the Briefs

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Recharging Your Professional Development

If you are like most people, the holdiays were probably spent reconnecting with your kids during their winter break, enjoying family gatherings, or simply enjoying a slower pace. This hiatus seems to have given us permission, even if unconsciously, to be a little less productive, a little less consumed by, and a little less focused on work. But now the holidays have come to an end, and it's time to focus on reenergizing and rededicating ourselves to our professional activities, goals, and networking.

While we were enjoying the slower pace, the Florida Supreme Court was hard at work giving us a few new rules. These rules included Florida Rule of Civil Procedure 2.516, which addresses service of pleadings by email and other changes to the Florida Rules of Civil Procedure concerning the hot topic of electronic discovery. They also approved a new uniform computation of time rule, Florida Rule of Judicial Administration 2.514.

These are just three examples of important changes that have taken place during the past months. So now that we are recharged it is time to get back on track, become familiar with these and other procedural changes, and put them into use in our practice. These changes remind us of one important benefit to networking – the ability to stay up-to-date on changes in laws and procedures that affect our cases. We can use our knowledge and familiarity with these new rules as an added asset to our employer.

It is also an excellent time to get out of the office and get more involved in your own professional development. You may be asking yourself, why bother joining a local bar association? Maybe you didn't even know that you had that option. You already have so many other expenses, so many other obligations, and who wants to sit through those boring meetings anyway? But you couldn't be more wrong. Whether you are unemployed, working for a solo practitioner, or working for a global mega-firm, joining a professional association is one of the most important investments you can make in your career.

You've heard about how important networking is, haven't you? Even though the Orange County Bar Association is a professional association, it is also a social group. You get to unwind, socialize, and develop new friendships, all while learning new information or brushing up on old skills. As a paralegal member, you can enjoy the camaraderie of fellow paralegals and learn from their personal and professional experiences, as well as gain valuable insight from attorneys, judges, administrators, community leaders, and other legal professionals in your community. Also, by taking the initiative of becoming more involved, you can show that you are dedicated to your chosen career and set yourself apart from others who may be using it as a stepping stone to other things.

Most attorneys know the importance of networking and recognize how critical it is to be a member of an organization such as the Orange County Bar Association. But many attorneys fail to recognize that their paralegal staff benefit in many of the same ways. Attorneys want their paralegals to be educated and professional. They also expect their paralegals to be up-to-date on local, state, and federal rules, and be able to implement rule changes flawlessly. Being a part of the Orange County Bar Association allows paralegals to do just that. It allows them to build a professional network that they can depend on for education and practice assistance. Professional associations also help paralegals gain confidence and increase their level of professionalism – two features that attorneys should prize. Attorneys should not only encourage but support their paralegal staff in their involvement with the Orange County Bar Association.

Another of the many benefits of association membership is the ease of access to a frequent and varied assortment of educational events designed to keep you current in your practice area or offer you new skills. While many paralegals are required to reach particular CLE reporting requirements, advancing your education is about so much more than that. For personal and professional advancement, we should strive to further our knowledge and education at every opportunity. This also allows us to stay on the cutting-edge and up-to-date with rule and procedural changes.

Many paralegals have the desire to get more involved with their profession but simply don't know how to get started or are nervous about the idea. We aren't secretaries, but we aren't attorneys either and we don't want to step on anyone's toes. You are professionals in your own right and now is the time to shake that feeling of uncertainty and take steps toward your own professional future. The Orange County Bar Association is giving you that opportunity – the opportunity to join and become a member of something bigger than yourself, to get involved and make a difference. They are giving you the opportunity to

grow professionally and to invest in yourself and your future. I encourage you to take this opportunity now, embrace it, and start on your own journey.

Linda McGrath-Cruz is a litigation paralegal with the Miami office of Arnstein & Lehr LLP. She has been a member of the OCBA since 2010.

ProfessionalismCommittee
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small-businesses-fail/. (While not a scientific study, the author's conclusions are in line with just about any other search done for the top reason businesses fail.)

[4]*The Florida Bar v. St. Louis*, 967 So.2d 108, 115 (Fla. 2007). The settlement amount for Mr. St. Louis's clients was $59,000,000.

[5]R. Regulating Fla. Bar 4-1.1.

[6]*The Florida Bar v. St. Louis*, 967 So.2d 108, 114 (Fla. 2007). "St. Louis testified that in his estimate, the value of potential future Benlate business that FRF & S surrendered to DuPont far exceeded [the] $6.4 million [payoff]."

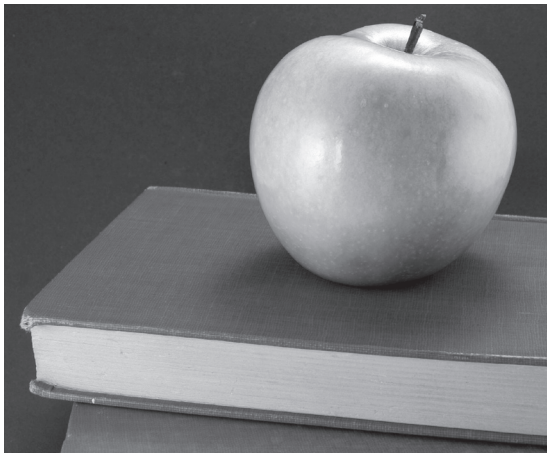
[7]*The Florida Bar v. St. Louis*, 967 So.2d 108, 125 (Fla. 2007).

[8]http://www.orangecountybar.org/committees.

[9]Florida Bar Ethics Hotline (800) 235-8619.

[10]"Talk with an experienced attorney to learn more about being an attorney or about a new area of law. There are seasoned attorneys available to counsel our next generation of lawyers through SCOPE." The Florida Bar website.

[11]"LOMAS was created to assist members dealing with all of the business aspects of setting up, managing, merging or closing a professional practice." The Florida Bar website.



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Dick's proven legal acumen and fair mindedness will greatly benefit our clients and help them reach successful resolutions.

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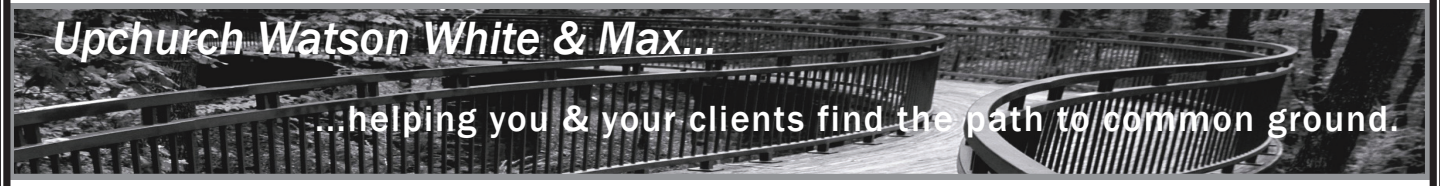

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