



Lawyers in **TRANSITION**

WWW.PHILLYLAWYERSINTRANSITION.ORG

By Daniel J. Siegel

For many attorneys, the dramatic changes in the economy have destroyed the conventional wisdom that law firms were immune from the cutbacks that have impacted other professions. They believed that after graduating from law school they could join a firm, work hard, become a partner and spend the rest of their careers with that firm. When attorneys did move from firm to firm, conventional wisdom was that they would do so when they wanted to, not because of any outside forces.

In recent months, as law firm layoffs have become relatively common, it seems as though no job is secure, and the future of many firms is in flux. According to one recent article, more than 1,200 lawyers have been laid off by large- and mid-size firms in the Philadelphia area since March 2008. In reality, that number is probably much greater.

As a result of this upheaval in the legal landscape, the Philadelphia Bar Association has created “Lawyers in Transition,” a wide-ranging initiative designed to assist lawyers who suddenly find themselves out of work, or who are concerned that they could be the next victims of the economy. An umbrella for all of the Bar Association’s efforts, Lawyers in Transition includes programs, online tools and other resources for lawyers aimed at helping them find work, build their practices and/or prepare to open their own practices.

“For many lawyers, it’s like going through a divorce,” said Mary Platt, co-chair of the Association’s Law Practice Management Division (LPM). “When you go through a divorce, you have to reinvent yourself and relearn skills that you may have forgotten about over the years, like dating. For lawyers who are suddenly out of work, they need to relearn how to interview, how to prepare a resume and how to present themselves so that they are attractive to potential employers.”

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“We understand how critical it is for the Philadelphia Bar Association to be a key resource that will provide assistance every step of the way,” said Chancellor Sayde J. Ladov. “We’ve made room at Bar Association headquarters so that attorneys can use a computer to help with a job search or check e-mail. We’re also concentrating many of our programs on ways to assist these attorneys. We want them to understand that the Bar Association is there for them through difficult times as well as good times.”

The Lawyers in Transition web site (PhillyLawyersInTransition.org) contains a variety of information specifically geared toward assisting lawyers affected by the economy. The site contains:

- Information about upcoming CLE and other Bar Association or related programs;
- A blog with contributions written by lawyers experiencing these transitions;

- Links to other sites with information that can help lawyers;
- The Association’s LPM Vendor Referral Program, along with a list of vendors who can provide various types of assistance;
- A bulletin board/forum in which registered users can talk candidly and openly with each other about their situation;
- Networking opportunities to help lawyers find jobs, develop new associations, and obtain the information necessary if they decide to open their own practices;
- Ethical information, as well as links to ethics opinions and other professional responsibility resources.

The kickoff event for Lawyers in Transition was a May 13 continuing legal education program sponsored jointly by the Bar Association’s Law Practice Management Division and the Pennsylvania Bar Institute. This half-day program, which was offered at no cost to lawyers “in transition,” featured speakers who addressed key topics that lawyers need to know as they explore their options, including:

- Legal malpractice, medical insurance information and options;

- Ethical concerns for new solo attorneys and for the firms with which they had been associated;
- Setting up IOLTA/Trust accounts;
- An overview of the basic technology and other items needed to set up a practice;
- Networking tools;
- Marketing information;
- Suggestions on how to conduct an effective job search, including how to interview favorably and how to prepare a resume that will attract employers.

Among the speakers at the May 13 program were Ellen Freedman, law practice management coordinator for the Pennsylvania Bar Association; Kenneth J. Hagreen of Lawyers

Programs and Events



Lawyers in Transition Kickoff Reception

Wednesday, May 27, 2009
04:30 PM



Spark Networking Event

June 1st
5-9 p.m.
The Hub at Cira Centre



ABA RECESSION RECOVERY TELECONFERENCE SERIES

SOLOutions:
June 2 @ noon CDT



Alternative Careers Academy for Attorneys

How to sell yourself:
Developing perfect pitch

FUTURE EVENTS

Careers in Government and Public Service
Wednesday, June 10, 2009

Concerned for Lawyers of Pennsylvania, Inc.; Elizabeth Lloyd of Ajilon Legal; Barbara Rosenberg, who focuses her practice on professional responsibility; and Gina Furia Rubel of Furia Rubel Communications, Inc.

“Our goal is to concentrate all of our efforts to assist these lawyers,” said Kenneth Shear, executive director of the Bar Association. “We are working with every aspect of the Association in this regard.”

Created at the suggestion of former Chancellor Alan Feldman, LPM concentrates its efforts on teaching lawyers about the practice of law, rather than the substance. As a result, LPM’s programs, and its constituent committees, are vital to the Bar Association’s efforts to assist its members.

Among LPM’s initiatives are programs sponsored by the Practice Technology Committee highlighting start-up law firm technology and ways to effectively use technology on a shoestring. The Solo and Small Firm Committee, another LPM subcommittee, has and will continue to offer programs focusing on the needs of those lawyers who find themselves “suddenly solo.”

“We are concentrating all of our efforts toward helping these lawyers,” said Harper Dimmerman, co-chair of the Solo and Small Firm Committee. Recently, Dimmerman’s committee worked with the LPM Marketing Committee to sponsor a program offering suggestions on how solo and small firm lawyers can effectively market themselves.

The Solo and Small Firm Committee also plans to offer a program aimed at helping solo and small firm attorneys create strategies so they can work with general counsel in large corporations to provide the types of services normally handled by large firms, but at a fraction of the cost. “We are always looking for suggestions about effective programs, and hope that members of the Association will continue to suggest them,” said Dimmerman.

In addition, Chancellor Ladov has requested that practice area committees also focus their programs on ways to help lawyers in

transition. In particular, one of Ladov’s goals is for the practice-specific committees to offer basic overview programs so that lawyers who are suddenly on their own can learn the nuts and bolts of areas in which they may not be familiar, such as estate planning, estate administration, workers’ compensation, civil litigation, etc.

“We want to be a comprehensive resource to lawyers, providing whatever services and information are needed,” added Ladov.

Another initiative of the Bar Association is the newly created Attorney Career Development Committee, which was formed specifically to address the career and client development needs of attorneys coping with a challenging economic environment. Chaired by Arthur Bousel, a legal career coach, the committee’s goal is to bring together attorneys from all practice areas and phases of their careers to collaborate on developing new business or career opportunities.

Other programs the Bar Association is planning are networking events designed to enable lawyers in transition to meet other attorneys in similar situations, and to allow growing firms the opportunity to meet these attorneys to discover possible synergies.

The Bar Association’s focus on lawyers in transition is meant to be an ongoing initiative aimed at helping lawyers until and even after the economy stabilizes.

“I plan to focus my efforts as Chancellor in 2010 on a variety of issues, including the impact of the economy on our profession,” said Chancellor-Elect Scott Cooper. “Our Lawyers in Transition is one of the programs I will emphasize as Chancellor so that we can continue to make the Bar Association relevant to all members, regardless of their circumstances.” ■

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