

IT'S NEVER TOO EARLY TO START GIVING BACK

By Elisabeth A. Sadowski

If you are going to be a lawyer, and just practice your profession, well, you have a skill, so you're very much like a plumber. But if you want to be a true professional, you will do something outside yourself, something to repair tears in your community, something to make life a little better for people less fortunate than you. That's what I think a meaningful life is. One lives not just for oneself, but for one's community.

—Ruth Bader Ginsburg, Associate Justice of the Supreme Court of the United States, while in conversation with the Rev. Professor Jane Shaw, Dean for Religious Life, February 6, 2017 in Stanford Memorial Church¹

Young lawyers bring tremendous skill and qualification to any organization that they join. No one is “too junior” to get involved. And given the relative privilege that our profession confers on us, there are both an ethical imperative and a host of practical reasons, to contribute to the legal community and the community at large.

Roger Watts of Lindsay LLP, who often mentors young lawyers, reflects on the adage that “you don’t know what you don’t know” in your first five years of practice. According to Watts, when junior lawyers consider volunteer positions like sitting on a board or an executive, they will state with greater certainty that they *do* know that they are not qualified for such tasks. “That is no excuse. Be bold. Get involved,” says Watts. “Everyone has to start somewhere, and you will not get the experience or qualifications until you put yourself out there.”

CONTRIBUTING TO THE LEGAL COMMUNITY

Volunteering your time in the legal community is mutually beneficial. It is imperative for young lawyers to have resources beyond their firms, partic-

ularly if they work for sole practitioners or at smaller firms. By volunteering, you can expand your network beyond your firm and meet other like-minded junior, intermediate or senior counsel in your practice area that you might not otherwise have the chance to meet.

Developing relationships within the legal community is not just about networking; it is more about connecting with others at all levels of call. Michael Slater, Q.C., of Slater Vecchio LLP cites Scott Gerber and Ryan Paugh from their book, *Superconnector*: “Being a Superconnector isn’t a talent or a gift—it’s having the awareness to realize that we all want the same things, even if we take different paths. It’s reaching out to someone else and saying, ‘I can help you get there.’”² In other words, having common shared experiences and working alongside those with similar goals create connection. And those connections will only enhance your personal and professional life.

Examples of how you can contribute to the legal community include joining legal associations and becoming part of their executives; writing in legal journals, in magazines and on blogs; speaking at seminars and workshops; and mentoring students, from high school to law school and beyond.

LEGAL ASSOCIATIONS

Several legal organizations across the province accept law students and lawyers at all years of call as their members, and many organizations offer discounted rates for younger lawyers.

Canadian Bar Association, British Columbia Branch (the “CBABC”)

The CBABC is a 6,500+ member organization with over 70 sections³ across the province. The sections are “practice-focused groups organized by substantive areas of law. They provide education, resources and opportunities. They also address legal issues, regulations and trends.”⁴

Sign up to a section that appeals to your interests and/or practice areas. There are sections specifically for young lawyers, for women lawyers and in areas ranging from Aboriginal law to children’s law, health law and wills and estates. After signing up to a section of interest, event notifications arrive via e-mail during the sections’ term from September 1 to August 31.

Each section is run by an executive of volunteers, elected from the membership, who create events throughout the year. The executives typically put out a call for nominations in May of each year; however, it is always best to attend events and make connections with the section members, executive and chairs prior to the election to increase your chances of being elected.

In addition to the section executives, volunteer committees “operate ... to implement programs and ... serve the interests of the profession and the public.”⁵ Some standing committees include an advisory committee to the

Judicial Council of B.C.; committees addressing issues of access to justice, legislation, law reform and professional development; the *BarTalk* editorial board; and many others. Further information about the committees and the relevant contact information can be found online.⁶

Vancouver Bar Association (the “VBA”)

The VBA is made up of over 1,500 lawyers in Vancouver and beyond. You can join the VBA as a member,⁷ attend one of their events⁸ or reach out to their current executive.⁹

The executive, which is elected every November at the VBA's Annual General Meeting, manages a number of events including the welcoming ceremonies for new appointments to the B.C. Supreme Court and Court of Appeal; works with downtown firms in administering articling and summer student interview guidelines; assists with fundraising for law-related events, charities and non-profit organizations; operates the Barristers' Lounge at the Vancouver Law Courts; and publishes the VBA's legal journal, the *Advocate*.

Trial Lawyers Association of BC (“TLABC”)

TLABC is a legal organization of over 1,500 legal professionals whose mandate is “to support and promote the rights of individuals in BC”.

