
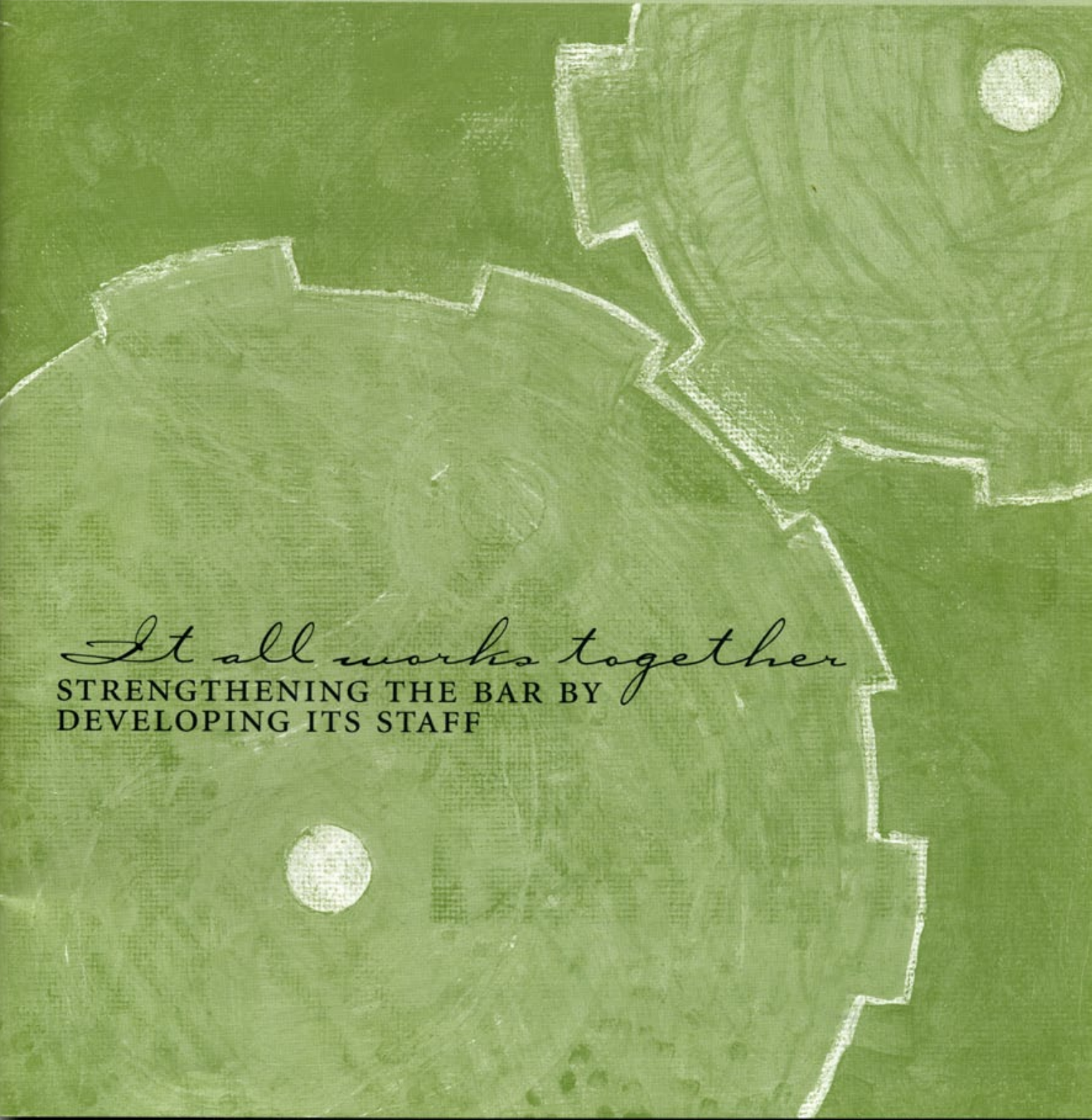


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*Bar*Leader

From the American Bar Association

for the leaders of bar associations 



It all works together
STRENGTHENING THE BAR BY
DEVELOPING ITS STAFF

I have an idea! Bar leaders share some recent innovations

"Don't say no to an idea unless you really have to," said Andrew Schpak, president-elect of the board of directors of the Multnomah (Ore.) Bar Association Young Lawyers Section.

