

# Lessons Learned While Leading the YLS During a Pandemic

By CINDY M. CIESLAK

**T**his year was unique in that the entire bar year was engulfed by the pandemic. Despite that challenge, I believe the YLS had a successful bar year, although those successes were measured in different ways. As my role as chair of the Young Lawyers Section ends, I have been reflecting on the past year and what it has taught me. Taking on a leadership role within the Young Lawyers Section has been quite fulfilling. Therefore, I wanted to share the lessons I have learned while leading the YLS during an unprecedented year.

## Lesson #1: We Join Organizations to be Connected

Earlier this year, as part of a leadership training, I was asked, “Why do individuals join organizations?” The answers to this question centered around the theory that organizations are merely groups of people striving to serve the needs of its members. But then we were asked, “What do members want?” Members join organizations to help themselves as an individual, but they also join to be part of a community and a vision larger than themselves.

Indeed, colleagues and I have recently discussed how to make a meaningful transition when attorneys return to work full time (if they haven’t already). We discussed that attorneys, and especially younger attorneys, want to feel important or part of something meaningful. Despite our busy lives, it is important to be nice, appreciate others, and recognize the hard work of the members on your team.

Through the YLS’s various initiatives this year, I have come to learn how truly

*Cindy M. Cieslak is the chair of the CBA Young Lawyers Section for the 2020-2021 bar year. She is a partner at Rose Kallor LLP in Hartford, where she focuses her practice on labor & employment litigation as well as independent workplace investigations. She graduated summa cum laude from Penn State University in 2009 and received her JD from UConn School of Law in 2012.*



valuable membership in the Connecticut Bar Association is in terms of creating relationships and connections on a personal and professional level, as well as the CBA’s impact our communities. Perhaps the isolation many of us felt during the pandemic magnified our desire to be connected, which in turn led to our members giving time and energy to our initiatives.

## Lesson #2: There Are Several Ways to Accomplish a Goal and Recognizing that Will Improve Results

During the pandemic, the YLS operated completely through emails and Zoom calls for planning events, and during our monthly meetings we offered various substantive or social programs in addition to regular business. Perhaps not being in-person at a large group meeting relieved the pressure of public speaking, but whatever the reason, I found that individuals spoke up during the planning process and the brainstorming process for creating events flourished. Oftentimes, my fellow officers and I would offer an idea to get us started in the planning process, but by the end of planning, our event had morphed into something completely different and better than the original idea.

I think virtual meeting platforms are here to stay because of its efficiency.

## Lesson #3: It Is Okay to Slow Down

I’m a workaholic. I wish I wasn’t, but it is hard for me to shut my work brain off and to disconnect from work communications. Additionally, when I started working from home in March 2020, and I was without childcare for three months, I did what I had to do—which meant working during the hours my son would be sleeping, foregoing health, exercise, and nutrition, as well as regular communication with friends and family. But we are not meant to function on all work and no play (or sleep)! And I quickly learned that many young lawyers were also operating this way. The Young Lawyers Section needed to emphasize the importance of lawyer well-being even more during the pandemic, and moreover, I needed to utilize the tools we were offering. My ability to balance work and my personal life is better because I have become a little better, and I am continuing to get better, at setting boundaries and blocking my time to allow me to fulfill each “bucket” that I need to have a fulfilling life outside of or in tandem with the law.<sup>1</sup> I hope that young



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lawyers recognize that taking breaks, vacations, and time off is critical to their success as an attorney.

I hope this year demonstrated the strength of the Young Lawyers Section and promotes section growth. I have noted in nearly every article I have authored this bar year that we are operating during a pandemic. This was not a complaint, but rather a reminder of the strength of our or-

ganization. I was unable to interact with or meet new YLS Executive Committee members in person this year. However, we worked as hard as we otherwise would to bring value to our members. We highlighted that while networking remains important, members may gain other types of value from active participation in the Young Lawyers Section. Although we had to reduce the types of networking events, we were able to focus our events

on diversity, equity and inclusion; lawyer well-being and professionalism; civics education; public service; and upholding the bar and the rule of law.

These accomplishments would not have been possible without the hard work of each and every YLS Executive Committee member to whom I express my sincere gratitude. We would not have had a successful year without all of your hard work.

I hope that seeing the YLS remain active during a difficult bar year will encourage other young lawyers to become involved. As this bar year concludes, it almost feels as though we have hit "refresh," and I am excited to see what the next year offers as we regain the ability to connect in person! ■

#### NOTES

1. See Cindy M. Cieslak, "It's Not Personal, It's Business: How Your Well-Being Could Impact Your Practice," *CT Lawyer*, Jan.-Feb. 2021, at 38-39.



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