As a TLABC member, you will support advocacy initiatives; receive TLABC's legal magazine, *The Verdict*; and access legal education seminars, webinars and the exclusive trial practice list server (featuring plaintiff-only personal injury, plaintiff-only medical negligence, estate litigation, family law, criminal defence, employment law and corporate/commercial litigation). The list server allows you to connect with lawyers in your chosen practice area, and it has an archive of messages that go back more than 15 years.

For young lawyers, the New Lawyers Committee organizes an annual retreat, social lectures throughout the year called “Trial by Fire No More” and other events for young lawyers.

TLABC membership director, Karen St.Aubin, encourages young lawyers to attend events and seminars and post on the list server: “Get out of your comfort zone. Put yourself out there and get involved. Challenge yourself to meet at least two people at every event that you attend.”

Later, you can go a step further and see how you can volunteer as an event organizer. St.Aubin is a perfect example of someone who practises what she preaches. She is a regular volunteer with Dress for Success and recently served as president of the Vancouver chapter of the International Live Events Association.

LEGAL EDUCATION

Writing

The Honourable Marion J. Allan began contributing to the legal community as a volunteer at a women's legal aid centre when she was a law student in the mid-1970s and has continued making contributions for decades through her countless contributions to academia. Allan has devoted considerable time to elder law issues and has been engaged in research with the Canadian Centre for Elder Law Studies.¹⁰ She has also been a speaker at several conferences and seminars through the Continuing Legal Education Society of BC ("CLEBC"), the CBABC and the TLABC. She encourages young lawyers to be open to evolving in the ways of contributing to the legal community while progressing through a career.

Writing articles in magazines or journals, conducting seminars or workshops, and even blogging are excellent ways to expand your knowledge and contribute to the legal community. And writing can help to market yourself to prospective clients. Online and print articles will attract visitors to your website and, ultimately, to your firm.

If you believe you need some extra support in writing an article for a legal journal or magazine, pitch an idea to an intermediate or senior counsel at your office and ask if they would be willing to co-author the piece with you.

Remember that contributions to legal journals or magazines can earn you up to six Continuing Professional Development ("CPD") credits (half of the credits you need each year) by submitting your activities through the Law Society of B.C.¹¹ Here are some leading B.C. legal publications to consider.

Legal Journal/ Magazine	Association	Circulation (Approx.)	Frequency	Submissions
<i>The Advocate</i>	VBA	14,000	Six times per year	Submit articles to the editor, D. Michael Bain, at <mbain@the-advocate.ca>, ensuring submission guidelines are followed. ¹²
<i>BarTalk</i>	CBABC	7,000	Six times per year	An article synopsis can be submitted to the editor, Deb Carfrae, at <bartalk@cbabc.org>. ¹³
<i>The Verdict</i>	TLABC	6,000	Four times per year	Article abstracts (250 words or less), the author's CV and a brief bio can be submitted to the publisher, Julia Chalifoux, at <julia@tlabc.org>. ¹⁴

In addition, many lawyers maintain their own blogs. Topics often include practical, procedural and substantive information directed at prospective clients. Writing blog articles ensures that you stay up to date on the latest legal developments and case law in your field.

Some lawyers' blogs in our province have become go-to resources for prospective and current clients, as well as lawyers. Erik Magraken of MacIsaac & Company's BC Injury Law and ICBC Claims Blog¹⁵ and Georgiale Lang's family law blog, Lawdiva,¹⁶ are frequently visited by lawyers practising in those fields for up-to-date information and expert perspective.

From a business perspective, blog content creation is a top priority for marketers. For example, "Companies that published 16+ blog posts per month got almost 3.5x more traffic than companies that published 0-4 monthly posts".¹⁷ Blog publishing can also elevate your profile and provide additional content for any of your related social media platforms, such as LinkedIn, Facebook or Twitter. Some social media management platforms, like Hootsuite¹⁸ and Later,¹⁹ can further assist a blogger by scheduling posts days, weeks or months in advance.

Speaking Engagements

In addition to written publications, a number of speaking opportunities are available with legal associations and organizations. Don't let your short time in practice discourage you—even as a young lawyer, you may have experience unique to your field, and there is always tremendous value in teaming up with a senior counsel to present a talk.

CLEBC publications and courses throughout the year create opportunities for speakers to contribute.²⁰ Similarly, the TLABC, CBABC and organizations like the Canadian Defence Lawyers²¹ feature speakers throughout the year. For example, Jason Newton of Stevens Virgin, spoke at an event held by the Canadian Defence Lawyers when he had been called to the bar for just a few months, reflecting on his experience of having five actions dismissed in a six-day trial.

MENTORING

For a young lawyer, having a mentor is as important as mentoring law students, graduates or even high school students who are interested in law. Many future lawyers have few or no connections to lawyers before beginning a career, and the impact of a mentor can leave a lasting impression with a young lawyer.

