

A Call for Increased Engagement— Then and Now



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Alone we can do so little; together we can do so much.
—Helen Keller

I write this article after just having returned from three inspiring days at the 2018 State Bar of Michigan NEXT Conference. During the conference, I had the privilege of attending the annual 50-Year Golden Celebration Luncheon, recognizing and honoring lawyers who have been SBM members since 1968. They were admitted to the Bar during a period of turmoil: student protests erupting against the war in Vietnam on college campuses across the country; riots in 100 cities nationwide following the April 4 assassination of Martin Luther King Jr.; and the report of the Kerner Commission, appointed by President Johnson, declaring that the nation was “moving toward two societies, one black, one white—separate and unequal.”¹

While it was a challenging time to enter the practice of law, it was also a time of great opportunity. There were 10,241 members, and the president, John Starr, focused on encouraging increased participation in programs and services to improve the legal

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profession in Michigan. He wrote in one of his President's Page columns:

Mindful as he is of the outstanding contributions made by his predecessors in office, no man approaches a job of this magnitude without consciously setting significant goals toward which he would strive.

Perhaps the most ambitious, and to me, one of the most imperative, of these goals is that of wider participation on the part of the general membership in the many areas of concern to be found within the legal profession and its organizational structure. To the lawyer who is willing to commit a portion of his [or her] time, talent and energy in devoted service to his [or her] State Bar there will come satisfaction out of all proportion to the hours spent.²

Fifty years later, I find myself focused on the same core issue, but in a very different world with very different technologies.

Coming together as public citizens

Although we are competing with advances in technology and innovation and nonlawyers who desire to enter the legal market, we can come together as one profession to demonstrate that lawyers continue to play a significant and important role in our society. We have the ability with our education, training, and ethical obligation to

positively affect the justice system for Michigan citizens. This ability and obligation set us apart from other professionals. As confirmed in the Preamble to MRPC 1.0, a lawyer is not just a representative of clients and an officer of the legal system, but a *public citizen* having special responsibility for the quality of justice. The Preamble states:

As a public citizen, a lawyer should seek improvement of the law, the administration of justice and the quality of service rendered by the legal profession. As a member of a learned profession, a lawyer should cultivate knowledge of the law beyond its use for clients, employ that knowledge in reform of the law and work to strengthen legal education. A lawyer should be mindful of deficiencies in the administration of justice and of the fact that the poor, and sometimes persons who are not poor, cannot afford adequate legal assistance, and should therefore devote professional time and civic influence in their behalf. A lawyer should aid the legal profession in pursuing these objectives and should help the bar regulate itself in the public interest.³

Opportunities to seek improvement of the law and administration of justice

Much of the work of Michigan lawyers as public citizens is accomplished through

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hours donated generously for the work of the SBM. In seeking improvements to the administration of justice and reform of the law, our committees and sections review legislation, court rules, and model jury instructions to evaluate the impact of proposed court rule changes or legislation on areas of practice. This analysis and debate provide valuable and necessary feedback to legislators and the Michigan Supreme Court.

However, one need not be a member of a committee or a section to review the proposed changes in the law and provide feedback to the SBM or the Supreme Court. The Public Policy Resource Center contains the agenda for matters to be considered by the SBM Board of Commissioners' Public Policy Committee or the Representative Assembly, and an opportunity to comment on each agenda item.⁴ Members can also sign up to receive weekly public policy updates in their email inboxes. Similar to the e-Journal, which provides notice of the cases that affect members' practices, the public policy updates provide notice of proposed changes in the law so members can be informed and share their thoughts, if desired.⁵ Comments can also be provided directly to the Supreme Court Administrative Office in response to proposed court rule changes.⁶ This is an impactful way for members to be engaged as public citizens in the Bar's work.

Opportunities afforded by social media to be engaged and informed

Unlike when John Starr sent out his request for increased engagement in 1968, social media provides the SBM with enhanced tools to reach members across the state. A member simply needs to follow the SBM's various social media sources to be informed and engaged regarding potential

changes in the law, resources and tools available to members, events of interest, and opportunities to give back. The SBM is on Twitter at @MIStateBar and Facebook. Members can discover the latest SBM or state and national legal news as it unfolds. Social media also allows members to connect and engage with one another through Twitter, Facebook, or the SBM-sponsored group on LinkedIn. Members can hold informal discussions, share news, and post and seek employment on the jobs board. For those who have not taken advantage of these resources, the SBM e-Journal regularly includes articles to help members use social media and other marketing tools. Recent articles have included "Twitter for Your Law Practice in 2018," "Is Instagram for Lawyers?," "Six Ways to Improve your LinkedIn Profile," "It's Time to Review Your Marketing Plan," and "Social Media and Lawyers in 2018."⁷ I urge members to utilize social media resources to be informed and more engaged with the Bar.

Social media may seem like a natural source of information for the next generation of lawyers, but we should continue to encourage and support our lawyers, especially young lawyers, to become active in the association. Exposing lawyers to SBM leaders and volunteer opportunities at an early stage in their careers is a win-win for lawyers and the profession. Their involvement provides the foundation for a strong profession in the future, with members focused on our core values and the responsibility to be leaders in society and benefit the public we serve.

