
Mentoring Stories

'Mentoring is an endless source of energy and inspiration – for both sides.'

Jan ExnerMentee

Jan Exner is an Assistant Professor at the Department of European Law, Faculty of Law, Charles University. Outside academia, he runs a law firm specializing in sports law and serves as an arbitrator at the Court of Arbitration for Sport. His academic and practical work focuses primarily on the legal aspects of anti-doping in sports. In addition, he is currently an avid amateur triathlete.

Jan KomárekMentor

Jan Komárek is the Vice-Dean for Science and Research at the Faculty of Law, Charles University, returning there after twenty years abroad (most recently as a Professor of European Law at the University of Copenhagen). He specializes in constitutional law and theory from a European and comparative perspective, and is also a passionate rock climber (and occasional faller).

What expectations did you have when entering the mentoring programme?

Jan Exner: I wanted to take a step forward in my academic career. My life has always been driven by a constant desire to improve in what I enjoy and find meaningful. The mentoring programme fit perfectly into this. I saw it as a university-backed platform for academic development, in collaboration with an experienced mentor who could inspire me.

Jan Komárek: After returning from abroad, I felt that I did not want to focus solely on my own research, but primarily on helping colleagues at my home faculty, which had welcomed me so warmly (and I had no idea I would later have the chance to help shape its research activities as Vice-Dean). The opportunity to mentor Jan, whom I had met as a student at a summer school I co-organised, was a perfect way to put this into practice – and still have the chance to meet with him (sometimes over a glass of wine).

Did your expectations change during the programme? If so, how?

JE: They did not change. I quickly realised that my decision had been correct when my expectations began to be fulfilled rapidly. Working with Jan Komárek gave me exactly what I wanted: inspiration, guidance for my future professional development, and critical feedback – all in a very pleasant personal atmosphere.

JK: They did not change; rather, they were fully realised – mostly thanks to Jan's effort and hard work. I only occasionally pointed him in the right direction –towards my colleagues abroad or certain decisions. I discovered how rewarding it is to see the success of someone I could help, even just a little.

What has the mentoring collaboration brought you? Could you give one concrete outcome or change that resulted from the mentoring?

JE: All the benefits of the mentoring collaboration could fill an essay. I don't want to overwhelm the reader, so I will highlight one specific outcome. Jan Komárek inspired me to step out of my comfort zone, pack my bags, and go for a three-month research stay at Oxford. It was the most intense, yet also one of the best periods of my life, and it sparked many further personal and academic projects.

JK: Personally, mainly a good feeling – and a desire to continue mentoring.

What do you think worked best in the collaboration?

JE: The personal relationship with the mentor. I knew Jan Komárek before the programme began, and I was confident that I could discuss academic topics with him at any time in an informal and pleasant atmosphere.

JK: I can only agree – and add that Jan's enthusiasm was also a boost to my own work.

If you were to describe your mentoring experience in one sentence, what would it be?

JE: An investment in personal and professional development that pays back with high interest.

JK: Mentoring is an endless source of energy and inspiration – for both sides.

What should future participants definitely not underestimate?

JE: The time commitment. How much time you dedicate to the mentoring programme is up to you, but more than elsewhere, the rule applies: the more time you invest, the better the feedback. Plan for this. Go for it and make the time.

JK: I agree – but I also think that even a minimal approach (i.e., a few unstructured meetings) is better than nothing.

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