The CBABC has a Student Mentoring Program that links law students from the University of British Columbia, University of Victoria and

Thompson Rivers University with participating lawyers from across the province.²²

Mentoring can also happen informally, through personal connections. Friends may have children or other family members who are interested in the law. More frequently, law students and graduates will contact your firm looking for work experience or an articling position. Even if your firm does not have a position available, consider taking the time to meet the individual for coffee. Mentoring takes many forms—ask a student to bring in a resume and offer them feedback; offer some insight into your practice area, especially if they are unsure about the area they want to specialize in; recommend books or articles; and ask if they would be interested in “job shadowing” (when appropriate). For example, if you are a litigator, ask them if they want to watch you in chambers or observe an anticipated interesting cross-examination during one of your trials.

Mentoring can be beneficial to all concerned. Most senior counsel will always remember the lawyers who helped them when they were at an early stage of their career. As a younger lawyer, do not underestimate the impact your perspectives will have on others who are interested in the profession.

CONTRIBUTING TO THE COMMUNITY AT LARGE

As lawyers, we are often confronted with prospective clients unable to afford our services. Some may require a lawyer in a different area of law. While it is necessary to balance time and fees, it is also important to provide individuals with information about resources and the next steps. Advocacy begins at your own firm. Prospective clients look to lawyers for answers, and a little research can go a long way to point prospective clients in the right direction while building goodwill towards your own practice or firm.

Beyond providing legal advice and advocacy, a great demand exists for law graduates in non-law-related organizations and charities. Many groups would love to have a law graduate or a young volunteer lawyer to provide a unique perspective. Giving back to the community is a great way for young lawyers to start their career. It can help by expanding your network and setting yourself apart in future interviews and interactions with senior counsel.

Pro Bono

Pro bono is rewarding on many levels. Most organizations are flexible about their time commitments, and a young lawyer can volunteer almost anywhere, for a few hours a month to a few hours a week.

There are countless benefits to volunteering for a pro bono program. In addition to contributing to the community, you gain valuable advocacy skills, better your client-management skills, increase your confidence and develop

long-lasting relationships. The Honourable Madam Justice Francesca V. Marzari refers to her own pro bono experience through West Coast LEAF (Women's Legal Education and Action Fund),²³ through which she made connections with people who later played pivotal roles in her career.²⁴

Several pro bono organizations and programs exist across the province that welcome lawyers of all levels and various areas of practice. Access Pro Bono is a non-profit organization with several programs and workshops,²⁵ and Amici Curiae is "a non-profit society offering workshops that help the public complete the legal forms necessary to present a matter to a court or a tribunal".²⁶

Additionally, many legal advocacy programs are in need of young lawyers: Artists' Legal Outreach,²⁷ the MOSAIC Legal Advocacy Program²⁸ and the Multiple Sclerosis Society of Canada Volunteer Legal Advocacy Program (B.C. and Yukon chapter)²⁹ are just a few, and with a little research you can find something of specific interest to you.

Non-Profit Organizations and Charities

If you want to join and aid a non-profit organization or charity, you want to pick something that you have a connection to or strong interest in. Some lawyers choose to get involved with charities that have benefitted them or people they know, such as a health-related organization that has aided a family member. Or they may choose an organization that is associated with a hobby or sport that they love. Other lawyers may choose organizations in which their children already participate, offering the dual benefit of increasing family time and contributing to the community.

Do not limit yourself to organizations you feel passionate about, and do not feel as though you have to join a board in order to contribute. You can start as a volunteer to help you become familiar with the aims and operations of the organization.

Young lawyers can enjoy many benefits by getting involved in their community. Rose Keith, who is involved in organizations in the legal community and the community at large (TLABC, CBABC, BC Lupus Society, Cycling BC and Ovarian Cancer Canada, to name a few), remarks that lawyers have a unique skill set that can easily be overlooked if they are not involved in the community. She believes that lawyers need to be familiar with governance and how boards are run. By contributing and being involved, young lawyers can strengthen their communication skills and their ability to understand and resolve conflict, to make them better lawyers. Roger Watts has a similar view of the overlapping benefits of involvement in the community and bettering a young lawyer's professional skills. Watts has been heavily involved in the Carousel Theatre for Young

People and Touchstone Theatre's annual *The Lawyer Show* (both on-stage and off) and maintains that the experience has sharpened his time management skills and improved to his work–life balance.

Community involvement expands your network, allowing you to meet more people who may later require your legal services. Although networking should not be the main motivator for getting involved in the community, the people you meet and those who benefit from your activities will grow in number and, in return, contribute to your personal and professional growth.

