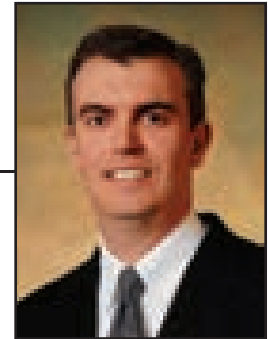


YOUNG LAWYERS

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Chairperson
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RECOGNIZING OUR ADMINISTRATIVE PROFESSIONALS

As this edition of *The West Virginia Lawyer* is arriving in your mailboxes, my term as chair of the Young Lawyers Executive Committee is about one month from expiring. It has been an eventful and enjoyable year. At the Annual Meeting of The West Virginia State Bar in April, new officers will be installed, and I wish them well in continuing to represent the interests of the young lawyers of our state.

Over the last year, The State Bar has seen many positive advances, the most visible of which is the new Bar Center that has now been occupied and in use for a few months. This center will allow The State Bar an opportunity to connect with newly admitted young lawyers for many years to come through welcome receptions and orientations that are planned at the Bar Center following the admission of new attorneys before the West Virginia

Supreme Court. This simply was not possible in the facilities that The Bar occupied on Kanawha Boulevard. It is hoped that by connecting with young lawyers at the beginning of their careers as attorneys in the State of West Virginia, the young attorneys will be more likely to become involved with The Bar. The more attorneys we can involve at an earlier stage of their career, the better opportunity we have to continue to build upon an already strong State Bar organization for many years and decades to come.

Over the last several years, I have read the Bar publications, and there are many areas of the law and our practices that are discussed in great detail and with frequency. An area that I do not recall being addressed over the last several years is the importance of all of those with whom we work who help to make us successful in the legal profession. An event

takes place in April each year that young lawyers need to recognize. The last full week in April is Administrative Professionals Week, and April 25, 2012, marks the 60th anniversary of Administrative Professionals Day. The administrative assistants who work in your offices can make you or break you as an attorney. They make sure you are where you are supposed to be when you are supposed to be there. They make sure deadlines are properly calendared and files are ready for you when you need them. They must be proficient in understanding highly technical terminology of the legal profession. They prepare documents under your direction and are in many ways the face and voice of your office. They do many things that we take for granted day in and day out.

As a young lawyer, the importance of a good working relationship with your administrative

assistants cannot be overemphasized. Treat your support staff with respect, and do not take them for granted. Many of the support staff in your office will have been in the office for many more years than the young lawyers in the office, and many will be there long after you have moved on to other offices. For new attorneys, they are a valuable source that should not be forgotten.

You must also make your expectations known to your support staff. Have routine discussions with them concerning areas which can help you to be more efficient in your practice. Don't be afraid to listen to their suggestions on ways to improve your efficiency as a lawyer. While you are busy conducting legal research, meeting with clients, drafting memos and appearing in court, your support staff is preparing you for your next round of meetings and hearings and interacting with your clients and the public as the face of your practice when you aren't available. This experience makes your staff an excellent source of information on how to improve functionality within the office and your practice.

If you are an attorney in a small firm or solo practice where training is not handled by upper management, it is also important to provide proper training to your support staff. The more your support staff knows and

understands about what you do and why you do it, the more they can assist you when you are unavailable. It is important, however, to also explain the limitations to your support staff of the scope of the assistance they can provide when you are not available. Many interactions with clients can occur in a more timely manner and result in a more satisfactory experience for your client when your support staff can answer their questions without the need for taking messages that result in the client waiting for your return call to answer general questions. You must be careful, however, that you know what kind of information your staff is providing to clients. In essence, you must make sure that your support staff is not practicing law. It is important to have ground rules in place concerning what information you are comfortable with your support staff providing to clients. Remember that you are ultimately responsible for your own work as well as the actions of your support staff and subordinate lawyers.

Make a conscious effort to recognize your support staff this year during Administrative Professionals Week. Without them, you would be unable to do many of the things that are necessary to run and maintain a successful law practice. **WVLL**

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