

THE DAILY RECORD

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The MCBA: What's in it for you?

The most important thing is not to stop questioning.

— ALBERT EINSTEIN

At the Monroe County Bar Association, we are always questioning how can we better fulfill our mission? How can we serve you, our members, more effectively? How can we have a more positive impact on the legal community?

We recently conducted a survey of our members and asked you a lot of questions, too. We asked about CLE and *pro bono* and technology. About which member benefits were the most important to you, and why you join and remain an MCBA member. About the challenges faced by the legal profession generally and you specifically. And about how the MCBA can help you meet these challenges.

Boy, did we get an earful! 258 of you took the time to answer, 13 percent of our membership, which is a very strong survey response. Thank you to everyone who filled out the survey and especially the many of you who provided thoughtful comments.

We take them to heart and we will try our best to address as many as possible, particularly those which raised common concerns. We will be publishing the results of the survey in the near future, but some of the responses struck a chord with me, and prompted me to address them in this column.

It was gratifying that for the most part, we seem to be getting things right. Ninety percent of you tell us that you are satisfied or highly satisfied that we are fulfilling our responsibility of service to you, our members and to the legal profession. An even higher number (93.5 percent) are satisfied or highly satisfied with the service you received from the MCBA staff. Of course, anything less than 100 percent is not acceptable, so we will continue to try harder.

There were several recurring themes in the responses regarding challenges faced by lawyers in our community.

First, in the words coined as a political phrase, "it's the economy, stupid." Our members are feeling the pressures of the ongoing economic downturn, with the competing tensions of higher costs and the challenge of developing new business. Regarding higher costs, MCBA can help members with dues waivers from

our Hardship Fund, as well as low cost CLE and our various insurance programs (health, malpractice, etc.). Regarding developing new business, consider signing up for the Lawyer Referral Service.

Second, many survey respondents were stressed by work-life balance concerns. Although, as pointed out by one of the respondents, MCBA cannot create a 30-hour day, we will be looking at adding some time-management programs to our CLE offerings.

Third, our members feel challenged by the growing impact of technology on the practice of law. We will continue to collaborate with the D4 Technology Center (formerly DocuLegal) to add additional technology classes, including Word, Excel, PowerPoint, Acrobat, Litigation Software, and usage of Blackberries and iPhones.

So, what are we doing right? Eighty-six percent of respondents rank CLE as an important or very important member benefit, and the MCBA is the primary source of CLE for 58 percent of respondents. The MCBA offers over 60 live CLE programs each year and has hundreds of pre-recorded programs available.

Many of you indicated that it was inconvenient to come downtown, or not worth the time for a short program. To make CLE more accessible, we just finalized a contract which will enable us to provide webinars online (live and recorded). This will allow you the convenience of CLE at your home or office, any time of day or night.

Another major reason that many attorneys join the MCBA is to network and build relationships with other attorneys and judges (over 80 percent rank networking as important or very important). In addition to networking opportunities at CLEs, MCBA offers many other networking events, including the annual bar-bench holiday party, Law Day luncheon, Federal Court dinner, speaker's forums, receptions, and other such events.

Another place to network through the MCBA is at section and committee events. Seventy-four percent of survey respondents ranked participating in section and committee work as an important or very important reason for being an MCBA member. The MCBA has nine sections and 26 committees. Substantive sections and committees include Trusts and Estates, Real Estate, Litigation,



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Family Law, Business Law, Criminal Justice, Tax, Disability, Labor & Employment, Bankruptcy, Elder Law, Environmental, Municipal, and School Attorneys.

MCBA also has many non-substantive sections and committees. The Solo & Small Practice Committee (formerly the Law Practice Management Committee) focuses on the needs of attorneys who are practicing and managing all aspects of their own firms. Our Young Lawyers Section is open to members admitted less than 10 years or under the age of 36, and at the other end of the generational spectrum is the Senior Attorneys Committee, both of which offer special programs of interest to their members.

The Diversity Committee coordinates the Legal Diversity Clerkship Program with RBBA and GRAWA, and is studying jury diversification. Lawyers Concerned for Lawyers offers anonymous assistance to those suffering from alcoholism, drug addition, depression and other mental illnesses. The new Lawyer Succession Registry Committee provides for a registry to assist families and clients upon a lawyer's death.

A number of attorneys commented on the importance of the MCBA continuing to improve access to justice. The President's Commission on Access to Justice seeks to enhance access by low income people to the legal system, including pro bono. About two-thirds of respondents to the survey indicated that they perform *pro bono* work.

One area where there was a strong dichotomy of opinion was judicial evaluations. Survey respondents ranked judicial evaluations as the fourth most important membership benefit/service provided by the MCBA. However, number of members expressed concern about the perception of bias. We have formed a special committee to study and recommend potential improvements to our judicial evaluation process.

The MCBA is a membership organization of the lawyers, by the lawyers and for the lawyers of Monroe County. Please continue to let us hear from you about how we can best meet your needs.

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