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GET AND USE QUALITY EXPERT HELP: RELIABLE BAR REVIEW COURSES, ACADEMIC SUPPORT FACULTY, AND TRUSTED MENTORS

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This book is about achieving. It is about success. It is not about pipe dreams. Nowhere am I saying, "Just be confident, and you will pass." Bar review is like a gym membership. You must do more than simply sign up and pay the fee. If that is all you do, you will lose time and money and not pass the bar (or get fit).

To succeed, you must fully engage. For bar review, that means sticking to the schedule, attending and listening carefully to all the lectures (live or online), and completing and turning in all the assignments. You must take many practice tests (including hundreds of essays and thousands of multiple-choice questions) and study reliable sample or model answers. (Sample answers are student answers that are passing, but not perfect. Model answers are those written by bar reviews or bar support faculty and designed as teaching tools.)

Some goals are easier to achieve with the help of experts. Bar passage is one of those. You must learn, memorize, and be able to clearly articulate many rules and concepts. You must master numerous skills, including critical reading, factual and legal analysis, clear and effective writing, and time management. It helps enormously to train with and learn from a team of experts who know what they are talking about. Conversely, it is an act of sabotage to solicit (and often pay dearly for) misinformation. Going it alone or with an unreliable tutor or bar review versus working with a proven, trustworthy bar review course nearly always means the difference between succeeding or not.

Beware. Reliable experts will tell you there are no shortcuts. Studying for the bar is hard work. If anyone promises you a foolproof system, walk away. Quality bar review instructors, like personal trainers, do not make it easy. They keep you on track.

A good teacher can clarify confusion and simplify complex concepts. You may have been lucky enough to have had professors who were able to do that; hopefully, you will find others like them in bar review. But even if you understand every aspect of every rule tested on the bar exam (which virtually no one does), the sheer volume of material and marathon nature of the exam make the exam difficult. Most of us do not have instant-recall brains; there is no search button in our memory that readily delivers every answer. So, again, do not fall for any course or tutor who sounds too good to be true. There are many scams in bar review. (This is true for first-timers, and even more so for repeat takers, as scammers prey on people's doubts and fears. More on repeating the exam in Part II.)
INVESTING IN YOURSELF

Keeping these caveats in mind, a reliable bar review is a must. You might have made it through law school without supplemental materials or tutoring. This is different. Those who take bar review courses succeed in geometrically greater numbers than those who study on their own.

If you think you cannot afford a bar review course, think again. You cannot afford not to take one. If at all possible, start a bar fund on or before day one of law school. (If you are reading this book and are already in law school, start your fund now with whatever money you can.) If you need more money to live on in June and July, bar loans may be available. (Many have high interest rates and strict qualification restrictions. Check them out carefully. Your law school’s financial-aid office may be able to help you.) Family may be more willing than you think to lend you money. Local bar associations may also have scholarships. And sometimes you can earn a free course by serving as a bar review rep.

However much it may appear that you can’t add another dime of debt to that mounting pile, you must continue investing in yourself. Would you spend time in Chicago in winter without a warm coat, scarf, and boots? Would you go mountain climbing without proper training and sturdy ropes? Taking the bar exam without a reliable bar review is similarly foolish. (It is unwise to cut corners and take a cheaper course if you don’t believe it is the best one for you.) Don’t sabotage yourself before you start. Spare yourself the Far greater costs of repeating the exam.

THE GRASS IS NOT ALWAYS GREENER

It may taste like a bitter pill watching wealthier or higher-achieving classmates have what seems like an easy time financially while you struggle to budget every dime. Energy spent on resentment generally does not yield productive dividends. 1. You are you, and you are in the position you are in. Resenting someone else will not change your position; 2. What you must work harder for, you likely appreciate more; and 3. You don’t know the full price someone is really paying for whatever funds that they have been given. There may be strings attached that you would never want. So focus all your energy on passing the exam. Let everything else go.

