

PREPARE YOURSELF TO DO WELL AND DO GOOD UPON GRADUATION*

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You are undoubtedly excited about being in law school and even more so about the prospect of getting out into the real world, starting your job, receiving a regular paycheck, paying off student loans, and making your mark in the legal profession. If you are like most of us, you are also probably somewhat intimidated by the challenges that loom ahead. You may have some trepidation about passing the bar exam, finding a job upon graduation, or deciding which job is “the right job.” You likely have concerns about developing and honing the necessary practice skills. If you are entering private practice, you also may be pondering how to bill all of the requisite hours and still find time to begin marketing yourself so you can become a “rainmaker”

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rather than a “grinder.”

Contemplating these challenges may prompt you to swear that you will not “sell out” — that you, unlike so many who have gone before you, will maintain perspective and strike a balance between your profession and your personal life that affords you an enviable quality of life. You understandably desire a balance that allows you to pay down your student debt and still have a few dollars left over to buy a new computer, pay some insurance premiums, park in the same zip code as your office, and take care of other mundane necessities, let alone buy that new sports car you have been coveting for the past few years. You want balance between those pesky (and seemingly ever increasing) billable hours and other employment obligations, and the hours devoted to family, friends, and fun.

Some of you may even be thinking about how you will reform our legal system and society to ensure justice always does prevail; make your voice heard on issues that will affect the profession and, thereby, you for years to come; and fulfill your desire and professional obligation to handle pro bono matters. You may yearn to be part of increasing access to justice for our less fortunate neighbors, which will not only allow you to “give something back” but will also help restore or enhance the image of the profession.

What is the answer to the challenges with which you are wrestling? Is there an answer? While the cynic in us is tempted to respond (once we stop laughing) with “Right. Sure. No problem,” we actually do have a serious response: join and become active in the organized bar.

Joining the organized bar may be a bit perplexing in and of itself. There are a myriad of bar associations. Some, such as The Florida Bar, are “integrated” or mandatory associations. If you want to practice law in the State of Florida, you *must* be a member in good standing of The Florida Bar. Other bar associations are voluntary. Voluntary bar associations are not of a “one size fits all” variety. There are specialty bars, local bars, and even several different national and international bar organizations. Specialty bars are generally organized around substantive practice areas (for example, the American Trial Lawyers Association, the Federal Energy Bar Association, the Maritime Law Association of the United States), or around certain characteristics or interests of members (for instance, minority bars, such as the George Edgecomb Bar Association, and the Florida Association of Women Lawyers). There are local bars (the Pinellas

County Bar Association), national bar associations (the National Bar Association, the Hispanic National Bar Association, the National Asian Pacific American Bar Association, and the American Bar Association), and even international bar groups (the International Bar Association, the Inter-American Bar Association, and the International Association of Young Lawyers).

The American Bar Association is the largest professional organization in the world. Many people view the American Bar Association (ABA) as the “voice of the legal profession.” Because the ABA is arguably the most influential organization of attorneys worldwide, it enjoys tremendous prestige and exercises significant clout. For example, it accredits law schools and offers recommendations to Congress on nominees to the federal bench. Resolutions passed by the ABA's policy making body, the House of Delegates, often lead to or influence state and national legislation. For all of the foregoing reasons, not to mention that we are both extremely involved in the ABA, we will use the ABA as an example of the benefits and services offered by the organized bar. Despite the fact that we are using the ABA as our example, we believe participation in bar associations at all levels (in varying degrees, given that there are only twenty-four hours in a day) is helpful to law students and new practitioners. Involvement can prepare you to do well — find a good job and progress professionally, and help you do good — provide pro bono service and make a positive contribution to your community.

Of particular importance to you as a law student is the fact that the ABA can help you prepare for (and hopefully pass) the bar exam. If you join the ABA as a first-year law student, you have the option of paying a reduced BAR/BRI deposit.¹ Additionally, BAR/BRI offers a scholarship fund for eligible participants. Also, your ABA membership can save you money on PMBR,² which offers discounts on its three day multistate exam workshops and six day multistate “early bird” bar review courses to ABA Law Student Division Members.