CONCLUSION

As a junior lawyer myself, I call on other young lawyers to honour our calling and get involved in any way you can, whether it's by joining a practice area executive, volunteering at your local high school or sitting on the board of a registered charity. The worst case scenario is that you may be turned away, but do not feel discouraged. In your own legal community or in the community at large, the need for people to be involved is never ending. So be proactive and find a place to make your own contribution to the community, because everyone has their own value.

ENDNOTES

- Rathbun Lecture on a Meaningful Life (6 February 2017), online: Stanford University <rathbun.stanford.edu/webcast>.
- Scott Gerber & Ryan Paugh, *Superconnector: Stop Networking and Start Building Business Relationships that Matter* (New York: Da Capo, 2018).
- CBABC, "About Sections", online: <www.cbabc.org/Sections-and-Community/About-Sections>.
- CBABC, "Sections and Community", online: <www.cbabc.org/Sections-and-Community>.
- CBABC, "Committees", online: <www.cbabc.org/Sections-and-Community/Committees>.
- Ibid.*
- VBA, "Become a Member", online: <www.vancouverbar.ca/become-a-member>.
- VBA, "Events", online: <www.vancouverbar.ca/events>.
- VBA, "Executive Members", online: <www.vancouverbar.ca/about-us/executive-members>.
- Online: <www.bcli.org/ccel>.
- You can claim credit by "writing law books or articles intended for publication and relating to the study or practice of law or to be included in course materials for any audience". A maximum of six hours is available for each writing project, based on the actual time to produce the final product. Credit is available for volunteer or part-time writing only, and not for writing that is done as a part of the lawyer's regular employment. More information can be found at Law Society of British Columbia, "Eligible Activities", online: <www.lawsociety.bc.ca/support-and-resources-for-lawyers/continuing-professional-development/eligible-activities>.
- The Advocate, "Submissions", online: <www.theadvocate.ca/submissions.html>.
- CBABC, *BarTalk*, "Contact Us", online: <www.cbabc.org/BarTalk/Contact>.
- TLABC, "Submissions: *The Verdict Magazine*", online: <www.tlabc.org/index.cfm?pg=ArticleSubmissions>.
- Erik Magraken, BC Injury Law and ICBC Claims Blog, online: <www.bc-injury-law.com/blog>.
- Georgiale Lang, Lawdiva (Blog), online: <lawdiva.wordpress.com>.
- HubSpot, "The Ultimate List of Digital Marketing Statistics for 2018", online: <www.hubspot.com/marketing-statistics>.
- Online: <www.hootsuite.com>.
- Online: <www.later.com>.
- CLEBC, "Contribute", online: <www.cle.bc.ca/contribute>.
- Canadian Defence Lawyers, "Events", online: <www.cdlawyers.org/events/index.html>.
- CBABC, "Student Mentorship Program", online: <www.cbabc.org/Professional-Development/Mentorship/Student-Mentorship-Program>.
- West Coast LEAF, "Volunteer", online: <www.westcoastleaf.org/take-action/volunteer>.
- CBABC Women Lawyers Forum, Annual General Meeting (June 12, 2018).
- Access Pro Bono, "Programs", online: <www.accessprobono.ca/programs>; Access Pro Bono, "Lawyer

- Registration”, online: <www.accessprobono.ca/lawyer-registration>. The Access Pro Bono program manager of the pro bono clinic operations, Frank Yates, can be reached at <fyates@accessprobono.ca> or at 604-482-3195 (ext. 1508).
26. Amici Curiae (Friends of Court), “About Us”, online: <www.legalformsbc.ca/about-us.html>; Amici Curiae (Friends of Court), “I Want to Help”, online: <www.legalformsbc.ca/i-want-to-help.html>. The main contact at Amici Curiae is Dom Bautista, who is also the executive director of the Law Courts Center. Dom can be reached at <dom@lawcourtscenter.com> or at 604-551-2727.
27. Artists’ Legal Outreach, online: <www.artistslegaloutreach.com>. Contact <artistslegaloutreach@gmail.com> if you would like to volunteer.
28. MOSAIC, “Legal Advocacy Program”, online: <www.mosaicbc.org/services/settlement/legal-advocacy-program>. For more information on how to volunteer, contact <volunteer@mosaicbc.org>.
29. MS Society of Canada, “Volunteer Legal Advocacy Program — BC & Yukon” online: <www.mssociety.ca/support-services/programs-and-services/198/volunteer-legal-advocacy-program-bc-yukon>. Contact the VLAP coordinator at <vlap-bcy@mssociety.ca> or at 604-602-3236 if you would like to volunteer.



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