

# WHAT'S NEXT: LAW

*Forchelli, Curto, Deegan, Schwartz, Mineo & Terrana, LLP*

## Law and the Art of Mentoring

Excelling in law school does not guarantee that the successful student will become a skilled attorney. In fact, the jump from the books to real life scenarios can be a daunting transition but the senior partners at Forchelli, Curto, Deegan, Schwartz, Mineo & Terrana, LLP (Forchelli Law) in Uniondale understand this changeover young attorneys must make and greet them into the firm with a guiding eye.

"You must watch and train younger attorneys into the practice of law," said the firm's Managing Partner Jeffrey Forchelli, who introduced mentoring relationships between senior partners and junior attorneys when he launched the firm in 1976. "You learn an awful lot in law school but you also learn as you go along and you need a good mentor to teach you how to avoid pitfalls."

John Terrana, partner-in-charge of the firm's Tax Certiorari Department, joined the firm in 1993 and was mentored by the firm's senior attorneys Jeff Forchelli and Peter Mineo. In turn, Terrana now mentors all junior attorneys and paralegals in the firm's Tax Certiorari Department.

"While we do talk about procedural and substantive law, negotiation is the most important skill I emphasize," Terrana noted. "How to analyze a case, determining the best way to present it, and anticipating the arguments of the other side are all crucial aspects in tax certiorari."

Terrana instills in his mentees that an attorney's job is to advocate for a client as best they can but they should never misrepresent the facts. "They are going to have long careers in the practice of law but that won't happen if their reputation and integrity are compromised," Terrana explained. "I would say that for any lawyer, but this is particularly true in tax certiorari where it's a very small world. If you lose the trust of one judge or assessor, the chances are that the word would spread very quickly."

Robert Renda came to Forchelli Law in 2012 as an intern in his final year of law school and upon graduation became an associate attorney in its Tax Certiorari Department.

"John Terrana took me under his wing to coach me in the law in our department and practicing in the field, but more than that he's teaching me how he came to be a successful lawyer and the things he's done to further his career. So, his guidance is not strictly from a legal perspective, it is also from a business and career perspective."

This mentorship has been a positive influence for Renda's morale.

"John's supervision has been so supportive, Renda said. "This is emblematic of all partners in the firm because they really take interest in you not only on a professional level but personal growth, as well. They don't put you in a box and then expect you to just be an associate and do your work. They want you to grow and become a future leader of the firm."

Partner Joseph Cuomo, who co-chairs the firm's Corporate Department, joined Forchelli Law after being a partner at a prominent national law firm. He began his career at a large Manhattan firm that he describes as "a not so kind or gentle environment."

"It was pretty much trial by fire and you learned by osmosis," Cuomo noted. "You were expected to teach yourself and keep up to speed. While there is some benefit to that it is very stressful and you may not learn to do things the right way."

An attorney for 25 years and with the Forchelli Law firm for nine, Cuomo said there needs to be a balance. "You don't want to spoon feed young attorneys forever, but you don't want them to be completely on their own either and thrown to the wolves."

Allison Rosenzweig joined the firm in 2013 as an associate in the Corporate Department. Working alongside Cuomo, Rosenzweig seeks professional guidance and has developed a personal business plan to keep her on course to achieving her goals.

She is also involved in co-creating the firm's training program for transactional associates and is the co-coordinator of the firm's Long Island General Counsel Network. "Joe and I have discussed many different ways to build a professional portfolio. The partners here encourage you not only to be a good attorney, but also to market yourself through many different avenues, including article writing, speaking engagements and professional and community involvement," Rosenzweig explained.

A business plan organizes your goals and forces you to seek challenging projects and professional opportunities, which ultimately amounts to increasing responsibility, Cuomo said. "When you mentor someone you give advice and it may go into the ether and may never be implemented," he noted. "Rather than take that approach



**Forchelli, Curto, Deegan, Schwartz, Mineo & Terrana, LLP Associates (L to R) Robert Renda and Allison Rosenzweig.**

having a personal business plan is a good alternative."

One of the primary lessons senior attorneys focus on is the importance of verbal communication. "I think you have to teach younger people that sometimes you have to get on the phone and talk to people," Forchelli said. "You can't do that sitting with your two thumbs typing away on your phone or iPad."

Building relationships is essential to the attorney-client bond. "We are in the personal service business and an email and text message doesn't have a personality – you have to develop a relationship with clients and build confidence," Forchelli explained. "Sending emails and text messages are useful techniques, especially for confirming things or giving information that are not subject to different interpretations."

The firm's senior attorneys also address anxieties of the younger attorneys.

"They may have self-doubt because they are not picking things up fast enough or they are not a master within a year or two," Cuomo said. "I always tell my young attorneys that they cannot become a master overnight and the only way to get there is to keep doing good work and working with good people."

As part of the mentoring process, senior partners are benefiting just as much as their younger counterparts.

"Mentorship has made all of us — those who



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teach and those who are learning — collectively better at dealing with the people we represent," Forchelli noted. "By partners teaching the younger attorneys they are reminding themselves what they should be doing. There is an ancient Chinese expression – 'when one teaches, two learn.' Mentoring is not a one-semester course — it is a lifetime course. We all need to brush up once in a while, which is why this is so beneficial to the mentors too. Younger attorneys bring energy and enthusiasm to the firm and mentoring helps blend that with the experience and wisdom of the older attorneys."