Schpak spoke at the Annual Meeting of the National Association of Bar Executives, the National Conference of Bar Presidents, and the National Conference of Bar Foundations, in San Francisco last August. In a fast-moving workshop, Schpak and five other bar leaders spoke about how their bars harness the energy of different groups within the bar.

Also speaking were: Peggy Probasco, then-president of the State Bar of Montana; Denise Squillante, vice president of the Massachusetts Bar Association; Charna E. Sherman, a member of the steering committee for the ABA Section of Business Law's DirectWomen initiative; Matthew W. Claman, president of the Alaska Bar Association; and John Kautzman, past president of the Indianapolis Bar Association.

All the speakers gave snapshots of programs that tap into what particular types of members have said they want and need, and that have a great deal of momentum because those members feel the bar is receptive to their ideas and wants to help develop them.

Encouraging individual creativity

Schpak said one key in developing the YLS YOUTHFILM Project was making room for section members' individual creativity. Whether for an established project or a new one, he said, if section members know they can share their ideas and assume some responsibility for a project, they are more likely to contribute, and the resulting projects could be more innovative and meaningful.

The YOUTHFILM Project was the brainchild of seven members of the YLS



Service to the Public Committee, who were looking for something new to add to the existing Community Law Week, which usually includes, among other events, a "Tell it to the Judge" day where judges go to shopping malls and other public places to answer questions. The committee members had seen the popularity of YouTube and other do-it-yourself video ventures, and decided to tap into that by creating a law-related film contest for high school and younger.

Someone on the committee knew of a judge who is on the board of a nonprofit that maintains a historic theater in Portland, which provided the perfect screening venue. The judge gave a speech, awards were presented—and there was even a red carpet. The event was such a hit, Schpak reported,

the YLS is now establishing a new committee to oversee it each year.

Recognition is another powerful way to encourage creativity and participation, Schpak added, noting that one way to do this is for section leadership to write letters to managing partners at the section members' firms, highlighting their great ideas and leadership.

Linking isolated members

Sometimes, board members can lose touch with the general membership of the bar. And in a far-flung state like Montana, it can be tough for anyone to stay in close contact. Those are two reasons the State Bar of Montana decided to try something a little different at a recent board retreat.

Bar leaders assembled five panels of

lawyers from around the state and invited them to come tell the board about their issues and needs. The five panels consisted of: law students, young lawyers, those in midcareer, those not directly practicing (such as those in a corporate or government setting), and retired lawyers.

One fact that emerged with some consistency, regardless of age or work situation, was that lawyers in Montana want more connection, more mentoring, and more collegiality, Probasco reported. The majority of law students in Montana plan to stay in the state after graduation, she said, so they can benefit from help in making connections with state bar members. Those who are midcareer or older talked a great deal about feeling disconnected because of heavy use of technology. In such a large and population-sparse state, videoconferencing and e-mail are a necessity, but Probasco noted that bar leaders are looking at ways to encourage members to at least chat by phone from time to time, or if they are in the same town, to meet in person for the sake of collegiality.

"It's important to use technology to our advantage, but not to our detriment," Probasco said.

A project on gender bias emerged from the panel discussions. Some bar leaders may have assumed gender bias was no longer a problem or would be phased out as the "old guard" retired, but a member of the young lawyer panel reported on the problems she faces in the small town where she practices. Some of the other women in attendance confirmed her assertion that in some cases, the "new guard" is no less biased than the old.

The bar's annual meeting was in September, and Probasco reported that the panels had yielded so many useful insights that something similar was planned for the meeting of the full bar.

Easing transition

How hungry for information are lawyers who are transitioning into or out of practice? When the Massachusetts Bar Association held its first Lawyers in

Transition conference, one woman came, grabbed copies of the materials, and dashed out the door, explaining that her children were home sick, but she simply had to have the information.

