

# “What’s In It For Me”



John T. Berry

**F**ield of Dreams is one of my favorite movies. In the latter part of this sentimental, sports and fantasy movie is a great conversation between the two main characters. Ray, who has sacrificed much throughout the story, says to Shoeless Joe Jackson, “I haven’t once asked what’s in it for me.” Jackson responds, “What are you saying?” After stuttering and shuffling his feet, Ray admits, “I’m saying what’s in it for me.”

In a conversation I once had with a bar leader from another state, the question arose as to bar dues: What should the amount be? Should there be any at all? My response was that there were a number of questions to be answered before you got to that one. The first and foremost for anyone asking the question is what’s in it for me, my profession, and my society; what is being provided; and is it being provided efficiently.

There are two polar positions that cause immediate responses to that question. One

says, “I get absolutely nothing for my dues” and the other defensively says, “Let me list the myriad advantages—aren’t you lucky?” As with most polar arguments, I would posit that the truth lies somewhere in between, though I hope you will feel more and more that the Bar provides you valuable benefits.

In our look at the State Bar of Michigan, let’s first examine some history over the last few years through the critical but hopefully objective eyes of a new executive director. It has been eight years since a dues increase. Much has happened. Some clearly good, some clearly bad, some subject to debate. Inflation depleted the value of our \$160 dues to where it now would take well over \$190 to have the same buying power. Investments helped us but now seem much less reliable. We have added programs, including Access to Justice, Access to Justice Development Campaign, Lawyers and Judges Assistance Program, and the *e-Journal*, among others. All of the programs are doing good work, with good intentions, but are expensive and wide in scope.

We have stretched ourselves too thin and not focused enough on our fundamental charge of improving the administration of justice and helping you in your day-to-day work. We have not been as efficient with our finances as we could have been, either. A much needed improvement in the Bar building cost too much, even though we do have an improved and more useful facility for members. The cumulative impact of all these are putting a strain on the system.

What has the Bar done in the last year to respond to these forces and what’s next? First, new leadership has been brought in. CPA lawyers have been combined with an already dedicated and hard-working finance committee. A new finance director has been added who has extensive corporate business experience. An outside facilitator has worked with a broad cross-section of our

membership to develop a strategic plan more in line with your needs as expressed by you. We have made dramatic and painful cuts in spending to enable us to balance our budget.

What now? What’s in it for all of us? Many excellent services are already in existence: *e-Journal*, *Bar Journal*, ethics hotline with free ethics advice, Lawyers and Judges Assistance Program, character and fitness review, client protection fund, UPL prosecutions, legislative work consistent with *Keller* guidelines, promoting the administration of justice, and much more.

As mentioned in previous articles, a new emphasis will be placed on helping you according to your desires, not ours—such as with law office management, defining the profession, and prosecuting those who are harming the public by attempting to practice without accountability, education, competence, ethics, or license. If we as an organized bar and as lawyers do not stand up to improve and protect our profession, who will?

What’s in it for you? An opportunity to make a difference. This is a great profession. Focusing and uniting on the common goal of improving it, defining it, and defending it will be worth the price to be paid in dues.

My next article will be a detailed summary of our financial status and projected future status. It will be printed both to inform and hopefully to generate questions and dialogue.

Please help us. We invite your input and direction. ♦

**Share your  
thoughts/concerns**

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[voice@mail.michbar.org](mailto:voice@mail.michbar.org)