THE NEED FOR AND BENEFITS OF BAR REVIEW

You need a reliable bar review to stay on track and to confidently trust the process. Especially toward the end of June, you may start dragging. You may get a couple of low scores on practice tests and, with the exam a month away, you may question your preparation. You want to avoid time spent doubting yourself (or your course), so you continue to focus on increasing your knowledge and improving your skills. So what will a bar review offer? A reliable bar review should do the following:

- Provide lectures that review each of the subjects tested on your bar exam.
- Provide outlines that summarize the relevant law you need to know for each subject.
- Help with skills training by providing essay, MBE, and performance-test workshops (if you have a PT in your jurisdiction).
- Flag heavily tested areas.
- Highlight areas that differ or conflict in jurisdictions where you are expected to apply both state and federal rules.
- Provide practice questions and sample or model answers to those questions.
- Grade or critique practice exams. (Note: Even if your bar review critiques all of your practice exams, you should also do your own self-assessment. The time to learn most from taking a practice exam is just after completing it. Chapter 8 explains how to self-assess practice exams.)
- Answer questions if you don’t understand something. (But remember, the bar review cannot do the work for you. Your instructors are not taking your bar; you are. You need to know the rules and be able to apply them. So try hard to understand concepts before jumping to ask questions.)
- Provide a calendar to structure your eight-week countdown.

Bar review also helps identify what you do and do not need to know. The bar exam tests an enormous amount of material. In an ideal world, we would say to master everything before you go in. But a) the world is not ideal, and b) that would be a waste of your time, energy, and brain “disk space.” A reputable bar review will flag what is heavily tested and what areas have historically never or rarely been tested. That doesn’t mean that a never-before-tested area cannot suddenly appear on your exam, but history repeats itself and so do bar examiners. One of the most helpful parts of being enrolled in a reputable bar review is getting sound advice on what should be covered only superficially, if at all, and what you should know in depth.

You may want or need to supplement your bar review, but you should never cut corners. (As a colleague often says, “Bar review is a floor, not a ceiling.” In other words, you can (and often should) do more than is on your bar review calendar, but without a very good reason, do not do less than what your bar review tells you to do.)
BAR REVIEW IS NOT A MAGIC PILL

Many bar applicants pay for bar review and expect the knowledge will magically enter their brains, kind of like sleeping with textbooks under your pillow. When they find the concepts are not simple, they look for another course that promises to make it easier. Some people end up enrolling in several bar reviews and still failing the bar exam. There are no quick fixes. As we said above, joining a gym will not get you fit. Buying a bar review course will not make you pass the exam. You must do the work, the learning, and the thinking, and take the practice tests.

We talked about the importance of selecting a reliable bar review. It is also important to select a bar review that works for you, not just one your friends sign up for. There may be a number of trustworthy choices. Be an active consumer. As you learn about different bar review options, list any pros and cons, who recommended it, your own impressions, and any follow-up questions. Note the name and contact information of someone who can answer future questions and how to enroll if you decide upon that course.

Bar Review Selection Worksheet

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<th>Name/Contact Info</th>
<th>Pros</th>
<th>Cons</th>
<th>Recommended By</th>
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Beyond bar review

You may attend bar review lectures with others, but much of the work you must do in June and July is independent. And, you cannot just attend bar review lectures and expect to pass the exam. That's sort of like going to a lecture on tennis and expecting to compete at Wimbledon. You need to complete practice exams, learn and memorize rules, and look up what you do not understand.

Even after listening to the best bar review lecturer, there may still be rules or concepts you do not understand. Figure them out, especially if they fall within areas identified as heavily tested. Start by reviewing the outline or your lecture notes. Read examples out loud. Sometimes just looking at a concept another couple of times will make it click. If you still don't understand it, perhaps someone at your bar review can clarify your question. If not, you may want to consult another resource, but do so with caution. You don't need to know every nuance of every rule to pass the bar exam. But if it's something critical, find a way to understand.

Generally it is not recommended to go back into your law school class notes during bar prep. Law classes often have a different emphasis and different objectives from bar review. However, if you happened to have a professor who explained an area of law in a way that makes more sense to you than the bar review lecturer, consult those notes. (I was fortunate enough to have the late Jesse Dukeminier as a professor. I consistently turned back to his materials on property because they made sense to me.)

