

The Young Lawyers Conference is Here for You

by Chris Fortier

When you run a young lawyer organization, you have to remain ahead of your constituency. You must be able to anticipate the needs and have infrastructure ready to go before your constituency's needs become a problem. This is more of an art than a science. In order to get anywhere near your goals, you must have your ears to the ground at all times.

As young lawyers, we have a number of challenges in front of us. Constant change, challenges getting started in our careers, meeting the expectations of our supervisors and clients, all while trying to prove ourselves and establish personal lives...we have a lot of pressure.

The YLC is there for you. We encourage young attorneys to attend our Professional Development Conference every fall, our Professional Development Series, seen weekly on our YouTube Channel, our First Day in Practice Seminar, and our Annual Meeting programs. They are meant to enhance your knowledge and provide professional fulfillment. However, we need to provide support to help you personally.

The new lawyer demographic has its own issues that the YLC needs assistance in addressing. While 20 percent of lawyers are known to have mental health or substance abuse issues, that number rises to 30 percent with our age demographic (i.e. under the age of 40). We have our work cut out for us. We are partnering with Lawyers Helping Lawyers and starting a Wellness Initiative aimed at providing opportunities for physical activities for lawyers, mindfulness courses, and a mindset that allows us to manage our mental health. We were delighted to see the ABA Report on Wellness in the Profession and even more delighted to see Chief Justice Lemons of the Supreme Court of Virginia ask the leaders of Virginia's bars to look into the issue.

Expanding Representation in Communities of Need

Lawyers service only 15 percent of the public that experiences legal issues. Furthermore, the percentage of those with legal issues who decide to represent themselves or sit on their hands praying the issue goes away is approximately 22 percent. These stats alone undermine the exceptional, client-oriented service that all of you do. This is also a potential source of work for the many new lawyers we swear in every year.

To help address this issue, we will seek to establish Legal Checkups, a no cost, low hassle, online tool that can be set up for in-person legal consultations. Like the annual checkup at your doctor's office, an individual will fill out a form describing their situation and legal issue. Then, an individual is invited to have a free brief chat with a lawyer, or is referred to resources if the individual is online. We envision this as a great way to involve potential clients who may need help but have no idea where to get started.

YLC's Commitment to Public Service Programs

As we are generally regarded as a public service arm of the Virginia State Bar, we have our series of projects that effectively serve Virginia. Programs such as the Oliver Hill/Samuel Tucker Pre-Law Institute, Immigrant Outreach Committee, Wills for Heroes, Children and the Law Committee, Women and Minorities Bench-Bar Dinner, Minority Prelaw Conferences, Domestic Violence Safety Project, and our Rule of Law Days advance access to justice as lawyers are either providing pro bono services, educating others, or introducing the rule of law to a new generation.

I am thankful for all the volunteers on these projects as they provide an essential service to our communities and our country. These lawyers are the unsung heroes who are spreading the American ideal to new groups of individuals, the people who will continue the American tradition of democracy and the rule of law.

However, we have a long way to go to meet our goal. There is a lot of work to do and a large population to reach. Join us, and we'll achieve great things together.



Chris Fortier is the president of the Young Lawyers Conference. He also serves as vice chair of the VSB TECHSHOW, a member of the board of governors for the Diversity Conference, and on the Future of Law Practice Study Committee. He is an attorney adviser at the Social Security Administration in Falls Church. The views represented in this article are his and not those of SSA or the Federal Government.