

# Creating Opportunities for Junior Attorneys

By CHRISTOPHER A. KLEPPS

**J**unior attorneys have always faced challenges. For litigators, gaining courtroom experience is often chief among them. The COVID-19 pandemic has exacerbated this problem. As CBA President Dan Horgan explained in his prior article for the *CT Lawyer*, Connecticut's short calendar system was overhauled years ago to only allow oral argument on certain motions. COVID-related changes have further restricted opportunities for junior associates to argue a motion or present evidence in front of a judge or jury in an actual courtroom.

I have seen numerous articles and social media posts from senior attorneys criticizing the post-COVID landscape and lamenting the lack of opportunities for junior associates to gain courtroom ex-

perience. For better or worse, the world will not revert back to pre-pandemic norms. Complaining about the current state of the legal profession is useless without proposing solutions. It is up to firms, attorneys, and judges to find and develop ways to train the next generation of litigators.

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*The Young Lawyers Section is in the process of creating a moot court/mock trial program designed to provide courtroom experience to newer and less experienced attorneys.*

The CBA is doing its part to remedy this problem. Two months ago, Dan Horgan announced his plan to propose a Pilot Civil Standing Order aimed at creating opportunities for younger and less experienced attorneys to learn and improve courtroom skills. Other states have implemented similar programs. For instance, Judge Moskowitz of the Central District of California will hold oral argument on civil motions only if the motions will be argued by attorneys with fewer than five years of admission. I am excited to see what Dan's proposed standing order looks like in the months to come.

The Young Lawyers Section is also stepping up to the plate. We are in the process of creating a moot court/mock trial program designed to provide courtroom experience to newer and less experienced attorneys. Details are still being worked out, but the plan is to provide participants with previously adjudicated motions to study and then argue in front of a sitting judge in an actual courtroom. We plan to launch this program in early 2023 at a single Judicial District, and then expand the program across the

state on a monthly or quarterly basis. We also hope to eventually hold mock trials where participants can gain experience cross examining a witness, asserting objections, and properly getting documents into evidence. Although this program is designed for less-experienced attorneys, we encourage partners to attend to support their associates and provide feedback on their performance. If you are interested in participating in the inaugural session, please contact me at Christopher.Klepps@thehartford.com.

I also encourage junior associates to speak up and ask for opportunities, and for partners to be receptive to those requests. Fewer trials and oral arguments mean fewer opportunities for all lawyers to be in court. Those opportunities should not be reserved solely for experienced attorneys. Not every motion or witness decides the fate of a case. Partners should look for ways to actively integrate junior

associates into a case, whether it be arguing a motion, taking a deposition, or examining a single witness at trial.

Lastly, any attorney seeking increased experience should embrace pro bono work. Through my prior firm's work with the Connecticut Coalition Against Domestic Violence, I was able to litigate several restraining order hearings as a junior associate, which meant the opportunity to examine witnesses and introduce evidence. Those hearings are among the most valuable courtroom experiences I have had in my career.

The opportunity for courtroom experience is out there, it just may take more effort to find than it did ten or 20 years ago. The YLS is excited about being part of the solution to this growing problem. I look forward to hopefully seeing some of you at our inaugural moot court session in early 2023. ■



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