It can be empowering to realize that your confusion may not be exclusively about you. Sometimes you hear or read a different explanation, and a concept that was previously mystifying is suddenly clear. Again, it may be you. You may just need to struggle a bit harder with the resources you have. But if you are really baffled, it may save time to quickly consult another source.

During school, I tell all of my students, "If you don't understand something, look it up!" I suggest reading the notes in their casebook and related passages in a reliable
hornbook. Hornbooks are treatises that summarize an area of law. They are great references and have helpful examples. There are endless choices of good hornbooks, especially for standard law school courses. Yet many law students have never opened a hornbook. (Have you?) One of my first-year professors assigned the superb civil procedure hornbook by Friedenthal, Kane, and Miller. We studied with both that hornbook and a casebook; from week one of law school, my class understood the value of learning from hornbooks. If you are still in school and don't understand something (or want to put your casebook reading in context), instead of rushing first to a commercial study aid (some of which are also helpful), try reading a good hornbook. (Don’t be intimidated if it’s heavy!) Hardbound hornbooks may look complex because of their size and weight, but you would be surprised how much they can clarify. Between the index, table of contents, and table of cases, you can easily find whatever area you want to focus on, and there is simply no substitute for looking something up and really getting it! (If you need recommendations for reliable hornbooks, ask your professors, law librarian, or ASP faculty. Note: To clarify confusion during law school, always check first to see what your professors have written. If your professor wrote a leading treatise in a particular area, start there!)

Bar reviews will tell you it is crazy to look anything up outside a bar review outline after May. I would be the first to say, start early so that June and July are review. But few feelings are worse than going in to your bar exam hoping they won't test a particular concept because you don't understand it. A negative ripple effect follows when you feel vulnerable. (You may feel even more “stupid” or “exposed” because you are afraid of it being on the exam.) Do not go there. You want the “power ripple.” Knowing that you finally get a concept makes you feel like you can reason through anything they throw at you. Again, your best bet is to start early so you have the time to look up what you do not understand.

Caveat: Don’t be too quick to consult anything beyond bar review materials.

During intensive bar prep, consult outside sources only with respect to major concepts that you don’t understand after trying hard to understand the bar review materials. Do not go to outside sources just because the review course states some rule differently than you learned it. It cannot be emphasized enough: don’t spend precious time in June and July routinely second-guessing your bar review. Enroll in a reliable course and trust it. One of the great distractors is time spent doubting and questioning your bar review materials. Different sources often state rules slightly differently. Bar review may vary from how you learned rules in law school. That does not mean your bar review or your professor was wrong. As long as the fundamentals are the same (for example, causes of action include the same elements), and as long as you understand the concepts, your time is best spent continuing to review additional rules and concepts, and taking more practice tests. Do not waste time drilling down to catch minor disparities.

Get the most out of your bar review.

One size does not fit all, not in shoes nor in bar preparation. What is right for you might not be best for a friend or classmate. In an earlier chapter, we discussed the need to periodically assess your progress, to look at everything in your schedule—from where and what time of day you study and the tasks you complete, to the kinds of food you eat to stay energized. Your bar review course is the principal component of your schedule; it also can be personalized to fit your lifestyle and learning style. We will look at ways to make bar review more effective: a) Be present and engaged; b) Personalize the materials; c) Make sure you understand what you are doing and learning; and d) Follow the schedule and do the work (keep training).

Be present and engaged.

You can enroll in bar review, pay the money, and show up occasionally. You can also be physically present at every session, but mentally miles away. This applies equally to live and online bar reviews. You can sit in front of your computer and log in, just as you can show up to a lecture hall, without actively listening, taking notes, and reviewing points you do not understand.

Do not tell yourself you are paying attention if you are constantly checking your phone or Facebook. Fooling yourself makes you the fool. The people whose texts you are reading instead of focusing intensely on bar review will not pay the price if you fail the bar. You will.

