
The **a**FFILIATE

The newsletter and resource guide for bar leaders nationwide

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The Multnomah Bar Association: Training Lawyers to Do It Themselves

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By Jodi McShan

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Each day attorneys start their own practices. Some are leaving big firms, and others are hanging out their shingles after passing the bar. As if not enough challenges to practicing law exist, starting your own firm provides an extra hurdle. There are limited resources and support available to attorneys wishing to start their own firms. Many figure it out through trial and error and with the help of friends. Other attorneys fail because of a lack of understanding of all the logistics involved. "Excellent lawyer" does not translate to "excellent solo practitioner." Therefore, attorneys running their own firms must learn to be small business owners.

Law school does not teach the business side of law, but local bar associations recognize the need. For example, the Multnomah Bar Association (MBA), located in Portland, Oregon, has acknowledged the struggles of solo attorneys. For years MBA has presented CLEs, provided guidance, and answered common questions associated with solo practice, but its leadership saw a huge opportunity to do more.

Solo and Small Firm Academy

To create a solution, Jeanne Sinnott, President of the MBA YLS, worked this year with the YLS Board and Shayda Zaerpoor Le on the YLS Solo and Small Firm Academy. Attorneys who started their own firms in the past year or are about to start their own firms are eligible for the Academy. Interested attorneys can apply for a limited number of spots. Applications will start coming in this fall for the inaugural class starting in January. Each group lasts close to five months, and two "Academies" will convene each year. Sessions occur frequently and topics range from the business side of a law firm, to marketing, to how to manage your work-life balance.

Don't Forget Important Upcoming Dates

October 9 - 11, 2014

[Fall Conference – Portland, OR](#)

November 1, 2014

[Next Steps Diversity Challenge Deadline](#)

December 1, 2014

[ABA Midyear Meeting: Assembly Delegate Deadline \(Local Affiliates\)](#)

December 15, 2014

[ABA Midyear Meeting: Assembly Delegate Deadline \(States and Specialty YL Affiliates and Military Branches\)](#)

February 5 - 8, 2015

[YLD Events at the ABA Midyear Meeting – Houston, TX](#)

About The Affiliate

The Affiliate is published electronically six times a year for the

Traci Ray, the Immediate-Past President of the MBA YLS, explained that each session focuses on the needs of solo attorneys just going out on their own. Well-established solo practitioners teach some of the classes during which they share their wealth of knowledge and experience. Topics include client control, marketing, and the ins and outs of being a solo attorney. Other sessions focus on the business aspects of a firm. Presenters will include accountants, business owners, and other professionals. These classes teach students about how to run a small business, from accounting to office management. Topics encompass the day-to-day needs of a small office that law schools fail to incorporate into the curriculum.

Attorneys graduate from this class with information about how to start and run a solo practice, and they will have a group of other solos they can work with to answer questions and turn to for support. Speakers serve not only as instructors for a given session, but they also act as role models and resources for the participating lawyers. This free program gives back to the profession and provides a way for class members to obtain some CLE credits while learning about topics that apply directly to them.

Improving the Profession

Many solo attorneys feel isolated or lost at one point or another, and this program aims to eradicate those feelings of isolation and provide a network of support through classes, mentors, and colleagues.

The committee continues to work diligently to brainstorm creative approaches to common difficulties and, above all else, to support the solo attorney. Traci Ray advised that leaders “listened to all ideas, and picked the best processes to ensure that the program would be successful and meaningful for participants.” Key decisions encompass location, speakers, topics, timing, and selection of candidates. Each bar association faces different needs, and the program should be tailored to meet the needs of members to provide the greatest benefit.

Thus far, the MBA and YLS leadership have responded enthusiastically, and the program is garnering support from all areas of the bar association. The MBA YLS hopes to start a wave of change and provide a strong foundation for beginning solo attorneys. More informed and better-prepared young solo attorneys raise the level of the bar association and improve the profession as a whole.

Solo Support

The small class size encourages interaction among the group and allows for everyone to truly get to know their colleagues. Graduates from Solo and Small Firm Academy will learn from experienced attorneys and other professionals and obtain the best background training possible. They will interact with leaders in the legal profession and in the community and gain mentors that they

American Bar Association Young Lawyers Division’s state, local, and specialty affiliated young lawyer groups. In addition to conveying information to bar leaders around the country about events, meetings, subgrants, and other resources offered through the ABA YLD, *The Affiliate* seeks to inspire new projects through feature articles highlighting individual Affiliate projects and persons involved in public service and membership support.

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may never have had the chance to meet otherwise. Finally, graduates form a bond with their group and with other individuals who are likely enduring the same struggles and celebrating the same victories. The Solo and Small Firm Academy strives to encompass a broad array of educational needs for the new solo attorney, but it also provides support and mentorship for these young lawyers breaking out on their own.

For More Information

For information about services and resources available to Affiliates through the ABA Young Lawyers Division, email yld@americanbar.org.

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