

The Mentoring Court: The Grumpy Old Manager

Oftentimes the first step to building a sound mentoring relationship is being open to the idea and to be willing to undertake new practices.

JEFF PARENTI

Cast

Voice Over
Judge Jean
Lefty, Courtroom Bailiff
Patricia Vinatieri, Plaintiff
Carl Redmond, Plaintiff
Mark Parker, Plaintiff
Elizabeth Lyght, Plaintiff
Randall Krundle, Defendant
Martha, Mr. Krundle's Secretary
Tilly Tuesday, Court Reporter

Open on a courtroom. The Judge's bench is stage left. The plaintiff's lectern is upstage center and the defendant's lectern is downstage center. There are several chairs in rows stage right making the

gallery. The bailiff, Lefty, stands ready upstage of the Judge's bench.

Scene 1

VOICE OVER
(Solemnly.) You are about to enter the courtroom of Judge Jean. The people are real. The cases are real. The rulings are final.

LEFTY

First case, docket number DO8A, Parker, Vinatieri and Redmond versus Krundle. Step forward please.

Enter Mark, Elizabeth, Patricia and Carl stage right. They walk toward the plaintiff's lectern.

VOICE OVER

Mark Parker, Patricia Vinatieri and Carl Redmond claim that the defendant caused them emotional distress by not choosing them as protégés.

Enter Krundle.

VOICE OVER

Randall Krundle says mentoring shouldn't be his responsibility, and that the plaintiffs are wasting his time.

Judge enters from stage right, behind her bench and sits down. She wears reading glasses and carries some files. She smiles at the gallery, who are all standing. She sits at her bench.

LEFTY
You may be seated.

The gallery sits.

JUDGE
Lefty, have the parties been sworn in?

LEFTY
Oh, oops. *(Takes a book from the Judge's bench.)*
Raise your right hands. Do you swear to not lie and stuff?

PLAINTIFFS
Yeah.

JUDGE
OK, who will speak on behalf of the plaintiffs?

PATRICIA
I will, your honor. Patricia Vinatieri.

JUDGE
Ms. Vinatieri. . . I've read your complaint. You are all young professionals and you all work for Mr. Krundle, is that right? And you claim that Mr. Krundle considered all of you but did not choose any of you as a protégé, is that right?

PATRICIA
Mentees, your honor.

JUDGE
What?

PATRICIA
We prefer the term *mentee* over *protégé*, your honor.

JUDGE
(Rolls her eyes and then speaks directly to Lefty.)
It's going to be another long day, isn't it, Lefty? I always thought they were called protégés. Have you ever heard of a mentee?

LEFTY
I thought it was one of those big animals in the ocean. You know, sea cows?

JUDGE
(To Patricia.) Anyway, tell me what happened.

PATRICIA
One day Mr. Krundle called us all into his office and told us that he had to pick one of us as a mentee, even though he didn't want to. He was going on and on about how he and his partner started up a little surveying company thirty years ago and built it up to the nine-hundred-person, international multi-disciplinary firm it is today and how the company made it this far without providing guidance to younger people in the company and how he didn't see the need to be a mentor to anyone at this point in his career.

KRUNDLER
Your honor. . .

JUDGE
Shh! Go on, Ms. Vinatieri.

PATRICIA
So then he started asking us which one he should pick because all he knew about us was our names. I mean, he didn't even know I was a woman. All he knew was I was Pat, and I guess he thought I was Patrick.

KRUNDLER
That's not true, your honor.

JUDGE
Quiet! You'll have your chance. Ms. Vinatieri, in your complaint, you say that Mr. Krundle has no appreciation for the value of being a mentor?

PATRICIA
That's right. Or the value of helping a younger person at his own company improve on their skills in a casual and supportive setting.

JUDGE
All right. *(Shakes her head.)* I still don't know about this "mentee" business. What's wrong

with protégé? What do you think, Lefty? Does it make sense to you?

LEFTY
Nope.

JUDGE
Now I'll hear from you, Mr. Krundle.

KRUNDLER
Your honor. . . I started this company thirty years ago with eighty bucks and a transit. My buddy, Lesko, was my rodman. We didn't need —

JUDGE
(*Puts up her hand.*) Already heard that part. Fast forward to the day in your office with the defendants.

KRUNDLER
I'm sorry, your honor. I got this memo from our management saying I should have a protégé. Now —

PATRICIA
Mentee.

JUDGE
Shh! Go on.

KRUNDLER
I've never had a protégé. I don't even know anyone who's ever been a mentor. I didn't understand why, after all these years, I would have to do this. But my secretary, Martha, already narrowed it down to four people and made an appointment for them to come in. I would have met with them separately, but I had a 4 o'clock tee time. I explained to them that I was going to choose one of them as my protégé — mentee, whatever — so they all understood what the arrangement was. So I asked each of them why I should choose them. I think it was pretty fair.