Think of it this way: “The buck stops here.” At the end of the day, you and you alone are responsible. As the bar applicant, it’s all on you to have done your best work by the time you walk into that exam. As an attorney, it will be all on you if you show up unprepared to represent a client. There is no one else to point to or blame. (Death and major illnesses are good excuses for failing to adequately prepare. Are there any others? You tell me.)
Concentrate.

To develop your concentration, start by observing your level of focus. If you find yourself drifting or zoning out while reading, sit up and subvocalize (say it barely audibly) as you look at and touch the words on the page. If you’re still losing focus, stand and stretch and sit back down. Still not alert enough? Go to the bathroom and splash water on your face. Yes, that wastes time, but not nearly as much time as will be lost by spacing out entirely. (Note: If you need to use the bathroom during the actual exam, read a question first so you can work on it in your head on your way to and from the restroom.)

Because time is so valuable during intensive bar prep, it is counterproductive to spend even a minute “reading” material you do not learn from. This is not reading; it’s glossing over the words. One of my former students, now an alumni bar mentor, calls this “hanging out with the outlines.” Your time is better spent taking an open-book practice test, looking up rules in the outline that you don’t know as you write your answers. Learning rules in the context of a fact pattern helps you remember them.

Another trap is taking breaks that we tell ourselves are necessary. When weaning yourself off social media and texting, for example, you may suddenly “need” more bathroom and coffee breaks. Sometimes those are genuine necessities, but other times they are ways of procrastinating. You may be subconsciously avoiding facing up to what you do not understand. It is easy to go through the material superficially. It is far more difficult to really understand, learn, and improve your skills. (But the latter gets you to your goal.)

Mastering the ability to focus and be actively engaged in what you do will serve you well for the rest of your life. More immediately, during bar prep:

- You will learn more material, and learn more effectively and efficiently;
- You will be attentive to detail (required on the bar and in law practice, and rather helpful in much of life);
- You will get ready for exam days, including learning to do without your multi-tasking devices when you won’t have them; and
- You will have a much better shot at completing all the questions within the allotted time, something that is hard to do when you haven’t built up your endurance and can’t concentrate for long, uninterrupted time blocks.

Of course, I know you will not have your phone with you in the exam, but unless you train now to really focus, you will find ways to drift off in that testing room. You’ll look at the person next to you, watch the proctors, listen to keyboards clacking, or clean your fingernails. You may find you have read the same paragraph several times before you even realize your mind was wandering. But you will pay a hefty price for “checking out.”

Personalize your bar review materials.

One of the best ways to present and get the most out of your review course is to take good notes that are personal to you. Write in your outlines. Online bar reviews often have electronic note-taking systems.

Add hypos that make sense to you. Translate formal rule statements into colloquial, short phrases. (Perhaps you will remember inadequacy of the legal remedy, a required element for certain equitable remedies, as the “money won’t cut it rule.” You might say to yourself: “Yeah, well, to get a court to order specific performance of a contract, the court must be persuaded that money just won’t cut it for this plaintiff; dollars just aren’t going to fly, it just doesn’t give the plaintiff what he bargained for.” Now, you would never write that on an exam. You might write something such as, “The legal remedy must be found to be inadequate. Here the plaintiff wanted to buy Blackacre, and because Blackacre is a unique parcel of land, money damages will not suffice to fully compensate the plaintiff for the loss of Blackacre.” Writing plain-English versions of legal concepts (translations, if you will), may make the meaning of those rules clearer for you and may help you remember the concepts on exams.

For a handwritten flash card, write the term on the front of the card. On the back of the card, at the top, write the succinct and proper phrasing of the rule (the official definition, or what you would write in an essay). Then, on the bottom of the back side of the card, note those plain-English words, images, or references that make sense to you to explain that rule.

Try the following short exercise. Take ten seconds to read the sentence below. Think of any specifics you might have learned about this point. In the spaces that follow, write whatever might help you to remember how this sentence might apply on a bar exam question.

