

OPEN NINTH:

CONVERSATIONS BEYOND THE COURTROOM

GIVING & RECEIVING: THE ART OF MENTORING

FEATURING JUDGE ALLEN AND JUDGE MADRIGAL, III

EPISODE 162

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(Music)

NARRATOR: Welcome to another episode of “Open Ninth: Conversations Beyond the Courtroom” in the Ninth Judicial Circuit Court of Florida. And now, here’s your host, Chief Judge Lisa Munyon.

CHIEF JUDGE MUNYON: Hello, and welcome to Open Ninth. Today I’m here with Judges Faye Allen and Diego Madrigal to discuss the value of mentorships. As nature participants in hosting internships over the years, these two know first-hand the benefit of imparting wisdom on the next generation of lawyers and judges. I’m thrilled to have you two on the show today. Thanks for joining me.

JUDGE ALLEN: Thank you

JUDGE MADRIGAL: Thank you.

CHIEF JUDGE MUNYON: So tell me, what is mentorship?

JUDGE ALLEN: For me mentorship is giving back. It’s an opportunity to share knowledge, skills and experience with young lawyers and law students, and just give them an opportunity to do some things that they wouldn’t otherwise be able to do to meet a professional judge, to maybe career shadow with a professional judge. Sometimes judges seem like they are untouchable and that we live these mysterious lives of black robes and high benches. And so being a mentor to a young lawyer or a law student gives an opportunity for them to see that we’re not that mysterious. It demystifies the court while at the same time gives them a structured foundation for some of the things that they’re going to face in their future careers as lawyers.

CHIEF JUDGE MUNYON: Judge Madrigal did you have mentors in your life when you became a young lawyer?

JUDGE MADRIGAL: Absolutely. I was hired by now Senior Judge Patricia Doherty. She was the one who sent the email saying you're hired. And I had a great support foundation from my first law firm. It was the old Honeywell firm where Judge Kest came from and Judge Doherty, obviously. So I had a lot of good support and just kind of joining on what Judge Allen said, it's about giving back and it's, if you took a macro view, it's about helping society because they didn't want me to make the mistakes they made. And so that's the view I take when somebody asks me a suggestion or a question or an intern. It's I don't want you to make the mistakes I made so if I can prevent that to help them and help society, that's why I think mentorship is important.

CHIEF JUDGE MUNYON: Judge Allen, did you have mentors before you became a judge?

JUDGE ALLEN: Yes, I actually had several mentors, but the most impactful mentor that I had was also a judge, Judge John Adams and he was here in the Ninth Judicial Circuit. He's retired now but I remember meeting him after I graduated from law school, then I started work. He was the first judge I was assigned to and I realized that there was more to the practice of law than being a lawyer. And I also was so I guess impressed with his level of knowledge and the way that he ran the courtroom so I began to observe him and then one day I shared with him that I too one day wanted to become a judge. And he instantly became my mentor.

CHIEF JUDGE MUNYON: So in addition to just helping you not make the mistakes that they made, what did your mentors teach you when you were young lawyers? Judge Madrigal.

JUDGE MADRIGAL: So in law school you're taught to read the law, you know, they say they treat you or teach you to think like a lawyer, but they don't teach you how to be a lawyer.

CHIEF JUDGE MUNYON: That is so true.

JUDGE MADRIGAL: So they taught me how to be a lawyer, what to look for, what to think about. All the other stuff that goes into the practice of law that you're not taught. Quite frankly, professionalism. How to interact with opposing counsel, with the other side, the other litigants. It's just – they teach you how to be a lawyer, or they taught me how to be a lawyer.

CHIEF JUDGE MUNYON: How to disagree with the other side without being disagreeable.

JUDGE MADRIGAL: Right, pick up the phone and call them. And I tell people all the time now, text them because young lawyers nowadays seem to text each other, not call each other. But text them, talk to them beforehand. It doesn't – just because it's an adversarial process doesn't mean you have to be adversaries in everything.

CHIEF JUDGE MUNYON: What did Judge Adams or your other mentors teach you, Judge Allen?

JUDGE ALLEN: I would actually agree with a lot of what Judge Madrigal said. They taught me what it's really like to be a lawyer. Mentors that I had before I entered law school and mentors that I had while I was in law school helped to prepare me for the real life day-to-day grind of being a lawyer and shared with me that it is, although a highly desirable profession, it can be also highly stressful. So making sure that there were things that might have been easy for them now because they've already gone down that road and to make it easier on me, they shared with me here's some shortcuts, here's some things you can do to prepare for when you get out into the

practice. And then once becoming a lawyer, you know how to stay away from certain pitfalls, mainly in the professionalism arena. You know how to maintain that responsible decorum as an attorney and how to stay in touch with your clients and you know how to deal with opposing counsel and whether the opposing counsel is nice or not as nice as you would like to be how to maintain your decorum. So they just would give tips and pointers and encouragement, and I think having a mentor is what made me want to become a mentor, or having several mentors is what made me want to become a mentor. And I enjoy that aspect of my career that I can now give back the same way that it was given to me.

