Seminar Discussion Points

February 6 – “Talk to Me!”: Communication Between Your Supervisors and You

Section 1: Communication

At your extern placement, examine the style in which communicate in the legal work place. Evaluate how you can be most productive. Consider the following qualities of effective work place communication.

1. Honesty and accuracy in the substance of what was said
2. Discretion about what one should communicate, to whom and when
3. Sensitivity to the knowledge and personality of the audience
4. Ability to listen to others effectively
5. Maturity in handling differences of opinion and criticism
6. Careful selection of means of communication
7. Confidence in thinking on one's feet and responding to issues as they arise, coupled with the ability to know when an off-the-cuff response is premature or imprudent
8. Strength in defending one's position when it is correct, and willingness to admit when it is not
9. Civility and cordiality, particularly under pressure
10. Patience with those who do not grasp what is being communicated

These skills are particularly important because law practice is often a collaborative enterprise. In addition, attorneys are often judged, initially at least, by their communication abilities. It is, after all, communication skills that allow attorneys to translate the knowledge they possess into a form that can be used by others.

As you develop your attorney communication style, you may find yourself under pressure to deliver information very quickly. You may need to develop the ability to gather and disseminate information more quickly than you may be accustomed to doing.

Another consideration is that communication is very closely related to the issue of documentation. Documentation skill essentially, is knowing what should and should not be made subject of your written records.

IN ADDITION TO GENERAL REFLECTIONS REGARDING THE WORK YOU ARE PERFORMING AT YOUR EXTERN PLACEMENT, YOU MAY REFLECT ON THE FOLLOWING IN ANY OF YOUR JOURNALS:

Think back to the last job you had, or the last time you were responsible for carrying out a task in cooperation with others. List the various ways in which your co-workers an others communicated with you and with each other (personally, e-mail, telephone, writing memoranda etc.). Evaluate each type of communication to consider which was most effective and when; which was most effective for achieving a quick response; which was best for preserving information; and which you felt more comfortable using. Additionally, discuss what should you make the subject in your written records, that is, what would be proper to discuss in person or by telephone, as opposed to committing it to writing.
Section 2: Feedback

Why is feedback important? Consider the following characteristics of effective feedback:

Effective feedback should describe behavior in a non-judgmental manner, using examples that are specific. Understand what the supervisee was trying to accomplish and listen to why choices were made. Characterize your reaction to the supervisee's choices in a subjective manner, for example, "I think..." "In my opinion..." If you are giving corrective rather than affirming feedback, describe the alternatives that you think would have been better with enough specificity to clarify your meaning. Involve the supervisee in a discussion on alternative sources.

IN ADDITION TO GENERAL REFLECTIONS REGARDING THE WORK YOU ARE PERFORMING AT YOUR EXTERN PLACEMENT, YOU MAY REFLECT ON THE FOLLOWING IN ANY OF YOUR JOURNALS:

1. Why do lawyers fail to give useful feedback to the people they supervise?
2. What can you do to enhance the possibility of getting effective feedback?
3. When time is an obstacle, what are some of the ways to address the problem?
4. Suppose your supervisor asks for feedback on the supervisor's performance in clarifying assignments, providing feedback, etc. Script the comments that you would give based on your experience with your supervisor thus far. Use principles of reflections, reaction, and prescriptive feedback in your comments.