And transition isn't just a "women's issue," reported Denise Squillante, vice president of the Massachusetts bar. Holding a focus session helped the bar make this realization; Squillante strongly recommended holding such a session before beginning any significant new project. The bar also provided a survey at its solo and small firm conference, because this form of practice often attracts transitioning lawyers.

With help from the focus group and survey, the Lawyers in Transition Task Force identified the following areas in which lawyers needed help:

- the parent track, in which lawyers decrease work hours or leave practice entirely to care for young children—and then seek to resume full practice;
- personal and medical leave;
- transition from another career; and
- transition out of practice.

Whether transitioning in or out of practice, Squillante said, lawyers reported wanting to stay closely connected to the bar. As a starting point, the task force decided to focus on helping those coming back to practice, and learned that such lawyers needed help in sharpening their skills, networking, brushing up on ethics, developing work-life balance, and getting up to speed with new technology.

On this last point, Squillante recounted that one woman who had been out of practice for 10 years and took the "T" commuter train into Boston was amazed by all the iPods, BlackBerries, and other handheld devices. "She felt like she was in a foreign country," Squillante said.

Echoing Schpak's experience with the YOUTHFILM Project, Squillante said, "There's such a need among lawyers in transition that our task force has turned into a permanent fixture at the bar and become a committee."



Denise Squillante: "There's such a need among lawyers in transition that our task force has turned into a permanent fixture at the bar and become a committee."



Matthew W. Claman found that a new approach helped increase both overall attendance and attendance among young lawyers at the Alaska Bar Association's annual meeting.

And that's not where the commitment ends, Squillante noted: The bar has created a new, reduced dues category for lawyers in transition.

Facilitating board service

Charna E. Sherman's number one recommendation for anyone contemplating a new project is to make sure it's relevant. Sherman, a member of the steering committee for the ABA

Section of Business Law's DirectWomen initiative, said it was quickly apparent that the new project aimed at placing women lawyers on boards at Fortune 1,000 companies had hit home. In the early days, she got 12 to 24 e-mails a day, not only from those interested in being part of DirectWomen, but also from people who just wanted to say how glad they were that the project existed. Two hundred applications quickly rolled in, with very little advertising.

Number two on Sherman's list is to make sure key leaders are on board. The support of Karen Mathis, then president of the ABA, and of section leaders, was a great help in launching DirectWomen, she said. Other key partners included Catalyst, a nonprofit whose focus is women in the professions, and a blue ribbon advisory board whose names and active participation lent credibility.

Another key to success is to allow many different ways for people to support the project. In conjunction with a two-day institute in New York at which faculty advised women lawyers on how to serve on corporate boards, the steering committee planned a luncheon to honor those who already serve on them. Not only were law firms and companies asked to sponsor the event, there was also a less expensive means for others, such as women's groups, to have their names printed in the materials.

Attendance expectations were low, Sherman said, but 400 people (including executives from the honorees' companies) accepted the invitation, which meant the event took place in the grand ballroom of the Waldorf-Astoria. Sandra Day O'Connor took notice, Sherman added, and agreed to lend her name to the award going forward.

But there's more work to be done, Sherman said. Training women lawyers to serve on boards is only half of the equation, she noted: The project's leaders must also focus on encouraging those Fortune 1,000 boards to take them on. Also, the steering committee would like to

work with Business Law section leaders on ways to help younger lawyers prepare for service, and to make DirectWomen more than an institute and luncheon. One possibility, she said, might be to partner with the ABA Commission on Women in the Profession, which reached its 20th anniversary in August. Sherman is also a member of that commission.

Boosting meeting attendance

Leaders at the Alaska Bar Association were faced with two problems involving the bar's annual meeting, said Matthew W. Claman, president: First, overall attendance was lower than desired, and second, those who did attend were generally well established in their careers. That meant young lawyers were missing a big opportunity to network and get involved with the bar.

What leaders came up with, he said, was a way for a more established lawyer who planned to attend to sign up a young lawyer (in practice for five years or less), who would then attend for free. The idea, Claman said, was that this would break a couple of significant barriers for young lawyers when it comes to annual meeting attendance. It can be difficult for them to get their firms to pay for them to go, and there's also the "but I won't know anybody there" feeling—a point that came out strongly in interviews with young lawyers regarding why they didn't attend.