CHIEF JUDGE MUNYON: So how do you be a mentor? What do you do to be a mentor?
Judge Allen.

JUDGE ALLEN: Okay. There are two kinds of mentors. I like to say one is the official mentor that signs up for a mentorship program with an organization, or an institution. And the other one is the more casual relationship of a mentor and I do both. And both to me are equally valuable in the area of the practice of law. So I'm currently an official mentor in the Florida A&M University mentorship program, which is designed for, I think it's first and second year, no, maybe first through third year law students, maybe all and those who volunteer to participate in it need at least ten years of experience. And it can be an attorney or a judge, and you have standards of commitment. The commitment is to attend a couple of mentorship sessions per year as well as to maintain contact with your mentee. Now that's the more formalized version and they have other formalized versions in other organizations in the past that I've participated in as well. The more informal version you could just develop a relationship with a young lawyer that you know from the courtroom or you know prior court experience. I'm not mentoring a lawyer who is appearing before me in that moment, but that may be how I met someone, or a law student who maybe I'm

at the law school giving a presentation and they need a mentor. I actually recently was approached by a friend of mine in Tallahassee who knew of a young lady who was moving to Orlando to go to law school at Florida A&M University, and wanted me to mentor her. So I'm mentoring her so that's informal. But either way is equally valuable to the student because we have a wealth of knowledge and you know what I like to think, to them I'm a walking encyclopedia but to me, I'm just giving them basic directions and goals, but they think we know so much. And you give so little of your time to them and to them it's so invaluable.

CHIEF JUDGE MUNYON: Judge Madrigal, how do you mentor other people?

JUDGE MADRIGAL: I think like Judge Allan said, just generally be an open door, an open door policy. Anybody can contact me. I've got messages from organizations, like law student organizations, college level organizations to come speak to them. I have an intern and so there's mentorship there. We're bringing – we're in discussions on the logistics of bringing back the brown bag lunches that were so successful here that Judge Kest started. That helped me so much as a young lawyer myself. Because I think Judge Allen hit the nail on the head. There's an intimidation factor in speaking to a judge so if we give people that opportunity, hey, no, this is the time to ask questions, that is something that I think will benefit them and benefit everybody. So to answer your question, just basically be an open door. Take on interns, take on speaking opportunities and just be available.

JUDGE ALLEN: Can I piggyback on what he said about the internships?

CHIEF JUDGE MUNYON: Yes.

JUDGE ALLEN: I absolutely agree. I have had probably more impact with the interns that I've had from various law schools all over the state of Florida as well as undergraduate students

who were interested in going to law school and maybe just wanted to career shadow for a semester. They can't really do any work but they could observe and come to court, and they would ask questions about what they needed to do to prepare to go to law school. I feel like there's a great opportunity to have an impact on students like that and then of course, the actual law interns that I've worked with over the years. They give me great feedback by the way and they all tell me the law clerkship or the mentoring component of a law clerkship really helped them when they graduated from law school and began their practice. So I do keep in touch with quite a number of them. I think I've had – I counted and I'm somewhere between 31 and 33 how many law clerks I've had since I became a judge. However, if you count the informal relationship, it's far greater than that but to hear from the previous law clerks on something that happened during the mentorship or the time that they worked with you that impacted them or resonated with them, that's a great feeling.

JUDGE MADRIGAL: And Judge Allen mentioned something. We – at least I get as much from them as I think I give to them.

JUDGE ALLEN: Yes.

JUDGE MADRIGAL: You know we – I'm not blind to the fact that we are in a very privileged position and the people who come in front of us perhaps are not in that same position. And so to have a different perspective on how to treat them, how they're perceiving things, has been really beneficial to me at least, and I'm sure for Judge Allen. Because although we try to relate and try to be kind and all that good stuff, sometimes – I remember at judicial college they showed us a video of a judge who was super-efficient, super-efficient and they interviewed the person, the litigant afterwards. And the litigant said that guy was a jerk. He ignored my case completely, and the judge thought he did a great job just because he didn't have that personal

attention. So the mentees kind of keep you grounded and make you recognize that fact of, that these are people and you know how they perceive things can be different than how you're perceiving it.

CHIEF JUDGE MUNYON: So you can see what you're doing through their eyes.

