

## WOMEN'S LEADERSHIP INITIATIVE'S MENTORING MOMENTS

### Episode 01: Al McKenna and Molly Crabtree

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Intro: This is Molly Crabtree and welcome to Porter Wright's Women's Leadership Initiative's Mentoring Moments.

**Molly:** This is Molly Crabtree with Porter Wright. I'm a partner in our litigation department in Columbus, Ohio, and I currently chair the firm's Women's Leadership Initiative. This is our first mentoring moment, where we have our women attorneys, sitting down with their mentors to talk about important issues in career development.

I'm here with Alan McKenna, a longtime partner and the former managing partner of our firm, and a longtime mentor of mine. I've asked Al to sit down with me today to just talk about mentorship and sponsorship. Al has been an integral part of my career and success at Porter Wright, and I want to share some of his wisdom with you while he's in town. So thanks for thanks for coming now.

**Al:** You're welcome.

**Molly:** So tell me what goes into, in your opinion what goes into a good mentoring relationship?

**Al:** Well, you need somebody who, as a mentor, you need somebody who has experience and is interested in doing the job, or the task, I should say. It's not a job. And you need a mentee or a person who is interested in mentorship. I have had a couple of incidents where I've had the sort of the mentoring relationship. But it was the person, the mentee, was looking past the mentoring relationship, in effect, trying to figure out what she was going to do next. And that's not always helpful.

**Molly:** And why do you say you corrected yourself and said that it's a task, not a job.

**Al:** Because a job makes it sounds like it's onerous. And it's not onerous. It's something lawyers or anybody in a workplace ought to do. Because people aren't born totally knowledgeable about what you need to do to succeed. And a mentor is giving advice. It's not direction, it's advice. And it's up, really, the success of it depends on the mentee. How much the mentee wants to succeed, that the relationship or what the target end of the relationship has. You know, if somebody wants to be a doctor, and they're being mentored by a lawyer, and then they're trying to figure out how to get the med school, that's not going to work.

**Molly:** So how do you feel about like the assignment of mentors? Do you think? Do you think it's something that works? Or that can work? Or is it on the mentee to seek out mentors?

**AI:** I think you'd need both. Just like a mentee needs guidance and what to do to succeed, they probably need guidance and how to figure out who's the best mentors for that person. But when they walk in the door, like at Porter Wright, they may have been here for one or two summers, but they really don't know everybody. And it's a good introduction to their professional career, to have somebody assigned to them. But what the mentee can learn over a year or two is, who do I want to work with to learn what that person does and how that person has succeeded in where I want to go? So the assignment is a good idea to start with. But the mentee should take it upon himself or herself to identify what he or she thinks would be an appropriate mentor.

**Molly:** So it's a progression over time and career.

**AI:** Yes. And as you proceed in your career, you find other mentors. I mean, once you get experienced that something, maybe you need somebody who has had different life experiences or work experiences that can help guide you as you want to achieve more or go in a different direction.

**Molly:** So as a mentee, you need to develop your mentors over time. Now, you've held a lot of different positions in the progression of your career. Do you think you've been a different kind of mentor at different stages in your career? Because I know there, there are lots and lots of people at this firm who consider you a mentor.

**AI:** I guess I don't look at a mentoring relationship, such as we went through, as being assigned to you or designated as your mentor or even believing I was your mentor. My whole theory is, I'm just there to help. You've got questions, you've got situations. I'm sort of a listener. I can tell you, now when I had that issue, here's what I did. And it didn't work. Or I can tell you, here's what I did, and it did work. Or here's what you might want to consider doing. So, as I've been in, you know, I wasn't born as old as I am now, so I didn't start in the practices as old as I am now. So I had mentors, but I'm sure not many of them thought of themselves and mentors, just, it was just somebody guiding me through my particular career stop at that point. Whether it was as a law clerk for a federal judge, an Assistant US Attorney, a brand new private practice associate, you young partner, an aging partner, or managing partner.

**Molly:** So can you describe a circumstance where you felt like a mentoring or an advising relationship? Didn't work out or had end? And how you handled that? Well, don't say me?

**AI:** No. I had a, you know, a couple of instances where it didn't work out with two different women. That I assisted in getting a job at Porter Wright, first as a law clerk, and then as a, as an associate. One had her eye on something else the whole time. And stopped in one day to say, "Guess what I'm leaving," no discussion before that as to whether there was an issue because there wasn't an issue. It was that she did not want to be bothered with private practice. And without really identifying her I can say I, one of the things I opened in my mail was a Christmas card from her. She's got three kids. The first one is named McKenna. If you can believe that. But she just left. The other one was I learned from somebody else that this person had left. And so I

contacted her. I said, what was the problem? Well, I wasn't getting the kind of work other people were getting. Now she did go to a bigger law firm. And I haven't checked on how she's done there. But my reaction was, that was very impolite. If anything, and I said you know, after going to bat for you, you could have at least come contacted me while you were not in the office. Hey, I got a phone, I got an email to try and discuss what could be done to address what you saw as the issue. I haven't talked to her since and hadn't talked to haven't talked to the person since either.