JUDGE
I'll decide that, OK, Mr. Krundle? Now, did you do any research on the candidates, find out if any of them have similar interests to yours?

KRUNDLER
No.

JUDGE
Why not?

KRUNDLER
My secretary, Martha, takes care of that sort of thing.

JUDGE
Did you ask your department managers about them? (*Pause.*) Did you even know what departments they work for?

KRUNDLER
Actually, it's interesting you ask that, because it turns out that Pat — who, by the way, I did know was a woman. . . after she had been in my office for a few minutes. . . and by the way, that did not factor into my decision at all. Anyway, it turns out that Patricia works in the Environmental Engineering Department, and I didn't even know we had that department. Heck, I hadn't even heard of Environmental Engineering before that!

CARL
Your honor.

JUDGE
Yes, who are you?

CARL
Carl Redmond, your honor. I just want to point out that Mr. Krundle's method for making his choice was truly unfair.

JUDGE
In what way?

CARL
Well, in my opinion, the person best suited to the position of mentee would have been the person who had shown the greatest commitment to the company, the employee who upholds the mission statement to its fullest and who contributes highly to the efficiency of the revenue stream. And I just want to state that, for the record, I have the highest utilization rate by far of —

JUDGE
Mr. Krundle, is that true?

KRUNDLER
I don't know, you'll have to ask Martha.

CARL
I have the financial statements from the last seventy-two weeks that show —

JUDGE
Mr. Redmond, it doesn't matter.

CARL
But I think the choice should be made objectively and —

JUDGE
Listen to me, Mr. Redmond. Being a mentee is more than kissing up to one of the Vice Presidents so you can get a raise, a promotion and a key to the fancy bathroom! Do you understand me?

CARL
Yes, your honor.

JUDGE
Who else haven't I heard from?

Mark stands up.

JUDGE
Step up here. What's your name?

MARK
Mahk Pahkah.

JUDGE
(*Confused.*) What's your first name?

MARK
Mahk.

JUDGE
(*Looks at her file.*) Mr. Parker. Mark.

MARK
That's what I said.

JUDGE
OK, what would you like to say?

MARK
(*With a heavy Boston accent.*) Well, everything these two said is right, and I'm fah from being the best workah and, honestly, I should be bettah at the computah, and I have to get bettah at passing my time cahd in time — actually, I still owe my time cahd for the fuhst week of March, but. . . wayuh was I? Oh, ah, I think it was wicked unfayuh that, ah, Mistah Krundle picked a person just because she went to Hahvahd or something.

JUDGE
(*Squinting at Mark. Pauses and then addresses Lefty.*) Do understand anything he said, Lefty?

LEFTY
Nope.

JUDGE
Was that English? What language was that?

LEFTY
I don't know.

JUDGE
Mr. Parker. . . I have no idea what you said. Why don't you try again, and enunciate a little more.

MARK
OK, your 'onah.

JUDGE
And stand up straight, this isn't Friday night at The Rack.

MARK
Hey, I saw Papi thayuh once!

JUDGE
(*Sarcastically.*) That's great, Mark. Now why don't you tell me more about the case?

MARK
OK, so ah, he stahsted talking about his pahtnah and the old days, like they said, and then

he was looking at us like he was smartah than us, like none of us wayr wahthy of him as a mentor and stuff, y'know? So I was thinking, y'know, it doesn't mattah, because I don't need a mentah anyway, right? I mean, y'know, don't do me any favahs, OK? But then these three stahted saying how it could help thayuh cahyeeah and everything, and then I staht daydreamin' about having a company cah, because I heard Krundle has a Vipah! So when he didn't pick me, I was wicked ripped.

Judge stares at Mark.

KRUNDLER
I couldn't understand him either, your honor.

JUDGE
Thank you for your testimony, Mr. Parker. *(Pauses.)* I'm curious, Mr. Parker. Have you ever had a mentor before?

MARK
Actually, yeah, when I was youngah, I looked up to my neighbor in Hyde Park, Tom Menino. Before he was mayuh.

JUDGE
(Says under her breath.) Makes sense. *(Then pauses and addresses Patricia.)* Ms. Vinatieri, there are three of you listed in the suit, but there are four of you here. Who is this extra person? *(Points at Elizabeth.)*

PATRICIA
That's Elizabeth Lyght, your honor. That's who Mr. Krundle picked as his mentee.

JUDGE
That's who he picked? So why is she a witness for you?

ELIZABETH
Because, your honor, he was a terrible mentor.

JUDGE
Step up here. Tell me why he was a bad mentor.

ELIZABETH
Well, at first I was really excited because I knew, with Mr. Krundle being the CEO, having him as a mentor would facilitate my advancement in the company. But it only took a day for me to learn that he might actually hurt my position in the company.

JUDGE
Why?

ELIZABETH
I was confident that he did not understand the role of a mentor. He wasn't helpful. He just made more work for me and my utilization went down.