Bar association involvement improves a lawyer's sense of community

Besides networking and leadership, bar association involvement can improve a lawyer's satisfaction and happiness in the prac-

tice of law by promoting a sense of legal community and providing a support system.⁸ We should not underestimate the importance of achieving satisfaction in the law and the sense of community, considering it has been estimated that 28 percent of lawyers are depressed.⁹ In a recent study of professionals, lawyers were ranked the loneliest workers.¹⁰ Lonely and unhappy workers perform more poorly, quit more often, and feel less satisfied with their jobs—costing employers \$3.5 billion a year.¹¹ If our lawyers are not satisfied, either personally or professionally, not only does their productivity suffer, but they may leave their firms or the profession.

A recent article in the *Stanford Law Review* stressed the importance of networks and connections, and suggested that we can increase lawyers' satisfaction and happiness by providing opportunities for pro bono and charitable activities, real leadership roles, and opportunities to "represent the firm through activities that can also promote business development."¹² Despite the myths we hear about the next generation of lawyers, millennials and Generation Z will gravitate toward bar association work because they value connection, collaboration, and community outreach.¹³ It is therefore important not to simply encourage engagement, but to actively support bar association work. It is easier for lawyers to work, raise a family, and be active in a bar association if that activity is valued by their employers and firms. And if a few hours spent on bar association work each month generate satisfaction and a sense of community, those hours are not a loss of billable time but an investment in a lawyer's career and longevity and our profession.

The beauty of bar association involvement is that it is always available, and there are opportunities at both the state and local level or through an affinity bar association to give back to the profession and the community. And it's a simple recipe for success: if you give of your time and talents, leadership opportunities will naturally present themselves. While we all should encourage new lawyers to become active, I would encourage lawyers to volunteer at any time in their careers when their schedule permits. We need your diverse viewpoints and ideas.

Fifty years after John Starr asked members to be more engaged in bar association work, I encourage our members to do the same. While our membership has increased fourfold from 1968, there are now more opportunities to stay informed about the SBM's work, connect and be aware of opportunities to jump in when time permits, and provide feedback on changes in the law. Each of us can have a positive impact on our role as public citizens by donating our time to bar association work or by simply being engaged, informed, and encouraging members. Please join us! ■

ENDNOTES

1. Kerner Comm, *Report of the Nat'l Advisory Comm on Civil Disorders* (1968).
2. Starr, *The President's Page*, 46 Mich St B J 10, 6 (October 1967). I would like to thank Samantha Meinke for her work in locating this article for purposes of the 50-Year Golden Celebration Luncheon and this column.

3. Comment, *Preamble: A Lawyer's Responsibility*, MRPC 1.0.
4. SBM, *Public Policy Resource Center* <<https://www.michbar.org/publicpolicy/Home>>. All websites cited in this article were accessed October 12, 2018.
5. SBM, *e-Publication Subscription* <<https://www.michbar.org/publications/subscription>>.
6. Michigan Courts, *Proposed Rules, Rule Amendments, Administrative Orders, and Appointments* <<https://courts.michigan.gov/courts/michigansupremecourt/rules/court-rules-admin-matters/pages/default.aspx>>.
7. Each of these articles is included within the e-Journals for the recent months and typically duplicated for a week before a new article is posted. There is also a social media series on the SBM website containing step-by-step webinars on how to use each of these tools: SBM, *Learning*, PMRC <<https://www.michbar.org/pmrc/Learning-EZ>>.
8. Davis-Laack, *What Makes Lawyers Happy? It's Not What You Think*, Forbes (December 19, 2017) <<https://www.forbes.com/sites/pauladavislaack/2017/12/19/what-makes-lawyers-happy-its-not-what-you-think/#7ed26c2917e5>>.
9. Zaretsky, *Stressed-Out Lawyers in First 10 Years of Practice More Likely to Have Mental-Health and Wellness Issues*, Above the Law (August 21, 2018) <<https://abovethelaw.com/2018/08/stressed-out-lawyers-in-first-10-years-of-practice-more-likely-to-have-mental-health-and-wellness-issues/>>.
10. Achor, et al, *America's Loneliest Workers, According to Research*, Harvard Bus Rev (March 19, 2018) <<https://hbr.org/2018/03/americas-loneliest-workers-according-to-research>>. See also Krieger & Sheldon, *What Makes Lawyers Happy? A Data-Driven Prescription to Redefine Professional Success*, 83 Geo Wash L Rev 554 (2015) <<https://ir.law.fsu.edu/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?article=1093&context=articles>>.
11. *American's Loneliest Workers*.
12. Westfahl & Perkins, *The Leadership Imperative: A Collaborative Approach to Professional Development in the Global Age of More for Less*, 69 Stanford L Rev 1667 (2017) <<https://review.law.stanford.edu/wp-content/uploads/sites/3/2017/06/69-Stan.-L.-Rev.-1667.pdf>>.
13. Underwood, *Why Millennials Join Associations and What Associations Can Do to Keep Them*, Naylor Ass'n Solutions (July 7, 2016) <<https://www.naylor.com/associationadviser/millennials-join-associations>>.



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