Contracts’ fact patterns are generally governed by UCC (goods) or common law (land or services).
Example of personalized notes:

Essay Writing: Start contracts question noting which law applies: UCC or common law. UCC—transactions in goods (moveable things like refrigerators or "subject") common law—basically law or services. (Remember tricky questions like the example where growing crops were considered law, but when harvested or removed from the law they are goods. The UCC is influential even when not controlling. Look out for issues UCC & common law fact patterns—remember the exam with the builder who supplied wood (goods) and with her own built a fence (services). If wood, can I divide into two contracts? If not, which predominates, goods or services?

This is an easy-to-understand example. But personalizing the materials will help you with both simple and complex points alike. It will also help you prepare to apply what you have learned to practice tests. Any time a bar review lecture flags a concept as important or heavily tested, annotate your materials. Write commentary that makes sense to you.

Let's try again. What is consideration?

ANNOTATING

One of my favorite law professors told our first-year class to write in our casebooks. He suggested we not only take notes in the margins, but also write our opinions and reactions to the decisions. Why would he suggest that, especially when students are nearly always instructed not to write their opinions on exams? Some day we would find the notes fascinating, he said, and the books would be valuable if we ever became famous. (He mentioned that an annotated casebook from a former U.S. Supreme Court justice had fetched a large sum of money.) Looking back, I suspect his real motive was simply to keep us actively engaged in the material. It worked.

Make sure you understand what you hear and read. This is a basic premise. When we don't know what certain terms mean, we can't readily understand explanations of concepts that use those terms. But how often do we stop and look them up? Too often we just move on and hope we will "get it" from context clues.

No more. From now on, plan to learn rules and definitions just as you would learn vocabulary when studying a foreign language. Until you are fluent in legalese, stop and look things up. Not only will familiarity with terminology help you understand reading and lectures, but it is critical for essay writing. (There is good reason that despite the abundance of lawyer jokes, people turn to lawyers when they need help resolving problems or tackling complex concerns. We have proved ourselves as thinkers. Graduating from law school and passing the bar exam provide a stamp of credibility that says you can read and reason.) But recalling the phrasing of a rule and making sense of it are two different animals. Likewise, "knowing" a rule and being able to quickly and readily articulate that rule are also two different things. You need the former ("I know it when I see it," to borrow the famous line from an entirely different context) for multiple-choice questions for which you must know the rules, and know them well, in order to determine which answer choice is best. But once that determination is made, you simply bubble in the A, B, C, or D accordingly. On essays, however, you must not only know which law you will apply to analyze the issues you identified, but also state those rules rapidly and accurately. So having a command of the terms (fluency) will help you deliver the information you do know in a more effective manner.

For bar exam essays, all the stockpiles of knowledge in your head won't do any good whatsoever if you cannot deliver that information effectively in your written answers. (After every bar, I talk with a number of students who passed the MBE portion and
failed the essays.) So again, by exam time at the latest, be sure you are fully fluent in legalese. Yet another reason to start early!

**Bar review lectures**

Bar review includes lectures during which professors summarize the most important legal concepts and rules tested on your bar exam. They may be live or recorded, online or in person. However the lecture is delivered, you can improve your understanding of what is said by "book-ending" the process.

Before the lecture, read through the outline's table of contents. Look up terms you can't readily define so you can follow the lecture easily and clearly. This will prime you to get the most out of each lecture.

During the lectures, listen as carefully as possible. Don't try to write down every word, as this will prevent you from hearing the professor. Make shorthand notes about points to look up later or to highlight particularly good examples. You may want to flag concepts the lecturer said were frequently tested. Remember, you will have an outline to look up what you don't understand. You need to "lean forward and listen." (See text box below.)

After the lecture, while the material is still fresh, annotate your outline with your lecture notes, examples, charts, lists, and tips on what the professor said is or is not frequently tested. This will help seal in what you learned. Make flash cards (written or digital) for every major rule, looking up rules or concepts you didn't understand during the lecture in your outline. (When I studied for the bar exam, I set aside time after each lecture to do just this. Often just an extra half-hour looking up or rewriting certain points, even thinking a bit more about some of the concepts, made the learning from that lecture much more useful.)