JUDGE MADRIGAL: Right.

JUDGE ALLEN: You know this might date me but it was a law clerk that taught me how to do a power point presentation. So it kind of just resonated with me when Judge Madrigal mentioned that you get as much from them and in some ways is that they get from you. Well, it was a law clerk that sat down and went through the steps with me and helped to develop my very first power point presentation. And now she's a big time attorney working with a local law firm. And I think about that and she always says when I see her, oh, Judge Allen, it was so wonderful working with you and I say, and you taught me power point presentations. So I do think it's a give and take relationship in some ways, not that you're expecting anything back from them, but I just get a lot out of giving back. And hoping that because I feel that Judge Adams' legacy rests with me, that may be something of my legacy can rest with another young lawyer who maybe one day wants to become a judge.

CHIEF JUDGE MUNYON: I imagine many people don't know that the court has an actual mentorship program for new judges that all of us have participated in. Judge Madrigal, who was your mentor?

JUDGE MADRIGAL: It was Judge John B. Morgan, a wonderful man and I tell you the most important thing I learned from him was not related to the law. Judge Morgan, he treated everybody the same as he treated me. He was nice to me but we're colleagues. He's going to be

nice to me. He treated everybody in that courthouse, which is now named after him, the same way he treated me and that was the best lesson. I mean, people just lit up when he walked by them. He was just an amazing guy.

CHIEF JUDGE MUNYON: He was a special person. And Judge Allen.

JUDGE ALLEN: I can't wait to share that it was Judge Nancy Clark and she was awesome. She just made me feel so welcome. It is like being a fish out of water, transitioning from the practice of law to sitting on the bench. But along with her, Judge Carolyn Freeman, Judge Reginald Whitehead, Judge Alice Blackwell, and I could go on. And of course at that time, my mentor judge who had been my mentor even when I was an attorney was still sitting and presiding in the Ninth Judicial Circuit, so even Judge Adams and might I also say yourself, Judge Lisa Munyon.

CHIEF JUDGE MUNYON: Well, thank you.

JUDGE ALLEN: So I feel like I've learned a lot from a number of the judges who are my senior and not just necessarily the ones who were assigned to me to help me through something and so I could continue name dropping but I would probably name almost everybody so I'll stop there.

CHIEF JUDGE MUNYON: Yeah. I think my mentor judge was Judge Fred Lauten.

JUDGE MADRIGAL: I've heard of him.

CHIEF JUDGE MUNYON: Yeah. He was in the criminal division at that time but my unofficial mentor for my entire legal career has been Belvin Perry, who was my first boss and was the Chief Judge when I became a judge.

JUDGE ALLEN: And I ought to say I should have said him too because you know he is a wealth of knowledge. He is truly a walking encyclopedia.

CHIEF JUDGE MUNYON: He is. I can remember when I was at the state attorney's office and he was head of intake and he was doing a murder case. And he needed me to do some research and he rattled off some concepts and I was – I can remember thinking, I want to be like that when I grow up.

JUDGE ALLEN: He's amazing.

CHIEF JUDGE MUNYON: He is amazing. Well, where are some of your mentees now?

JUDGE ALLEN: Okay. I actually contacted a few of mine just because I wanted to see how they were doing in case a question came up. One of mine is working in a civil practice in Houston, Texas – Houston, Texas because when I contacted her, I said, hey, are you getting flooded. Because there are floods over there now. And she said no, that's in Dallas. I'm actually in Houston, we're okay. I have the young lady I spoke of who helped me with power point, local law firm right here in town. Do you want me to tell you the name of the firm?

CHIEF JUDGE MUNYON: You can if you wish.

JUDGE ALLEN: Okay, she's works with Gary Salzman. And I have a law clerk who is in their own practice in Brevard County and then I have another law clerk who is working with a civil firm in West Palm Beach. That's just a few of them.

CHIEF JUDGE MUNYON: Wow. How about you, Judge Madrigal?

JUDGE MADRIGAL: Most of them are local attorneys. Some are in law school. I jokingly say every time somebody gets appointed or elected I'll shoot them an email or text to congratulate

them and say hey, you're going to get a lot of advice on the law but I didn't know who to ask dumb questions to, so ask me your dumb questions. Like where do I park?

CHIEF JUDGE MUNYON: How do I get in the building?

JUDGE MADRIGAL: How do you get in the building? What does this key do? Ask me those. So I'll say, some of them are circuit court judges, but unofficial.

