



# Negligence Law Section

Sharpening Each Other: Finding and being mentors in the Negligence Section  
By Emily Thomas

*What the heck am I doing? What should I do next? Did I make the right decision?* These are the thoughts of every new lawyer. In full confession, seasoned professionals sometimes ask these questions, too. I have yet to meet any newly barred attorney that approaches their law practice with total knowledge and confidence in what they are doing. Further, such a confident new lawyer that fails to ask these questions is missing out, failing to appreciate the importance of learning and continuously improving their practice.

“The greatest good you can do for another is not just to share your riches but to reveal to him his own.” — *Benjamin Disraeli*

In the practice of law, experience is the best teacher. As a new lawyer, you can only accumulate experience two ways: (1) with time and (2) through the wisdom of mentors. New lawyers can maximize their accumulation of experience by finding as many mentors as possible, and by getting out there to practice law. Just as the best decisions are made by a group of people with diverse perspectives, a diverse group of mentors challenges new lawyers and gives them an array of opportunities to grow.

“Mentoring is a brain to pick, an ear to listen, and a push in the right direction.” — *John Crosby*

Research demonstrates that successful outliers in any field engage in “deliberate practice.” There are great books on this premise, such as *Talent is Overrated* by Geoffrey Colvin and *Outliers* by Malcolm Gladwell. Colvin profiles prodigies such as Mozart and Tiger Woods, illustrating that what is often labeled as talent, is in fact the result of hard work over time. Colvin’s book undermines the mythical belief that people are divinely gifted with the ability to succeed. Instead, it makes clear that success is the result of purposeful drive toward what matters.

No one is better at helping one focus on what to deliberately practice than an experienced mentor. Both Mozart and Tiger Woods were gifted with fathers who taught them to deliberately practice their craft beginning at birth, and as a result, Mozart and Tiger exceeded the expectations in their fields at an early age.

“A lot of people put pressure on themselves and think it will be way too hard for them to live out their dreams. Mentors are there to say, ‘Look, it’s not that tough. It’s not as hard as you think. Here are some guidelines and things I have gone through to get to where I am in my career.’” — *Joe Jonas*

Deliberate practice done right is always hard. Learning a new skill requires effort. If you’re comfortable with what you’re doing, then you’re not engaged in deliberate practice. Deliberate practice is purposeful and systematic. It is the opposite of mindless repetition. Deliberate practice is focused attention to specific goals that better your performance. An experienced mentor is the best at helping you focus, by giving you guidelines and things to improve upon.

“Show me a successful individual and I’ll show you someone who had real positive influences in his or her life. I don’t care what you do for a living—if you do it well I’m sure there was someone cheering you on or showing the way. A mentor.” — *Denzel Washington*

Every experience you have in life contributes something to your practice. You bring your own unique experiences to what you do, and these in combination with your practice and future experiences will impact your success. So, get out there and experience as much as you can! Find mentors that contribute to your experiential knowledge base. Find seminars and educational opportunities that broaden your horizons. Find people who challenge you to grow.

“I’ve learned a lot from mentors who were instrumental in shaping me, and I want to share what I’ve learned.” — *Herbie Hancock*

Just as mentors have been there to share their experiences with you and challenge you to grow – reciprocate. Be there to share your experiences and challenge other attorneys. Teaching others your craft reinforces what you know to be important in your field. Teaching others leaves behind a legacy that will continue to create an impact in your field for generations.

“Iron sharpens iron, and one man sharpens another.” —Proverbs 27:17

We should make it our mission to sharpen each other in the practice of negligence law and leave a legacy of excellence in what we do. The State Bar of Michigan Negligence Section has a diverse array of experienced practitioners from both the plaintiff and defense bars. New lawyers eager to listen and learn about how to better their practice are also an integral part of the Section.

The best opportunity to find a mentor or to become a mentor is when these two groups come together at Negligence Section events. The next gathering is the Negligence Section’s New Lawyers mixer at Punch Bowl Social in Detroit on April 11<sup>th</sup> from 5:30 p.m. to 7:30 p.m. Come and bring your questions – and don’t forget to ask: “*How can I sharpen my practice?*”