Finding a job can also be made easier through ABA membership. The ABA is reviewing, and will likely soon implement, a job opportunity/career development online service specifically designed for the

1. BAR/BRI is an organization that offers a bar review course to law school students.

2. PMBR (Preliminary Multistate Bar Review) is a course that prepares law students for the Multistate Bar Exam.

legal community.

Once you have passed the bar and landed a job, there are several ways you can facilitate the development and fine-tuning of practice skills through your participation in the ABA. One way to do so is to attend the ABA Young Lawyers Division's Professional Development Conference (PDC), which assists young lawyers in improving their legal skills. The PDC is held once a year in conjunction with the ABA's mid-year meeting. Attendees participate in interactive sessions and examine practical cutting edge issues and common "real life" ethical dilemmas.

The ABA is also famous for its high-quality continuing legal education (CLE) seminars. Recently, the ABA has made it easier for members to obtain the benefits of such CLE courses by making them available via the Internet, video conferencing, conference calls, and other innovative procedures.

Networking is a tremendous benefit of bar involvement, and this networking can begin while you are still in law school. It may help you obtain a job offer by affording you the opportunity to meet potential employers or setting you apart from the field of interviewees! Many lawyers credit bar involvement with having a direct positive impact on the "bottom line." This positive impact results from the referrals they have obtained from other lawyers with whom they have worked in the organized bar. Bar programs regularly provide "members-only" networking opportunities and rainmaking tutorials.

Moreover, bar involvement affords members with countless opportunities to speak and publish. Most organized bars are particularly sensitive to providing young lawyers with opportunities to present CLE seminars or publish scholarly articles. These opportunities give you a chance to "make a name for yourself" before you have a head full of gray hair (or, as is the case for many of us, little or no hair left at all).

Bar involvement can also help you "strike a balance" and maintain a quality lifestyle. Tips on "getting a life," financial planning, law practice management, and related topics regularly appear in many bar journals and publications like *The Young Lawyer*. Further, it is not at all uncommon to hear people say, "Many of my best friends are people I met through my involvement in the organized bar."³

3. Were it not for the fact that we met one another through our participation in the American Bar Association, we would roll our eyes at such a comment and respond

Other more mundane benefits can also be derived through bar membership. For example, many bars allow you to obtain insurance at affordable rates. Many bar associations also offer credit card services with favorable interest rates and payment terms. If you are an ABA member under the age of twenty-five, you can still rent a car without any “underage surcharge” thanks to a program the ABA has established with Hertz. Many bars also have competitive deals on the purchase of computers, cellular telephones, and other items. (Brooks Brothers and Jos. A. Banks offer clothing discounts to ABA members. Keep that in mind when you go to purchase your “interview suit.”) There is no reason that you should wait until you graduate to begin taking advantage of these benefits.

The decision to begin your involvement in the American Bar Association is even more compelling when you consider that there is a Law Student Division that was created specifically to assist you in getting ahead in law school and to provide you with a platform from which to launch your career. One benefit is not having to change your e-mail address every time you change your e-mail service provider. Through the ABA, you can sign up for a complimentary program that will forward all messages to your current and any future e-mail service provider you may select. The program is ideal for law students and young lawyers who tend to be quite mobile. As a member of the Law Student Division, you are also entitled to join other ABA sections at reduced rates.

Substantive sections within the ABA, such as the Litigation Section, the Real Property Section, Probate and Trust Law Section, the Tax Section, and the Tort and Insurance Practice Section, welcome law student and young lawyer members. Several ABA sections host “brown bag” programs that bring lawyers and law students together in regional locations to discuss important trends, share new information, and analyze the way such things will affect one's practice. In recent years, the various sections of the ABA have devoted themselves to being more relevant to the “Main Street” lawyer.

Upon passing the bar exam, you will automatically become a member of the ABA Young Lawyers Division (YLD). Your first year of membership is free, so take full advantage of the available benefits and privileges. In addition to other benefits, you will receive a

with a witty retort such as “That is pathetic,” or “Perhaps you need to find some new friends.” Instead, *our* ABA recruiting mantra is “Join the bar and meet your spouse!”

monthly newsletter, *The Young Lawyer*, that provides career guidance, tips for maintaining (or, particularly in light of law school, obtaining) a “quality-of-life” and information about helpful Web sites. The YLD is also widely regarded as *the* public service arm of the ABA as it sponsors and promotes a host of pro bono and public service programs in which you are welcome to become involved.

