

BY ANDY KANEFIELD AND MARK POWERS

The flip of a coin taught Mark Burkhart, CEO of Colliers Turley Martin Tucker (CTMT), one of his most important lessons. “Fifteen years ago, a prospective client told us that he flipped a coin to decide who to give his business to. He said we were both great companies, but we didn’t get the business. To suggest that we were a commodity was a very tough lesson to learn. At that moment, I realized that if we were going to get put in that corner as a commodity, we were going to lose. I knew that we had to define our culture so clients would be clear about what makes us different from the great competitors we have.”

One thing that differentiates the CTMT culture is mentoring. “Mentoring is critical because of the business we’re in. We’re in an entrepreneurial business, and our new hires are in front of our clients on day one. It’s critical to match them with mentors. We want new associates to understand right away that our business is built on four cornerstones of commitment: committed employees, client solutions, civic involvement and constant growth.

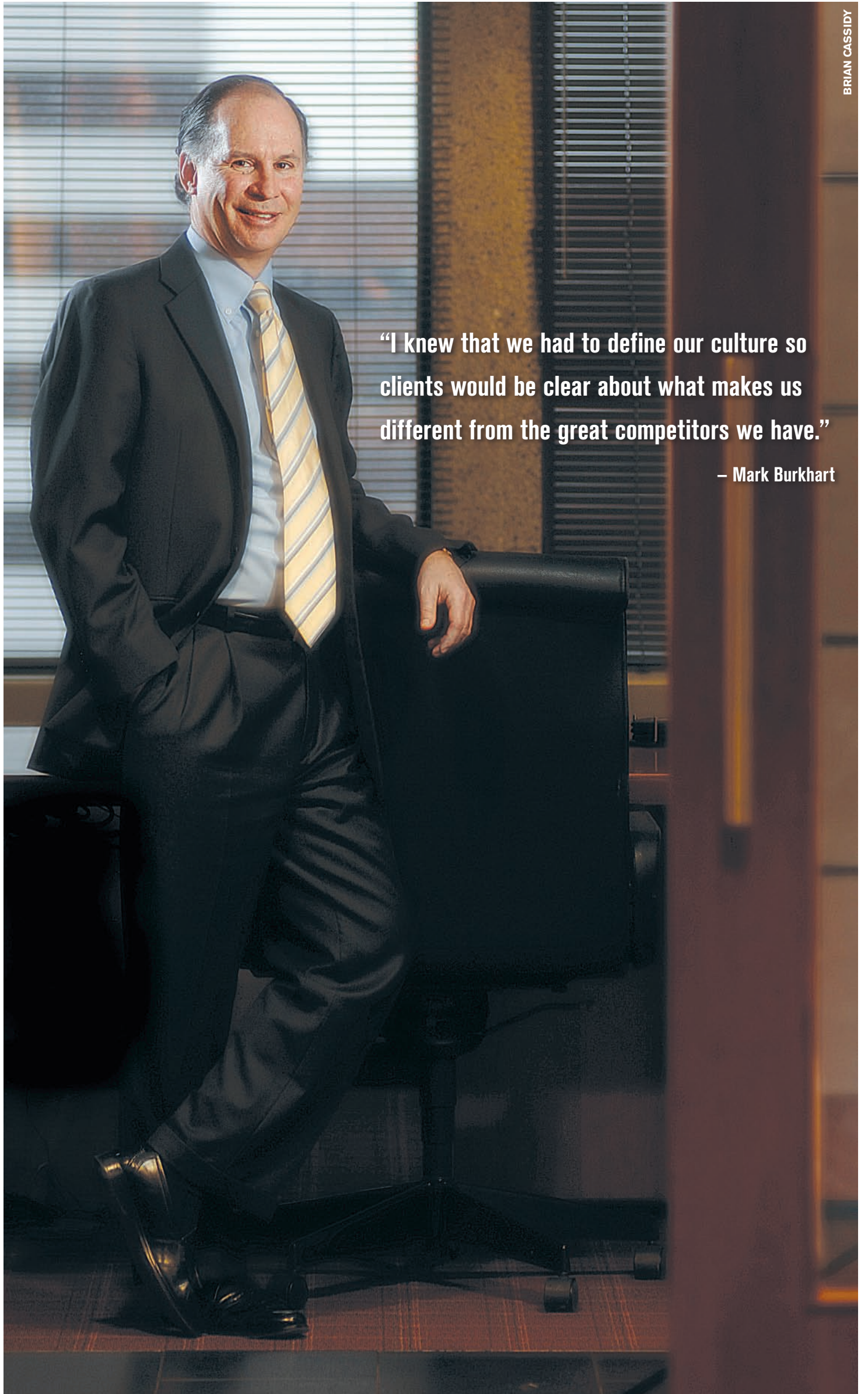
“I’ve learned that developing our bench strength through mentoring is critical in two ways. First, it gives us the talent we need to succeed. The key to success in our business is to provide client solutions. That is how we provide value. In order to do that, knowledge has to be transferred from our firm to our clients.

