



## What My Mentor Taught Me About Workplace Etiquette

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**By Anthony Rosario**

While in high school, I was fortunate to participate in a mentoring program. I was an Annualized Law and Social Justice major at Martin Luther King Jr., H.S. in Midtown, Manhattan. I was 15 and living in the Bronx at the time. The purpose of the program was to connect high school students with practicing lawyers to gain a better understanding of the legal field and to expose students to professional etiquette and explore career paths in the field. My mentor was a young Latino attorney named Aurelio. He was of Cuban descent and recently moved to NYC from Miami. At first it was very awkward; conversations were mostly a barrage of questions about preferences, childhood experiences, identities and school. Once we realized we had things in common, we would keep conversations going about the commonality until we got tired of the subject and asked more questions. This program was site based so we met exclusively at the NYC Bar Association Building. We were limited in our contact and that made it hard to strengthen our relationship.

At first, I didn't know exactly what I wanted from a mentor. I was curious about this adult that seemed to have things in common with me but still was different enough where I was now learning things about different cities, life experiences, family situations, and about what it was really like to go to law school and practice law. I don't think I understood what kind of impact Aurelio was having on me just from seeing me once a month. Towards the end of that school year, students were discussing summer jobs and what they were looking to do. A summer job was not new to me because I spent my time off from school working with my dad at his business. This year would be different, Aurelio invited me to visit his office. I met the receptionist, legal assistants, associates, and the partners at this small law firm. During my visit with the partner at the law firm, Aurelio suggested that the firm consider giving me a job for the summer. The partner looked at me and asked if I was interested in working there. Without thinking twice I blurted out, yes! He then asked if I had my working permit and then offered me a summer position as a file clerk.

Fast forward 10 years to 2005, I was working with the same partner that gave me my first job but at a new law firm and I was now Senior Paralegal. At that point my mentor, Aurelio, had moved on to work at another firm but we were still meeting up a few times a year to have dinner and we were still talking about professional behavior, how to achieve happiness, and how to live a fulfilling life. Aurelio had attended my high school graduation and helped me celebrate my college and graduate school accomplishments.

Just a few years ago, Aurelio moved away from NYC and we lost contact with one another, but at that point I was 30 years old. That experience had a huge impact on me. Looking back at this experience I can say that I learned to have confidence in my abilities. I learned professional work behavior and etiquette. I also learned that I had a few people that I could go to for help and that it was ok to ask for help. I learned to take responsibility for my actions. I also learned the value of hard work.

I also learned how important it is to pay it forward. Aurelio could've come to NYC and lived a pretty amazing life as an attorney and attended lots of parties and filled his time with work and self-serving activities. He chose to give a little of his time to help me become a better version of myself. This motivated me to become a mentor myself. I worked with a high school student for two years before he left to college. I became a mentor to give someone what I got from Aurelio, understanding, confidence, support, and to help build an environment where they felt encouraged to keep dreaming and achieving their goals. This relationship made me really believe that it takes a village to raise a child and that I was committed to seeing other kids succeed in life.

*Anthony Rosario is a current staff member of **Big Brothers Big Sisters of New York City**. To become a volunteer mentor or to learn more about Big Brothers Big Sisters of NYC, log onto [www.bigsnyc.org](http://www.bigsnyc.org) or call 212-686-2042.*