A few older lawyers wondered if the younger ones could split the cost with them, Claman said, but most understood that the point was mentoring and connection, and not a half-price meeting for the older lawyers.

The first year, 2004, there were 50 such pairs who attended. At the most recent annual meeting, there were 105 pairs, out of a total attendance of 500, Claman reported. And there were some very distinguished participants, he noted: Twenty-nine judges and 10 federal judges were there as the "older" half of a pair.

The program has since been tweaked a bit, reports Executive Director Deborah O'Regan: At the



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bar's next annual meeting, young lawyers will be able to go two for one with any other attendee, including another young lawyer.

Creating connection

The informal goal of the Indianapolis Bar Association is to be "there for you from cradle to grave," said past President John Kautzman. This means that all along the continuum of a lawyer's career, the bar reaches out and encourages connection among different bar divisions and between members and the bar.

The Young Lawyers Division and Law Student Division, for example, are encouraged to work closely together. Young lawyers can be great mentors for law students, Kautzman said; because they are often only three to five years older than the law students, there are often more shared interests and more candor than if a law student is paired with a more established lawyer. Perhaps in part because the two divisions work so well together, the bar enjoys a 75 to 80 percent retention rate when it comes to law student members who then join as young lawyers, he added.

As lawyers progress a bit in their careers, the bar's popular Bar Leader Series offers meetings and retreats where they can learn leadership skills and how to advance within

the bar. This training "creates connected members who can't wait to serve," Kautzman noted.

It became clear, too, that seniors were looking for more connection with each other and with the bar, Kautzman said. That's why the annual "milestone" celebration for lawyers with a certain number of years in the profession moved from a luncheon to a dinner. The luncheon was a more briskly efficient affair, Kautzman explained, and the perception was that the honorees were to get their awards and go home. But the senior lawyers felt a need for more connection with

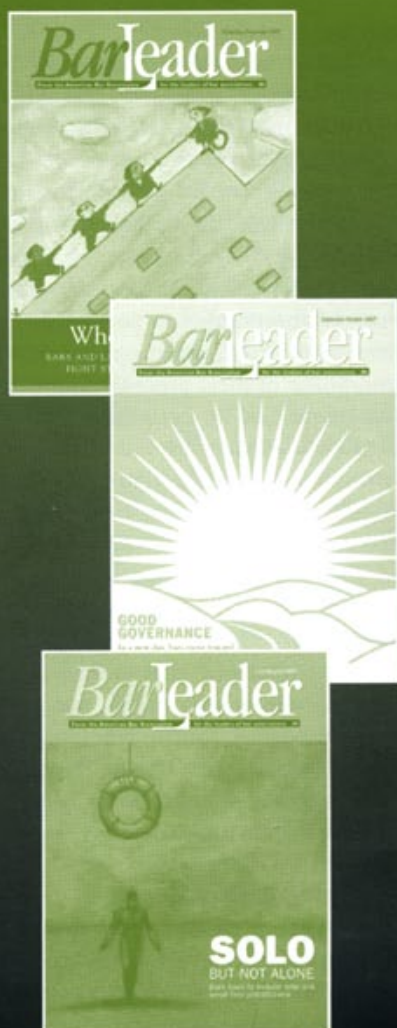
their peers, he said, and the dinner provides that—after receiving the awards, the honorees "hang out, have a cocktail," and enjoy the evening together.

Connection is encouraged between the bar and the Indianapolis Bar Foundation, too; there are designated IBF board seats for IBA board members, and vice versa. Likewise, there's a swap of designated seats for each organization's finance and nominating committees. This helps ensure that the bar and foundation work toward a common vision and goal, he said.

In the past year, Kautzman said, the bar has also developed an easy way for

the current president to stay in touch with past presidents, and for the past presidents—who often feel some withdrawal—to stay involved, too. The Presidential Information Exchange (affectionately known as PIE) is a simple e-mail list that lets the current president or board members tap past presidents' wisdom. That way, he noted, the president doesn't feel as if he or she is out there making decisions alone, but instead has immediate access to differing opinions and experiences. "The results are unbelievable," Kautzman said.

—By Marilyn Cavicchia



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