The ABA is at the forefront of improving access to justice. The ABA has always been a staunch supporter of the Legal Services Corporation and a champion of the cause of increasing the involvement of individual lawyers in providing direct free legal services to those who cannot afford to retain a lawyer in the open market. The ABA has also been an advocate for, and protectorate of, the independence of the judiciary. These are issues on which lawyers agree almost unanimously.

Lawyers and law students of color are supported by the ABA. The ABA Commission on Opportunities for Minorities in the Profession⁴ helps develop career and employment opportunities for minorities, promote minority appointments to the judiciary, and increase minority involvement in bar associations. The Conference of Minority Partners addresses the unique circumstances and needs of minority lawyers and provides a professional support network. The Minority Counsel Program is designed to provide a forum for minority practitioners to showcase their professional talents. The Minority In-House Counsel Group exists to assist minority in-house and government attorneys through career conferences, symposia, and a national directory.

The ABA's Commission on Women in the Profession helps female lawyers crash through the glass-ceiling, combat discrimination and sexual harassment, and pursue alternative work schedules. The Commission also works to foster work environments that preclude a career interruption for a lawyer who pursues the “mommy track.”

The legal profession has changed significantly in the last ten to fifteen years. The practice of law is becoming more like a business and is being confronted with issues pertaining to “multi-disciplinary practices” or “MDPs.” The American Bar Association is uniquely positioned to represent the interests of lawyers in these debates.

4. Effective September 1, 2000, the Commission on Opportunities for Minorities in the Profession will be known as the Commission on Racial and Ethnic Diversity in the Profession.

Competition from accounting firms and other professions will increasingly influence the practice of law. Two legal commentators have cautioned, "Give up any hope that this isn't happening. Your bar association is not going to be able to stem this tide. The Maginot Line of the legal guild has been breached."⁵ Incoming ABA President Martha Barnett has added, "Lawyers must recognize that multidisciplinary practices and ancillary businesses are here now. The profession has to find a way to maintain adherence to the Model Rules and Professional Standards and our responsibility to the public."⁶ "Much of the traditional practice of law will be subject to new competitive pressures from a variety of new service providers. We'll see many once-traditional legal service providers join multidisciplinary organizations. This means cultural clashes are inevitable."⁷ Vigorous debate about MDPs and the ethical and practical ramifications thereof is occurring within the ABA and state and local bar associations around the nation as this Essay is going to press. By becoming an active participant in the organized bar, you can ensure that your voice is heard and that your views are represented on this and other issues that will impact the practice of law as you know it for years to come. We honestly believe that you cannot afford to remain on the sidelines.

We constantly hear that there are too many lawyers and that our profession is in grave danger. We disagree. We certainly don't think that there are too many lawyers assisting victims of domestic violence, our nation's elderly, persons with AIDS, children waiting to be adopted, indigents, or other persons in need of free or low-cost legal services. Further, we believe that there is much about our profession of which we can be extremely proud. However, if you believe our profession is in trouble, we encourage you to help yank it back from the precipice by being an agent of positive change in our society. Involvement in the bar is one way to get started.

We applaud you for entering the endurance race we call law school, and we applaud you in advance for the worthwhile, rewarding, and meaningful pro bono and public service you will undertake in the

5. Merrilyn Astin Tarlton & Simon Chester, *The Territory Ahead: 25 Trends to Watch in the Business of Practicing Law*, LAW PRAC. MGMT., July–Aug. 1999, at 32, 35.

6. Joy M. White, *Trend Setters: Pioneers in the New World of Law Practice*, LAW PRAC. MGMT., July–Aug. 1999, at 43, 51.

7. *Id.* at 46 (quoting C. Randel Lewis, CEO of Hildebrandt International, commenting on "Accepting the Challenges").

future. We hope you will agree that there are many compelling reasons to actively participate in shaping your profession and your community through the organized bar and no good reason to delay doing so. The relatively small amount you will spend in bar dues will prove to be an excellent investment.⁸

We sincerely hope to meet you at a bar event soon!

8. Most voluntary bar associations have scholarships or subsidies if you truly can't afford the dues.