We can teach policy, processes, and systems. But good mentoring relationships allow us to help people develop in the art of our business. In other words, what does the data mean to specific clients in each specific context? We translate data to knowledge to the best decisions for our clients’ specific needs. Mentoring helps us get to that point a lot faster.

I realized 10 years ago that we couldn’t fuel the growth we wanted by just hiring experienced people from competitors or from other industries. We do hire top people from other organizations, but we also recruit a lot of students right out of college, and mentoring is critical to their success and ours. Recently we have been able to double the size of our firm every three or four years, and mentoring has been key to that success.

“Secondly, in order to be a sustainable company that perpetuates itself, you need to have qualified younger

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BRIAN CASSIDY

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partners ready to take more prominent leadership roles and establish ownership positions in the firm. This helps the younger partners and helps senior partners with liquidity issues.

Often the mentor/mentee relationship will turn into a financial partnership as well. Mentoring shows the mentee how to be a good partner. I think the success of our approach is shown by the fact that 85 to 90 percent of our top brokers have partners they are financially tied to. Being a good partner means being a good mentor and a team player.

What advice does Burkhart have for those wanting to focus on mentoring?

“Our approach is very structured, and we provide a detailed roadmap for mentors and mentees to follow. The roadmap has specific activities designed to promote the success of our new associates and timelines for getting things done.

“We include things like learning how to talk about CTMT and their role here, understanding the mechanics of their role, learning about avenues for professional development, encouraging new associates to interact with each other and share best practices, and connecting the mentee to community mentoring opportunities.

“Mentoring in the community is very important to us. We’re involved with the Regional Business Council mentoring program, local schools, Mizzou’s business school, Teach for America, and we always have summer interns, including 75 last summer.

“Providing a structure helps attract additional mentors. And having a mentoring committee allows us to collect data and notice patterns. We’ve been able to define the critical attributes of a successful associate. We also gain insights into how to tailor mentoring to the unique needs of the person being mentored. And we’ve identified specific areas where clear expectations are critical for a successful mentoring relationship.

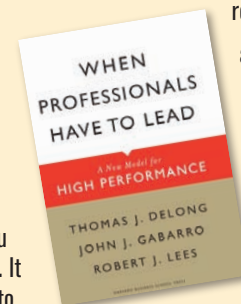
“When I came to work for Turley Martin, I was 23 years old and right out of Mizzou’s business school. I was fortunate enough to have an office right next to Ted Martin and the other top guys and got to be around them every day. There was never a time in my career where I felt like they were the boss and I was the employee. Having them as mentors always meant a lot to me.”

Andy Kanefield is president of Dialect, which helps leaders promote sync — that elusive state when departments and people are working in concert toward big picture goals. He can be reached at (314)-863-4400 or andy@dialect.com.

Effective mentoring

Thomas DeLong, John Gabarro and Robert Lees, co-authors of “When Professionals Have to Lead: A New Model for High Performance,” discuss four principles they call “guideposts” for effective mentoring:

1. Mentoring is personal. Don’t let the process become a “stylized charade devoid of any real learning.” In other words, don’t let having a process convince you that real mentoring is happening. It must connect in a personal way to those being mentored.
2. Not everyone is an A player. Don’t focus too much on A players just because they appear to deliver the highest financial return. The authors call B players “solid citizens” and note that they are the “heart and soul of the firm.” Everyone needs watering.



3. Choice assignments are in short supply. Because this is often the case, your talent may be underutilized. If so, you can respond in several ways.
 - a. Let your junior people shadow senior people on their choice assignments.
 - b. Assign research projects that allow the associate to develop a reputation as an expert in a field of interest.
 - c. During downtime allow for work on high-profile pro bono work.

All of these options promote utilization of key skills and keeps associates stimulated and interested.
4. Mentoring is a two-way street. Associates need to learn how to attract good mentors. “If you want a mentor, start acting like you do.” As you attract senior people and colleagues around you who share your interests, you’ll develop your own “personal advisory board.”

What makes a good mentor?

The authors’ interviews with successful professionals suggest that a good mentor...

- is someone credible whose integrity transcends the message, be it positive or negative
- tells you things you may not want to hear but leaves you feeling you have been heard
- interacts with you in a way that makes you want to become better
- makes you feel secure enough to take risks
- gives you the confidence to rise above your inner doubts and fears
- supports your attempts to set stretch goals for yourself
- presents opportunities and highlights challenges you might not have seen on your own

SOURCE: “WHY MENTORING MATTERS IN A HYPERCOMPETITIVE WORLD” BY THOMAS J. DELONG, JOHN J. GABARRO AND ROBERT J. LEES, HARVARD BUSINESS REVIEW, JANUARY 2008.