To a large extent the mentee drives the relationship. The mentee has to want to have the relationship and want to learn and want to learn and want to learn what the mentor may be able to help them with. If it's something that the mentor can't help them with based on experiences. What the mentor is aware of has happened with other people. It's not going to work, but it makes sense. I always do.

**Molly:** You always think you do. Are there any specific challenges you think, in mentoring women or diverse attorneys as opposed to other attorneys.

**AI:** As to women, I'm the father of five daughters.

**Molly:** And a son

**AI:** Five daughters and a son. And we even had a female cat so I guess I've traveled the winding road. A lot of talking to women. And it really is no different. And the I would say the only reaction I would have to guard against is, is a woman attorney or woman mentee thinking, what the heck does he know about if he's not a woman?

As to the diverse attorneys for all the people who don't know, I am diverse. I was the first African American graduate of the Notre Dame Law School. So I, every time I once in a while, not once in a while a lot, I go back and do some mentoring with the students there. They look at me and I don't look like I'm supposed to, to be called a black lawyer. A term I do not like, which I will get to,

**Molly:** Black lawyer?

**AI:** Right. Well, I have made this comment several times. Most recently, I was on a zoom panel for Black History Month at the law school. And I said something that I said once before, that I've not had any blowback on. In fact, I've had several people say, "Well, that's a good idea. I said, I would, I would like there to be a time when a black lawyer or Black Law Student from not at Notre Dame is not identified as a black lawyer. He's identified, he or she is identified as a lawyer from Notre Dame or a law student from Notre Dame, because that's when I think we've made the jump to where it should be. And it's the same way with the women lawyers, we will have made the jump when there's not a need for a Women's Leadership Initiative. Oh, she happens to be a lawyer, which is the way I guess I dealt with what would possibly be mentees.

I was with a law firm that merged into Porter Wright. When we merged, we had 25 lawyers. Well, the first woman, a law clerk and who became the first woman lawyer at this firm was assigned to work with me. And I was doing a lot of coal mine strike work. And I took her to the coal mine, where there was one woman who worked there, at least underground. And at first people did a double take. But it was a matter of just, she's here. She's a new lawyer, and she's going to be working with me. After a couple

of years, there would be times when I would get a call about something. Can you send her down? That's when I knew it worked. She wasn't an odd ball or shocked to help people see this woman they're doing the same kind of work I did when I was there. In fact, they prefer to have her sometimes, I guess.

**Molly:** And I think that's a lot of what you did for me, you put me in rooms, that other people wouldn't have put me in and you put me there very matter of factly. So that it wasn't an issue that I was in the room. It was you're in the room.

**AI:** And I think that's at least that's the way I've approached it that you have to do it. And I would do the same thing with a diverse attorney, if you're talking about racial diversity. I mean, I've done that with minority lawyers, black lawyers here in Porter Wright, going on assignments with clients. Here's Joe, you know, he's not here carrying my bags. I guess that's the way I've tended to work with younger newer lawyers, I should say not necessarily younger, newer lawyers. They can go with me the first couple of times and watch how it goes. Then after a couple of times, they start doing a good bit of it. And then after more time, I get to sit and watch. And if they are paying attention, if they want to succeed, they will have picked up things to do and not do when dealing with clients or dealing with witnesses or dealing with the public, I guess.

**Molly:** Yeah, I think that perfectly describes how you create that experience. So kind of wrapping up a little bit. Can you describe a couple of your more meaningful successes? I know you don't necessarily use the word mentor but advisor.

**AI:** Well, I would say to me, meaningful successes as a mentor, which is your question means that that mentee has succeeded. You have people like who will become partners at Porter Wright, Adele O'Conner, Diane Reichwein, Mark Stemm, Mike Miller, I don't know that he will admit that he is a mentee but, and you, of all people. That's what I consider successes that that person, hopefully having picked up something from working with me or working around me, that has led to their being able to succeed as they want it to. And I guess success in the world of legal practice is becoming a partner in a law firm, or owning a law firm, whatever you want to call, or you got somebody like Bernard Jones, who became a federal judge, who bugged the heck out of me to get a summer job. Finally he got a summer job and then got a job then his wife convinced him to go back to Oklahoma, but he would call from time to time. In fact, I can remember the most recent time he called was when he was the background check was being done on him for his federal district judgeship. And he was calling, they asked me some questions about things. And I was waiting for my wife who was having her physical therapy after a knee replacement surgery, and I'm standing out in the parking lot, talking to him about what he should be doing. Haven't talked to him in a while since he became a federal judge.

**Molly:** But you helped get them there.

**AI:** Yeah.

**Molly:** Well, thank you so much for sitting down with me and sharing your thoughts and allowing us to put this out there. You've meant the world to me over the years, and we thank you dearly for coming in and helping us start this series,

**AI:** And you're one of the big successes. Thank you for having me.

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