



Insights

Chapman in Action Spotlight: Q&A with Charles Calloway

Community
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Charles Calloway remembers defending the Big Bad Wolf against the Three Little Pigs in a middle-school mock trial. He colorfully painted the Big Bad Wolf as a misunderstood victim with no place to live and at that moment, in 8th grade, Charles decided he wanted to be a lawyer.

Charles Calloway of Chapman's Corporate Finance Department

Now Charles is an associate in Chapman and Cutler LLP's Corporate Finance Department in Chicago and a long-time volunteer with Spark, a national mentorship program for 7th- and 8th-grade students in underprivileged communities. As someone who was motivated to become a lawyer in 8th grade, he understands how important it is to help at-risk youth at that age. And, he knows how powerful a mentor can be having worked with certain current and retired Chapman partners, including Neil Mann, Amy Olshansky, Karl Williams, and Tony Yager.

"There is a growing movement with corporate involvement in mentorship programs nationwide, but Chicago has the perfect mix of ingredients for a program like this to thrive," says Charles. "Chicago is full of major and diverse corporations, the student need is vast, and there is a large and growing supply of young professionals making mentorship their first priority."

We asked Charles some questions about his motivation to work with Spark and why Chapman is so invested in the program.

Why Spark?

I was fortunate to have an idea of what career I wanted at an early age, but not everyone is so lucky. Often I feel that by the time kids get to high school, many doors are already closed, so reaching them in middle school is a really meaningful time. The focus of Spark is to engage students with workplace-based apprenticeships that combine mentoring, project-based learning, skill building, and career exploration. Eighty-nine percent of Spark students enter 9th grade on track to graduate high school on time, compared to 70% of their peers.

I started working with Spark in 2008 in San Francisco and have continued my work since I have been in Chicago. I brought my passion for Spark to Chapman and the firm has been extremely supportive. Most school semesters we have five to ten associate mentors from diverse backgrounds. In addition, Partner Neil Mann joined Spark's Executive Board, I am on Spark's Advisory Board, and the firm also financially supports Spark.

Are many law firms Spark partners?

No. Some firms may not think it makes sense for them, but at Chapman we see it as a natural fit to our pro bono service continuum. For example, our attorneys do pro bono work for individuals facing barriers stemming from an encounter with the criminal justice system, in an effort to allow them to lead more normal lives. As we work on these cases at Chapman, we discuss innovative solutions to help prevent those mistakes in the first place — which is where mentorship comes into play.

Chapman is trying to get students at all education levels interested in law. The firm is also involved with Chicago Scholars, a mentorship program that helps first-generation college students navigate the process of getting into college, as well as seeing them through to graduation and beyond.

In addition, the firm recently started a paid internship summer program through its Finance Law Intern Program for college undergrads and a two-year paid program for recent college grads through its Finance Law Development Program. The more we expose students to the possibility of a legal career, the more we build a foundation for the future.

I am proud that our leadership and firm are doing everything we can to influence students of all ages — from middle school through college. If we can teach kids at a young age to understand the importance of a career in law, it will carry with them through life.

Describe a day at Chapman for Spark participants.

Spark students come to our downtown Chicago office after a full day of classes and spend about two hours with their mentors. They talk about their school day and what's been happening in their lives the past week. Then the students work on a group activity that centers around the application of basic legal skills. The most popular activities are partner negotiations where two students represent competing interests and write and deliver opening statements. The session ends with a recap and progress report.

Each student gets to choose a project to demonstrate what they worked on during the semester. Their Discovery Project can be based on their experiences at Chapman, but sometimes students have an interest unrelated to law. We like to encourage students to pick projects they are excited about. Students work with their mentor on these projects throughout the semester and get the opportunity to present the project to their classmates, parents, and friends at the end of the semester. Some projects have been "How to Pass a Bill through Congress," "The Study of a Human Eyeball," and one project described the intricacies of becoming a U.N. Ambassador.

Do all Spark students at Chapman become interested in law?

No. To be honest, many kids start the program with a goal of becoming a professional athlete because it is one of the few careers that is tangible to their everyday experience. Many of our students don't know any lawyers, have never been in an office like Chapman's, and lack the resources to contemplate college or postgraduate education, but they are inundated with the fame and fortune of professional athletes. They see them on billboards, in commercials, and during their games. Many times we are introducing students to a career in law as a new path to success that may have been foreign to them.

After spending time at Chapman — which we try to make interesting with field trips to the Richard J. Daley Center courthouse and Northwestern School of Law or mock negotiation competitions at the office — and after finishing the program, only some want to be lawyers, but that is OK with me. However, almost all of them come out with some career in mind, many learning of other careers they didn't know existed from other Spark students who worked with different companies. In addition, they are learning life skills, how to communicate with others in a professional setting, and how to work as a team.

What have you learned by being a Spark mentor?

I have learned many things while serving as a mentor. First, I have very much enjoyed getting to know students and the local middle schools they attend in the Chicago area. As a person who is originally from North Carolina, I know that my experiences growing up are very different from a kid from Chicago, so taking the time to get to know my students has been very rewarding and allowed me to better assess how I can best be of service in their communities. Second, I feel that as a mentor it forced me to manage my time wisely so that I could perform my duties at work and find time to give back. Third, I found that the act of teaching someone about my practice uncovered many benefits that I did not originally foresee. For instance, I found that teaching students about my practice provided opportunities to create lesson plans that I use to help train younger associates. I learned to structure my tone and tenor to maximize my ability to connect with the students. I also gained valuable experience working as a team with other mentors at the firm.

Any success stories to share?

We have mentored more than 50 students in three years. Many have gone on to the top prep schools in the city. We have developed a curriculum for the students specific to a law firm and a lawyer's experience. We have worked with students at Ariel Community Academy, which is a middle school on the south side of Chicago where teachers, parents, and members of the community work in partnership with Ariel Investments to provide world-class educational opportunities and where financial literacy is not just taught but practiced. Since Chapman is also focused on finance, establishing a partnership with that school just made sense. Seventy-one percent of participants in all of Spark's programs have seen school performance improve.

[Click here for more information on Spark Chicago.](#)