

DAILY REPORT

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2019 GEORGIA LEGAL AWARDS

Best Mentors



LORI COHEN
Greenberg Traurig

LORI COHEN HAS appeared in our Professional Excellence sections several times before as her firm, Greenberg Traurig, has been recognized for its litigation prowess, including in Cohen's area of practice—medical products liability defense.

Less experienced lawyers also credit Cohen for her mentoring.

"Lori's professional excellence and dedication has built a seamless bridge between generations of lawyers—those whom she has mentored and those whom she currently mentors," said Mary-Olga Lovett, senior vice president of Greenberg Traurig.

Fourth-year associate Allison Ng says Lori's dedication to cultivating young associates is unparalleled, allowing them meaningful trial experience on active trial teams. This is a rare "golden" opportunity for associates at Big Law firms, and Lori makes it a regular practice on her team—even if it means funding the junior associate without charging the client.

Cohen is particularly proud of Christiana Jacxsens becoming product liability counsel for W.L. Gore & Associates Inc., one of Cohen's clients. Jacxsens explained, "Lori stresses the importance of developing your own brand, including personal style, honing your skills and finding your own path."

Who was one of your most important mentors, and what was that relationship like?

I am very fortunate because I had several remarkable mentors when I was coming along as a young associate, and two very special ones come to mind: Judson Graves and Kip Kirkpatrick. I worked closely with the two of them as a young associate at Alston & Bird and tried a number of significant cases with them. They were ahead of their time, forward-thinking, very supportive and, essentially, stayed out of my path when needed and helped create paths for me, too. They put me in lead positions for our cases and trials and with clients. I remain very close with both today and have had chances recently to be a guest lecturer at their Emory trial advocacy classes.

They really empowered me to take a first chair role, and the unique aspect of both relationships was that, when I transitioned to first chair, they were not only happy but really proud to be my second chair. That was not all that common back in the 1990s. I tried dozens of serious cases with Jud. We operated as equals and had such a close bond that we could really read each other's minds in trial and knew what to hand each other and when. Jud won the hearts of many jurors by being complimentary of me in trial, which only made my confidence soar all the more. It is hard to replicate these kinds of relationships which are incredibly unique and life-enhancing. Although they have both retired now, they support me, provide advice and love to hear my continued war (and battle) stories. Our mutual respect and admiration has never waned, and I always feel like they are in my corner, even today.

What is the biggest challenge to maintaining a mentor-mentee relationship?

When trying my best to be a good mentor for those on my team and even those at other law firms whom I have come to know and with whom I work on litigations, what I think is most important is to be supportive and encouraging, look for opportunities for them and help to open doors for them. I try never to stand in the way or block the path but rather hope to push them out as far as they will go while being supportive in the background.

The challenging part, of course, is to give them enough space and leeway to do things on their own, even if some mistakes occur along the way. The greatest stress in what we do as attorneys is making sure our clients are fully protected and given the absolute best client service. The challenge is giving your mentees enough opportunities without causing any risk to your clients and their matters.

The best way to find the right balance here is to bring the clients into the fold. Clients want to make sure we all have succession plans; they want to know our team and see our young stars shine, too. So, while this challenge is always looming in mind, discussing with clients and laying out where the mentees fit and how to develop them while ensuring the client is protected becomes part of the partnership.

I look for opportunities to bring associates to events, trials, hearings and argue when appropriate, as well. Sometimes this means the firm must foot part or all of the bill. If you are thinking ahead and want strong partnerships with the client and your younger team members, this is always worthwhile.

The other challenge with mentees is making sure that, while there are certain approaches and "must-haves," that they should also be finding their own "personality" and using their own creativeness to forge their own path and style. You would not want a bunch of Lori clones running around. So, while they can learn from me as mentor, they should then broaden and customize that to be their own authentic self.

LORI COHEN | GREENBERG TRAUIG

