landed on their feet. Brett, however, strove to keep his team intact, and any firm that wanted only a part of that group was rebuffed. Brett was loyal to his team, not only when it was convenient but when it mattered most, and in so doing demonstrated that essential trait of a great mentor: a selfless interest in the careers and well-being of one's colleagues.

— Babak Nikravesh, Jones Day