

## YOUNG LAWYERS

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# PRACTICAL TIPS FOR YOUNG LAWYERS & HOW SEASONED ATTORNEYS CAN HELP

“The Young Lawyer Section of the West Virginia State Bar is authorized to assist new lawyers in making the transition between law school and the practice of law by providing a means for personal and professional growth and encouraging participation in the activities of the Bar.” (*West Virginia State Bar Bylaws*, Section 17.01.) Further, “[t]he Young Lawyer Section ... implements and contributes to programs that promote education, leadership, and public service, and assists the State Bar in its mission to improve the administration of justice and increase the legal services provided to the citizens of West Virginia.” (*Id.*) Through this mission, we serve as a resource for the young lawyers who are either aspiring to practice law or who are already practicing in the state. We are, of course, not their only resource. Every member of the West

Virginia State Bar is, or should also be, a resource to the young lawyers in our state. In this article, I am going to be discussing the issues we commonly discuss with young lawyers about navigating the transition from student to practicing attorney, as well as discussing how we as a Bar can more wholly support that transition.

### 1. Mentorship for the Young and for the “Seasoned”

We have all been told, and hopefully experienced, the value of mentorship. Establishing a strong relationship with a seasoned lawyer can provide young attorneys with guidance, wisdom and insights into the practice, as well as provide constructive feedback on their work if they are in the same practice area. We also know that a mentor can assist in networking and expanding a young lawyer’s professional

circle, which can open doors to new opportunities.

But what can mentorship do for the seasoned lawyer? Mentorship is not one-sided — especially in today’s world where there are distinct generational divides in communication, technology and how work is performed. By mentoring young lawyers, you not only are helping them navigate their practice, but you are also giving yourself the opportunity to learn how to adjust in your practice, which is changing.

The young lawyers in your areas are resources for adjusting to the changing world. Members of Generation Z are entering our profession and are also becoming our clients. Gen Zers are those born between the mid-1990s and the early 2010s. They were raised fully in a digital age and are more connected and engaged than previous generations, and that has its

advantages. So, while it is certainly the job of a mentor to make sure their mentees understand the fundamentals of the practice, we can also learn much from those we mentor and should want to in order to appropriately adjust to the changing society we influence.

## **2. Developing a Strong Work Ethic, While Setting Personal Boundaries**

It is hard to stress how difficult the transition from law school to practicing law is to a young lawyer. Long hours, tight deadlines and demanding clients are one thing. The feeling that you'll never get to a good "stopping point" or truly enjoy another stress-free vacation is a whole other feeling. Gone are the days of not knowing there is an issue at work unless you are there. Our emails are with us everywhere we go, on the phones that never leave our sides. So, that work ethic that you cultivated in law school — when you had projects that naturally concluded at the end of a semester — is now being put up against endless assignments that you can realistically work on from your laptop on your beach vacation with your family.

Burnout and addiction are real issues in our practice for a variety of reasons, one being that we as a profession have not valued our mental health as much as we have valued our mental acumen and accomplishments. While dedication and hard work can earn you respect among colleagues and clients, we also have to stress to young lawyers that they have to take care of themselves; and that takes reasonable boundary-setting and communication about their personal time and schedule.

Time management is harder than it used to be due to accessibility of work and the demands and pressures in this profession. If you are not talking to the young lawyers who are around you or who work for you about how they plan to manage their workload while also setting boundaries for their personal time, then you probably should be.

## **3. Building and Maintaining a Professional Network Based on Civility and Ethical Conduct**

Networking is a powerful tool for career advancement in the legal field. Young lawyers should be encouraged

to attend legal conferences, bar association events and social gatherings to meet fellow attorneys, potential clients and potential future mentors. However, young lawyers also need to understand, by example from seasoned attorneys, that networking starts with civility and professionalism in the workplace. This state has a smaller bar than most, and only one law school. That means that most of us are connected through far fewer than seven degrees of separation. When we act poorly toward one another in the name of the practice, it can easily become whom we are perceived to be in reality. Zealous representation and civility are not diametrically opposed, and the ability to effectively network and then use those connections for advancement requires lawyers to know that.

Furthermore, and as we all know, ethical conduct is paramount and required in this profession. While we have to abide by the Code of Professional Responsibility, gaining trust among colleagues and clients really requires lawyers to be more ethical than the Code requires. As society changes and the truth gets harder to discern and even becomes less interesting in some circles, we need to remember our professional and moral responsibility to seek justice and provide honest representation. In order to maintain the prestige of this profession, we should be talking with young lawyers about the ideals of "winning at all costs" and "the ends will justify the means" and the effects of those ideals on our profession. While those ideals may earn you money and clients in the short run, our careers are long and people's memories are longer. Young lawyers need to see seasoned attorneys exemplify network-building based on honorable reputations.

In conclusion, the transition from law school to practicing law is a transformative phase in a young lawyer's career and has different issues than when a lot of us went through it. With fewer people going to law school, we need to ensure that we are doing everything we can to maintain the dignity of the practice, while encouraging young minds to join us. The Young Lawyer Section of the State Bar is committed to serving as a resource to aspiring and newly admitted attorneys, but the responsibility belongs to all of us by example and by having real and honest conversations with our incoming and new colleagues. **WVL**