The recent passing of former DRI President Donald Pierce reminded me once again of the importance of mentors and role models in our lives, careers, and profession. I met Don Pierce during my years in the Young Lawyers Committee, where I served as a member with his son John. Mr. Pierce loved DRI and took special interest in our young lawyer group, serving as a mentor, advisor, and friend to many of us. Mr. Pierce is the second role model and mentor my class of young lawyers has lost in the past two years. Last year we lost another friend in past DRI President Steve Morrison. Like Mr. Pierce, Steve took a special interest in the young lawyers group and encouraged us not to just be good lawyers, but to serve the profession and the bar in which we are privileged to be a member.

The term “organization” is defined as a group of people structured in a specific way to achieve a series of shared goals. As members of DRI and the defense bar, one of our shared goals and duties is to do what we can to preserve the legal profession by preparing the next generation. The strength of the defense bar depends on our following the examples of Don Pierce and Steve Morrison, who unselfishly worked to teach the next generation of lawyers the art of being a lawyer.

Young lawyers need mentors and role models to help them develop the skills and judgment it takes to be successful. Often, the most effective mentorships come from outside a young lawyer’s firm. Depending on the issue, external mentors can often provide young lawyers with a sounding board to work through questions that they are uncomfortable talking about with people within their own firms. Mentors from other states and different-sized firms can give a unique perspective and provide young lawyers with tools to problem-solve on their own. External mentors and role models can help young lawyers to begin building the all-important network for their future.

When asked to describe what value my DRI membership has brought me, I always start by describing the incredible DRI mentors and role models that took me under their wings during the early stages of my career. These lawyers showed me the nuts and bolts of how to practice law and taught me lessons of leadership and the importance of civility and character. But for my involvement in DRI, I never would have met any of these gifted individuals and benefited from their incredible wisdom and guidance.

I joined DRI as a third-year lawyer at a small firm in Alabama. Over the next 19 years of membership, I became active in several DRI committees including the Young Lawyers Committee. As a result of being active in the organization, I was exposed to and privileged to meet mentors and role models from all over the country. Top trial lawyers with busy schedules from places such as Indianapolis, Seattle, Kansas City, Raleigh, Oklahoma City, and Dallas took the time to help and guide me as I navigated my career. The value of the advice, guidance, and training I received, and still receive today, from these amazing lawyers and friends cannot be measured in dollars but instead is reflected in my ability to achieve my career goals and continued development as a lawyer and a person.

Now more than ever our profession needs strong mentors and role models to guide the next generation. DRI provides young lawyers with opportunities to meet and work with mentors and role models who will help them learn the ropes, develop their skills, and benefit from the wisdom of those who have made practicing law an art. If you are a young lawyer, I encourage you to use DRI as your training ground. Take advantage of the depth of talent and experience found in its 22,000 members. Get involved, be active, and look around for people who can serve as your mentors and role models. Don’t miss this valuable opportunity to learn from the best and the brightest.

If you are in a leadership role or have been practicing law for a while, look around for young lawyers not in your firm, whom you can help develop and mentor. Reach out to them, offer advice, take the time to listen to their thoughts, and help guide them along the way. Who knows, they may be able to teach you a thing or two as well. Don’t miss this valuable opportunity to pay it forward.
**On The Record**, from page 1

If you are in firm management, don’t forget that the future of your firm rests in the development of your young lawyers as leaders, communicators, and talented lawyers. The best lawyers are those who not only know the law, but can communicate and work with others to deliver their messages effectively. It takes time, practice, and exposure to different perspectives to turn good skills into an art form. DRI is a place where your young lawyers can be mentored and exposed to lawyers such as Don Pierce and Steve Morrison, who were willing to pass along what they had learned. Don’t miss this valuable resource for the development of your young lawyers.

I will be forever grateful to Don Pierce and Steve Morrison for understanding the importance of being a good mentor and their selfless willingness to share their wisdom and talents to help make us better lawyers and individuals. They will be truly missed.