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**LEAN FORWARD AND LISTEN**

I recently attended an outdoor theater production of George Bernard Shaw's *Heartbreak House*. There were no microphones to amplify the actors' voices. But even if they had been blasted from the most-modern soundstage, there were words and thoughts (written in the early part of the twentieth century) that require more effort to understand than today's TV sound bites. After the performance, chatting with one of the actors who asked how the sound was in the back row, he said, "No matter what seat you are in, you have to sort of lean forward and listen to really get what we're saying." Similarly, you have to lean forward and listen to get this bar stuff.

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**NOTE TAKING**

Some people need to take notes to pay attention. For others, the opposite is true: they can't really focus and absorb concepts while taking notes. (One of the great advantages to online lectures is that you can usually replay them. So you may want to just watch and listen the first time around. If it's a live online class, you might want to actively participate in the discussions, and then review the recording and take notes when you replay the session.) If you are in a traditional, live bar review class and you know you will get more from just listening, do that (while also jotting down isolated words that you will want to look up and review in the outline after the lecture). Most or all of what was said in the lecture will probably be in the outline. Get to know yourself and how note taking helps or hinders your learning.

**Bar review outlines**

Everyone talks about bar review outlines. What are they? How do they help you? Bar review outlines are essentially mini-hornbooks, treatises, or summaries of discrete subjects. A good outline will not only summarize the area of law, but provide clear, easy-to-remember rule statements; explain the logic and reasoning behind those rules; and provide examples or hypos showing how they have been tested in fact patterns. The bar review outline may also indicate the frequency with which certain areas have appeared on previous exams in your jurisdiction. To help make bar review outlines work for you, you will want to do the following:

- Annotate them with examples and phrasings that make sense to you. (These can come from a bar review lecturer, a professor in law school, or a case or practice-exam fact pattern that you recall.) Write in the margins or type into the text file if your outline is online. Writing will help you remember. (Many people write out new rules several times on a separate piece of paper to seal them in.)
- Chart key areas if you are a visual learner. Make flowcharts.
- Create mnemonics to memorize lists of elements, if they help you. Some people think of the basics of a contract cause of action as FBPD (Formation, Breach, Performance, Damages). Some people remember the mnemonic with the help of another catchy phrase. For example, DBCD stands for the elements of negligence: Duty, Breach, Causation, Damages. You may recall "DBCD" by reme-
berring the phrase “Desserts Bring Calories and Diabetes,” or the more-upbeat “Delicious Brownies, Cake, and Donuts.”

- Condense them to usable size as you get closer to exam time. Most bar review outlines are long—some several hundred pages. Before your exam, reduce them to a more user-friendly form. Remember: outlines cannot be brought into the exam! Only what is in your brain comes into the test site. So be sure you are using the outlines as learning tools and that the most critical information gets and stays in your head.

Bottom line: outlines are only as useful as you make them. So begin bar review doing the assigned reading in the major outlines. Use them as companions to the lectures, helping you learn the frequently tested rules and concepts. As you get closer to test time, by the end of June or early July, transform them into about ten pages each. You will then move the major outlines from your desk to the bookshelf. Keep them on the shelf as references, and shift your focus to using your own shortened summary outlines along with practice tests. Eventually, by the week before the bar exam at the latest, condense each subject to one page. Include on that one page summary approaches, checklists, or a shorthand outline—whatever you would want to take into the exam if you could to help you answer a question in that area.

Understand what is in the outlines. You can chart all you want and memorize with clever mnemonics, but if you don’t understand the concepts you probably won’t be able to apply them correctly. Recalling the phrasing of a rule and making sense of it are two different things. Can you explain a concept to a layperson? If so, you probably understand at least the basics fairly well.

Quick test:
Explain felony murder to a very smart 16-year-old. (See Chapter 1 for more on the fictitious “very smart 16-year-old” standard, and why trying to explain heavily tested concepts to such a person is helpful.)

