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## How These Mentoring GCs Help Diverse Associates Stand Out

By **Steven Lerner**

*Law360 (April 26, 2022, 1:09 PM EDT)* -- A mentorship program that provides law firm associates from underrepresented groups with career coaching and support will start its latest iteration this summer.

Recommendations from in-house counsel can go a long way in helping a young attorney's career. Michael Williams, CEO of AdvanceLaw LLC, heard about this when a general counsel told a story about helping a senior associate make partner by praising the associate's work to the managing partner.

This story spurred AdvanceLaw, an online marketplace where corporate general counsel rate law firms, to launch its Diversity Mentorship Program in 2019 to help young talent move up in the legal profession.

Over 300 general counsel, including many from Fortune 500 companies, use AdvanceLaw to confidentially share lawyer performance information.

Its mentorship program taps senior in-house lawyers, including general counsel who are AdvanceLaw clients, to mentor high-performing senior associates at one of AdvanceLaw's 27 participating law firms.

By the start of this year's program, over 100 mentors and over 100 associates will have participated in the program since its inception. There are 25 to 30 matches each year.

### **Mutually Beneficial**

AdvanceLaw clients are not required to participate in the program, because the company wants to make sure that mentors can commit the time for the program's relationship to be fruitful for everyone involved, Britt Waller, a senior director at AdvanceLaw, told Law360 Pulse.

Law firm partners are also not required to participate, but all the U.S. firms in AdvanceLaw's network are involved in the program.

Crowell & Moring LLP, which became an AdvanceLaw client in 2018, selected Tiffany Wynn, a counsel in the firm's white collar and regulatory enforcement group, to join the first class of mentees for the program in September 2019.

Wynn was matched with Royce Warrick, a senior vice president and general counsel at chemicals manufacturer Solenis LLC.

Waller said that the matchmaking between mentors and mentees looks for commonalities including geography, practice area and law school. Warrick and Wynn were both alumnae of Duke University, which made for a nice starting point.

Although AdvanceLaw conducts periodic check-ins with mentors and mentees, the program follows an open agenda to allow more spontaneous dialogue between participants.

"Mentors and mentees all come to the program with different objectives, different viewpoints, reasons for being in the program, different backgrounds," Waller said. "In terms of agenda, what they talk about, it's basically up to them."

Wynn said because the mentorship is not heavily programmatic and structured, it gives participants the space for developing organic, one-on-one discussions.

The two have bonded and discussed Wynn's career trajectory as well as her short- and long-term goals.

Wynn, who is also co-chair of Crowell & Moring's women's leadership initiative, told Law360 Pulse that she was able to talk with Warrick about some of the women's programs they are producing. She also said Warrick participated in one of the firmwide discussions for the women's program.

Warrick also connected Wynn with the company's vice president of diversity, equity and inclusion to discuss how their company can reach diversity goals.

Each iteration of the mentorship program lasts a full year. Matches are required to connect either in person or online on a quarterly basis. Waller said that most matches connect every month, and many continue their relationships beyond the year.

Both Warrick and Wynn have stayed in touch monthly since they began the program over two years ago. There were plans to meet in person in 2020, but the pandemic has delayed that.

### **Lasting Impact**

AdvanceLaw says what distinguishes the program is that the mentors are all at the senior level of in-house legal departments, most of them general counsel or deputy general counsel.

For a counsel such as Wynn, the program has connected them with people who make decisions about client work.

"Would I have connected with Royce and had a relationship with her?" Wynn said. "Kind of hard to see that happening out of whole cloth."

Wynn, who has been at Crowell & Moring for over 10 years and is thinking about her potential trajectory to partner, said it has been valuable to develop a concrete relationship with a general counsel such as Warrick, who has already achieved a lot in her career and can offer guidance.

"For me to be able to say 'I know Royce,' there are not a lot of people who at my level know general counsel on that closer level," Wynn said.

Warrick said she has enjoyed connecting with someone early in their career, especially a counsel from a

law firm that her company doesn't currently use. She added that Solenis could be open to retaining Crowell & Moring someday, including Wynn in particular.

"Solenis' relationship with Crowell has not formalized into retention, but I have no doubt that it will," Warrick said. "Just waiting for the right opportunity."

She added that having access to Wynn and her firm's colleagues on issues such as diversity and inclusion has given Solenis food for thought about how they might want to further progress their organization.

"Tiffany's perspective is kind of different," Warrick said. "She speaks to me in a way that helps me think differently about the value of networking and how that actually works."

More than a dozen mentees in the program have already made partner at their firms, according to Williams.

AdvanceLaw was bought by legal and compliance software provider Mitrtech Holdings LLC in May 2021.

"Diversity is a consistent topic about where AdvanceLaw and some of the technology that Mitrtech has been developing can play together," Williams said. "They've been 100% supportive, helping to steer resources our way."

With the help of Mitrtech, Williams said that AdvanceLaw will launch a digital portal in the next few months for its in-house clients, and diversity will be a component of that.

And now that the pandemic might be winding down, Williams said that he would like to get a large group of mentors and mentees together for an in-person event later this year.

Whether that event happens, Wynn and Warrick hope to finally meet in person this year.

--Editing by Brian Baresch and Alyssa Miller.