

YOUNG LAWYERS

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ARE YOU A LAWYER MENTOR? WHY GIVING BACK IS MORE IMPORTANT THAN EVER

Without question, as lawyers, we are members of one of most influential and grandest of professions. To be a lawyer is to be a counselor and helper of those in need. Unfortunately, we sometimes forget that helping those in need doesn't always mean assistance to just our clients. It often means reaching out to young lawyers who need guidance and wisdom from their experienced counterparts, or providing assistance to members of the community.

Unfortunately, many young lawyers do not have the ben-

efit of guidance from a mentor. Moreover, given the fast-paced and competitive nature in which the practice of law has evolved, young lawyers often fall through the cracks and are left to make their own way. Without the guidance of seasoned lawyers, the path of a young lawyer is often a needlessly difficult one. Similarly, as lawyers, we sometimes focus on our own clients or the legal community in general. But, as stewards of our profession, it is more important than ever for more seasoned lawyers to mentor their younger, less

experienced colleagues. In addition, lawyers of all ages should be mindful of dedicating time to community service.

With this concept in mind, the Young Lawyer's Executive Committee has developed several programs focused on improving the practice of law for the West Virginia State Bar's newest members and encourages all lawyers to give back to their communities.

One such program is the Young Lawyer Mentoring Initiative. With the assistance of Jason Foster, YLS Chair-Elect, the YLS

is developing a system in which young lawyers can be “matched up” with more seasoned lawyers in their area. Young Lawyers will receive an email (or be able to log onto the YLS website) and access an online survey. The survey will ask basic practice information including the attorney’s practice area, where they practice law and their years of experience. Once the form is submitted, the YLS will provide a list of potential mentors for that lawyer. Ultimately, the YLS anticipates that every young lawyer who wants the advice and wisdom of a seasoned lawyer will be connected to a mentor.

Additionally, the YLS continues to provide the infamous Practice Handbook. A general resource guide, the Practice Handbook is free of charge and found exclusively on the YLS website. The YLS, however, has recognized the need to refresh the Practice Handbook by expanding its topics. With the assistance of Jamie O’Brien and Shannon Smith, YLS Executive Committee members, the Practice Handbook is consistently being updated and will start adding chapters. If you have a topic that you believe will be a good addition to the Practice Handbook, or if you can update an existing chapter, please contact the YLS today.

In an effort to encourage public service among our members, the YLS is involved in several programs that focus on education. For example, the West Virginia Law Adventure is the Supreme Court of West Virginia’s civic education program. The program is geared toward middle school and high school students and allows student groups to write their own scripts based on one of three criminal case scenarios. The case scenarios are written by the

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YLS who also judge the winners in several grade categories. Each group must act out its script in front of a judicial officer – a magistrate, family court judge or circuit judge – before sending in its entry. Winners in each category are invited to perform their scripts in front of a Supreme Court justice at the State Capitol. If you are a young lawyer and would like to assist in this program please contact the YLS.

For the first time, the YLS is partnering with the West Virginia Department of Education

to provide attorneys to visit classrooms. Attorneys throughout the state will team up with teachers and school administrators to assist with civics projects, career days and the presentation of mock trials. Attorneys will also make classroom or school-wide presentations on the legal ramifications of drug and alcohol abuse, registering to vote, providing tips on issues related to driving and discussing the additional driving duties and responsibilities that occur when a student turns 18. In focusing on youth, the YLS is helping to mold the leaders, and possibly lawyers, of the future.

I take great pride in the efforts that the YLS is making to encourage mentorship and service to the community. When you read this article I hope that you ask yourself one question: are you a lawyer mentor? Do you encourage the other young lawyers around you and lift them up to make them better leaders of tomorrow? Do you give to your community and offer assistance without the expectation of a personal benefit? If you aren’t contributing to the future of our profession and community, please make a change today! 