UNDERSTAND WHAT YOU MEMORIZE

Students often memorize the elements of injunctive relief as IPFBD (Inadequacy of the legal remedy, Property right, Feasibility, Balancing of equities, and Defenses). You must know what those terms mean, though, rather than merely memorizing them. A colleague frequently refers to students who have memorized the term feasibility, but are confused about its meaning. They mistakenly assume it refers to whether it is feasible for the parties to carry out the order, rather than the accurate meaning, which is whether it is feasible for the court to supervise implementation of the order. Do you recall discussions in remedies about whether it would be easier for a court to supervise the tearing down of a second-story house or the building of a new one-story home? This would have been a discussion regarding the element of feasibility.
FINDING A MENTOR

DICTIONARY DEFINITION OF MENTOR: A TRUSTED FRIEND, COUNSELOR OR TEACHER, USUALLY A MORE EXPERIENCED PERSON WHO ADVISES AND SERVES AS BY EXAMPLE.

I will suggest mentors for at least two purposes: a bar mentor discussed below, and a career mentor described in Chapter 10. A bar mentor can:

• Serve as proof that the exam is passable. (You want to look at your mentor, feel encouraged that he or she passed, and believe unequivocally that you can, too!);
• Review your study plan or study schedule, remind you of things you may have forgotten, and give you tips (perhaps something simple like reserving your hotel room for an extra night so you don’t have to worry about packing up or checking out as you head into your last day of the exam);
• Check in with you weekly in June and July to see that you are staying on your study schedule (this is sort of the “mentor as coach or trainer” function);
• Give you moral support to stay focused and not be bothered by those who don’t understand when you say no to social invitations and hibernate to study;
• Help you think through adjusting your study plan or schedule if something is not working for you;
• Encourage and reassure you if you feel guilty or irresponsible when you need extra funds for bar studies, offering the justification that you must not skimp in your preparation if you want to pass the bar the first time, and
• Be a friendly face who “gets it,” someone who just puts you on the back and says, “Stick with this. You can do it!”

Mentor Credibility

A key trait of a good bar mentor is his or her ability to convince you that you can pass the bar. A mentor must be someone you find credible. Credibility is one reason I started an alumni bar-mentoring program. Recent graduates are more believable than professors, who likely went to different (perhaps more prestigious) schools and took the bar exam decades earlier. Students are (rightfully) skeptical about the relevance of certain professors’ experience. But hearing from someone who has just recently been in your shoes, someone who studied the same books and with the same professors, took the same bar review, and faced the same challenges is extremely persuasive. It carries weight when a recent graduate tells you, “I did it, and you can, too.” (If you have a unique situation, you may want a mentor who has been through the same or similar circumstances. Alice, a working mother of two young children, did not find her twenty-seven-year-old, single mentor helpful. “His passing the bar doesn’t say anything about whether I can. He didn’t have a care in the world other than studying.” Alice needed a mentor whose life situation was similar to hers when he or she took the bar. You may, too. If so, find one.)

An effective bar mentor must know and appreciate what you are going through. Your family and friends, even if they are supportive, are typically not great bar mentors unless they themselves took and passed the bar exam. A supportive professor can be a fine mentor, as can a lawyer in the community, but if you can find an alum (someone from your school who graduated recently and passed the bar) with whom you feel comfortable, he or she may be best suited to help you.

Note: Do not rely on your bar mentor to help you learn the law. Do that work with your bar review and independently, and perhaps with your school’s bar support program. Your mentor is a coach, someone who will keep you on target. You are training for the Bar Exam Olympics. The PT, MBE, and essays, as well as any other statespecific portions of your exam, are the individual events you are competing in. You must train to do well, every day, under simulated conditions. A mentor can help hold you accountable for completing all your practice sessions and improving at every turn.

Good mentors will help their protégés believe in themselves. In the words of a former student to his mentor, “Thank you for everything! Thank you for being there for us, for keeping us in your thoughts, and for having confidence in us even when we did not believe in ourselves. I don’t know if you recall, but one time I happened to mention that the PT was going to be my Achilles’ heel. You immediately shot back that you would not let me fail the PT. That was the turning point. I knew then that I would blow them away, and I am certain now that of all parts of the exam, I actually did the best on those PTs.”
Potential Mentors:
List names of people who might make good mentors. If your school does not have a mentor program that will pair you with someone, reach out to one of the people on your list and see if he or she will agree to mentor you.