

## YOUNG LAWYERS

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## THE VALUE OF GETTING YOUR FEET WET

*Getting your feet wet.* It's an idiom that we have all heard throughout our lives in various contexts and situations. But what does *getting your feet wet* mean for young attorneys in West Virginia? In short, it means experiencing new things in the legal field with the goal of gaining knowledge and new skills.

Entering the legal profession can be a frightening experience. Most young law graduates are leaving the world of education for the first time; and for many graduates, they are about to embark on their first adult, full-time job. These graduates go from being students spending long nights in the library to being full-fledged professionals tasked not only with challenging new jobs, but also with new responsibilities that come with home ownership, raising a family and navigating a life post-school. As such, young lawyers are often overworked and overwhelmed.

However, although young lawyers are busy learning the ropes of their new careers, they should always be looking for opportunities to *get their feet wet*. Here are a few examples of opportunities that will get the young lawyers in this State practice ready!

### Tag Along!

The beginning months, and even years, of a young lawyer's career are often occupied by assignments involving legal research and writing. While this may feel like a comfort zone because of its similarity to law school assignments, it should not be the only thing occupying your day. The opportunities may be scarce, but be aware of what other attorneys in your office are doing — taking depositions, meeting with clients, going to trial. There is valuable experience in being a spectator. Ask to tag along with the more experienced attorneys. Some of the best

training that I have received did not come from a textbook — it came from watching talented attorneys interact in depositions and hearings. Watching them, you can see how they apply the law in real-life circumstances and how they are able to. Listen to the questions they ask. Be inquisitive! Experiencing the law in a hands-on manner is so beneficial to our growth and development as young practicing attorneys.

### Attend Conferences and CLEs

Sometimes young attorneys are not given as many opportunities to attend conferences or out-of-town CLEs. However, if you are given the opportunity, do not pass it up! Conferences give attorneys an opportunity to network. Sometimes the attorneys practice in the same area of law and the topic of the conference is very specific and detailed.

For example, if you are a family law attorney attending a family law conference, you have an opportunity to meet and network with future colleagues and contemporaries. These are the attorneys and judges you will be interacting with on a daily basis at hearings, mediations and more. Get to know them. Learn from them. Introduce yourself and immerse yourself in the material being presented at the conference.

### Learn from the Best at the Supreme Court

Have you ever listened to a Supreme Court oral argument? If you have not, you are missing an amazing, free learning opportunity. One day, you could be standing in front of the Court arguing on behalf of your own clients — and the best way to prepare is by listening to other oral arguments. When cases are appealed, the best attorneys are selected to present oral arguments to the Court — so you know you will be learning from some of the best, most prestigious attorneys in the State. In West Virginia, oral arguments take place in Charleston at the State Capitol and are open to the public. If you have the opportunity, go to the Supreme Court in person and watch some cases be argued. Listen to how they present their cases and address the Court. See how they respond to questions from the justices. Experience our State's beautiful courtroom. Don't have the time to attend in person? No problem. You can watch arguments on YouTube — the Supreme Court of Appeals of West Virginia livestreams each day's oral arguments on the Court's YouTube page.

### Take the Time and Volunteer

All young lawyers are busy. As mentioned above, not only are you juggling the ups and downs of a new career, but also the challenges of starting a life outside of school. Volunteering additional time may seem like the last thing that you have time for; however, I guarantee

you it will *always* be worth your time. Volunteering in the legal field allows us to experience different areas of law that we may not have experienced before. It also allows us to practice our skills in an atmosphere outside of our workplace. Volunteering your time to pro bono work or organizations such as Legal Aid will make you a better attorney and will open your eyes to different aspects and areas of the law.

### Get Involved with the Young Lawyer Section

The Young Lawyer Section (YLS) of the State Bar was created to assist new lawyers in making the transition between law school and the practice of law through CLEs, service projects, networking and leadership opportunities. The YLS provides a means for personal and professional growth for young lawyers by encouraging participation in the activities of the State Bar. The YLS does numerous service and volunteer projects throughout the year that you can be a part of. All State Bar members who either (1) have been admitted to practice for 10 years or less, or, (2) are 35 years of age or under, are automatically members of the Young Lawyer Section. I encourage you to watch your email for Bar Blasts from the State Bar to see announcements and upcoming events from the YLS. If you have any questions or would like to become more involved with the YLS, please contact me at [ashtonb@lyneranson.com](mailto:ashtonb@lyneranson.com).

These are just a few examples of ways young lawyers can *get their feet wet* — but there are so many more. My advice to the young lawyers reading this article is this: don't be afraid to try new things. Always ask to tag along. Attend the conference on the area of law that interests you. Drive to Charleston to see our Court in action. Donate your time. And most importantly, take it all in. Every new opportunity is a learning experience. Find the opportunities, jump in and *get your feet wet*. **WVL**