JUDGE ALLEN: One of my mentees contacted me recently and she's at a point in her career where she is ready to begin considering becoming a judge and I – I mean, the pride that I had, I mean, I swelled with pride to think that she would even feel like in her words, that something that you know she gained from me inspired her to also want to become a judge. And so she's beginning that application process and I shared with her some of the things that I did in the application process and began to just tell her, you know, it's not an easy process just like being an attorney, but you know what you want. You start now. You lay your foundation and you just be as prepared as you possibly can be when the time comes for you to make that move and make that application. I don't think there are any current vacancies. She's just interested in doing it in the future. But imagine how proud you feel to know that someone who has observed you as a judge wants to become a judge because of their relationship with you. That's very humbling but also a proud moment.

CHIEF JUDGE MUNYON: So any last thoughts on how mentorships can help shape the next generation of lawyers and judges? Judge Madrigal.

JUDGE MADRIGAL: So when you're a judge – let me, when you're a lawyer, you really only see your own performance or maybe opposing counsel's performance. When you're a judge, you see a lot of people perform. You see what works, what doesn't work and perhaps some things

that you never even considered when you were practicing. So my thought process changed when I took this job. I said, oh, gosh, I can see what – I can see everybody. I can see what everybody is doing and what's working and what's not working, and where there's maybe deficiencies in training or in knowledge and I can address those. So I'm going to continue to try to mentor, try to help people. Please, if you need anything, contact me. Contact my JA, don't contact me directly. And I think it's just important for all of us who are in this position to give back and I think when I became a judge I was amazed at how open-handed everybody was. I mean, I felt like the luckiest guy in the world. It's like I'm joining a law – it's like joining a law firm that has like Lisa Munyon, and Dan Traver, and you know, Judge Kest, and all these people who are still here. Judge Blackwell helped so much. Judge Higbee, Judge Rodriguez, Judge Tennis. It was like imagine, if I had joined a law firm that had these people in it, I'd be like the luckiest guy, and that's what I was. And so I think it's important for us to continue to give back.

CHIEF JUDGE MUNYON: Judge Allen.

JUDGE ALLEN: So I think along with professionalism and maintaining a positive reputation in the community and making sure that you are you know ready as you transition to the next steps in your legal career, I think maintaining personal health and wellness goals is important. We just have come to a time I think not just in the legal community but in our culture where personal health and wellness should never be relegated to a backburner because we're going to be more effective as responsible professionals if we are holistic about our care. So the professionalism aspect, you know, be on time, be courteous, know the rules relegating Florida Bar and follow them, along with hey, have you done a personal self-check. Are you okay. I think that's where I see mentoring kind of maybe making more of an impact, at least in my mentoring in the future.

CHIEF JUDGE MUNYON: So what would you say to other people to encourage them to either become mentors or seek out a mentor?

JUDGE ALLEN: Well, number one, it is going to be the most fulfilling thing that you could do. You are going to be fulfilled because you're able to share your knowledge, your skills, things that you experienced with others and it's going to help them to be better professionals. And what better outcomes can you get from knowing that you are able to help someone be better at being a lawyer or being a judge. And that's what I would – that probably would be the number one thing that I would say. On top of that, most of us have had mentors and I'll say think back to the value of the mentors that impacted your life. Think back to that and was there someone in your life that if it were not for them, you wouldn't be where you are today, or it would be harder for you to have reached that goal and I think that that is an inspiration to become a mentor.

CHIEF JUDGE MUNYON: Judge Madrigal.

JUDGE MADRIGAL: I'll talk about seeking out mentors. So the only people who can relate to where you are and I'm going to focus on young lawyers because that's generally who is seeking mentorship. The only people who can relate to where you are are people who have been there and so we know the mistakes to make and I think you'd be shocked, nobody is going to think your question is irrelevant or makes you less intelligent if you ask a question. I think it makes you smarter to ask those questions and to seek out that help. And I think people would be very surprised at how many people are willing to help, especially in this community. I'm going to talk about the Ninth Circuit. I think we have an amazing local bar and an amazing bench and people who are always willing, ready and able to help and to answer any questions you may have that you just may not know the answer to. So just seek out the help. You'll be helping us just as much as we'd be helping you.

CHIEF JUDGE MUNYON: Well, Judge Madrigal, Judge Allen, thank you so much for joining me today to talk about the value of mentoring and of mentorship.

JUDGE ALLEN: It was my pleasure.

JUDGE MADRIGAL: Yeah, it was a pleasure. Thank you.

(Music)

NARRATOR: Thank you for listening to “Open Ninth: Conversations Beyond the Courtroom” brought to you by Chief Judge Lisa Munyon and the Ninth Judicial Circuit Court of Florida. Follow us on Facebook, Twitter, or Instagram @ninthcircuitfl for updates on new episodes, and subscribe to Open Ninth on your favorite podcast service.

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