

The Value of a Mentor who “Lifts as She Climbs”

“If you have knowledge, let others light their candles in it.” This quote by Margaret Fuller, a journalist, critic, and women’s rights advocate, describes Susan Zaunbrecher perfectly. Susan was recently named one of the YWCA’s 2016 Career Women of Achievement, and she embodies the YWCA’s motto of what it means to “lift as you climb.” I can say this because I am fortunate to call her a mentor and friend.

The head of our corporate department and member of the Board of Directors, Susan has many responsibilities at Dinsmore, but she takes the time to support young professionals in their rising careers and personal development, while she continually achieves success in her own career.

Susan made considerable efforts to help me throughout my career, beginning when I was a Summer Associate with Dinsmore. Susan and I just clicked right away. I will never forget how Susan took the time out of her packed schedule to attend my law school graduation party. Susan may not think of it because it is in her nature to make a personal gesture like that, but it meant so much to me. I keep her graduation gift, an engraved Dinsmore clock, on my desk. It serves as a symbol of her guidance in my path from Summer Associate to now Partner at Dinsmore. Susan’s advice regarding my promotion to partner this past January was critical. I was able to learn how to negotiate the politics of practicing in a law firm by watching Susan. She has repeatedly gone out of her way to encourage my growth and show her support.

Susan has also been instrumental in providing leadership and guidance to all young attorneys at Dinsmore. She founded the firm’s Leadership Academy, which is a nine month development program for new associates that provides guidance on marketing, sales, business etiquette, networking, firm processes and procedures, among many other essential areas. After I completed the program, Susan made sure I was a member of the leadership academy faculty for seven years and then helped with my transition onto the firm’s recruitment committee.

“This will up your game.” That is how Susan would often motivate me to take my efforts to the next level, referring to the many internal and external networking opportunities. Because of that push, I became further engaged in the community, including my involvement with the YWCA. I was honored as a “Rising Star” in 2014 with 53 other Cincinnati young professionals. Susan also started our Cincinnati Women’s Initiative, which is a monthly networking program for women attorneys at Dinsmore. Susan encouraged me to help plan the programs, and because of this, I developed relationships among the women attorneys at the firm. Susan is also the kind of mentor who provides counseling rather than just giving advice. She is a guide and a sounding board.

Susan has always provided smart and sensible direction on navigating through the many written and unwritten rules of practicing in private practice. Through Susan's unwavering support and guidance, it is clear that she cares about my happiness at the firm and my development and success. Mentoring is an innate quality Susan holds and for which I am deeply grateful.