KRUNDLER
That's not true, your honor.

JUDGE
Why did you pick her, Mr. Krundle?

KRUNDLER
Oh, well, it turned out that I knew her. My brother-in-law is her cousin, or something like that. I'd met her once before at a family reunion.

JUDGE
And?

KRUNDLER
And so I thought we'd have something to talk about on the golf course.

JUDGE
You picked her on the basis of her being related to you?

KRUNDLER
Well —

JUDGE
I don't want to hear it. *(To Elizabeth.)* Did you ever play golf?

ELIZABETH
No, your honor. I have a rare condition that makes it impossible for me to play golf. I'm allergic to gophers.

KRUNDLÉ
So she's useless to me.

ELIZABETH
But I didn't care about the golf. The first time I went to him for guidance, he made me write a memo with advice a mentor would give a mentee and he signed it!

JUDGE
Did you do that, Mr. Krundle?

KRUNDLÉ
She's a very good writer. It was great advice. And since I initialed it, it was officially from me. Plus it's good training for her for when the company makes her become a mentor.

JUDGE
(Sighs.) All right, is there anything else anyone would like to tell me?

PATRICIA
Yes, your honor. (Hands a paper to Lefty.)

JUDGE
What's this?

PATRICIA
That's my resume. I think you can clearly see why I should have been chosen as mentee.

JUDGE
I wouldn't hire you as my hairdresser! Listen carefully, OK? I'm dismissing your case. None of you get it! Having a mentor is more than just about getting ahead in the company! It very well might be the most important relationship in your professional life. A mentor can help you grow as a professional and as a person. So you better get that straight, all right? If you use your mentor just to get ahead, it's what, Lefty?

LEFTY
It's selfish.

KRUNDLÉ
That's what I tried to tell them.

JUDGE
Mr. Krundle. I am dismissing the complaint. But you have some growing up to do yourself! You obviously feel that having a protégé — mentee, whatever — is a burden to you!

KRUNDLÉ
I'm sorry, your honor.

JUDGE
You should be! You should be lucky that there are young people in your company who seek out your advice, for whatever that's worth. You might even learn something from them!

KRUNDLÉ
Yes, your honor.

JUDGE
The case is dismissed. That's all.

PLAINTIFFS
Thank you, your honor.

Plaintiffs exit stage right. The defendant crosses stage right past the gallery to the hallway, where the court Reporter is waiting.

Scene 2

TILLY
Hi, I'm Tilly Tuesday, court reporter for The Mentoring Court. That last case, "The Grumpy Old Manager," was another example of an experienced engineer who missed an opportunity to pass his boundless knowledge onto a younger professional. Judge Jean dismissed the case, but taught the plaintiffs a valuable lesson on what being a good mentor entails, and also what being a good mentee is all about. Here comes the defendant now. (Addresses Krundle.) Mr. Krundle, were you relieved that the Judge dismissed this case?

KRUNDLÉ
I don't think it was a fair decision. I think she should have ruled that those kids should have to mentor themselves, or each other, or something. They should have to fend for themselves, just like I did. I started this company

thirty years ago with eighty bucks and a transit —

MARTHA

(Interrupting.) Er, what Mr. Krundle means is that the company places a heavy value on its young professionals who are, in many ways, its single best resource, and will soon announce a new program spearheaded by Mr. Krundle, which he will personally —

KRUNDLER

Martha, where are my golf clubs?

MARTHA

They're in your Viper, Mr. Krundle.

KRUNDLER

All right, let's go. I hope we don't run into those kids in the parking lot. *(He turns to leave.)*

MARTHA

(Aside, to Tilly.) He loves mentoring.

Krundle and Martha exit stage right.

TILLY

OK, let's have a word with the plaintiffs, who are exiting the courtroom now. *(Plaintiffs approach Tilly.)* Do you think the judge made a fair decision?

PATRICIA

We are disappointed that Judge Jean dismissed the case. We believe that we had the required evidence for a conviction.

TILLY

Conviction? This wasn't a criminal trial.

PATRICIA

Er, sorry. I've been watching too much *Boston Legal*.

TILLY

Does anyone else have a comment?

MARK

Yeah, I just want to say that I worked wicked hard to get hayuh, and even though I fuhgot to pass in my time cahd again this week, I think the company should reward me for my effuht. And I don't need a mentor, I know how to do my job good. A promotion and more dough suwah would raise my morale, y'know? One more thing. Red Sox numbah one this yeah. All the way. Go Papi!

TILLY

I have no idea what you said. But thank you for your comments. If you step this way, we have some papers for you to sign.



JEFF PARENTI is the Principal Traffic Engineer for the City of Cambridge, Massachusetts. His first published work of fiction was the short story "The Opposite Field" as part of the 2005 anthology *Fenway Fiction*. He holds a BSCE from Carnegie Mellon University and an MSCE from the Georgia Institute of Technology.