

# Leaning In to the Future

Over the past year, I've spent a significant amount of time researching, discussing, writing, and speaking about the future of the legal profession. As you've seen, and hopefully read, I've devoted a number of my columns in *NWLawyer* to this issue, primarily because of its importance to each and every one of you.

Change isn't on its way, it is here, and, as your Bar, we need to ensure we're aligning our resources and work to support not only the change that is here, but that which is just around the corner.

With that focus in mind, a Strategic Planning Committee comprised of Board of Governors members and the staff Executive Management team has spent several months framing the organization's strategic goals for the next three years. At the September Board of Governors meeting, the full Board took action and approved the goals.

The Committee invested considerable time examining the sea change in the legal profession, acknowledging that the practice of law and delivery of legal services is fundamentally changing. The profession is aging as law school admissions decrease. Young lawyers graduate with staggering debt loads and insufficient and/or limited practice experience. The profession's business model is changing, with firms consolidating and solo firms increasing while clients demand more efficient and less expensive options to meet their needs. Certain aspects of our work are increasingly becoming commoditized and outsourced. These changes add to an already high level of stress in the profession.

Considering the changes in the profession and extensive member feedback received from the membership study, statewide listening tours, and town hall meetings, the Committee concluded that 1) members need greater preparation for the needs of the 21st-century practice, including networking and community building opportunities, inclusiveness, and support with career transitions; and 2) the WSBA is uniquely situated to help address these needs.

Based on its conclusions, the Committee recommended and received full

Board approval on the following 2013–15 strategic goals.

## **The WSBA will prepare and equip members with problem-solving skills for the changing profession.**

Our first goal focuses on ensuring competency and professionalism in today's legal environment, one that we know is changing and evolving even as this magazine goes to print.

We recognize that a successful career in law requires lifelong experiential learning and professional development. It also requires stamina. Under this strategic goal, WSBA will align its educational resources to help members:

- Learn 21st-century practice skills, including the use of technology and the business side of practice;
- Network and build community with others;
- Gain more practice experience;
- Ground their work in ethical practice and professionalism; and
- Mindfully address work-life balance issues.

Unfortunately, many members are not aware of the current services WSBA offers, so we will focus on increasing member awareness of, and involvement and use of, our Lawyer Assistance Program and other resources and tools that support and promote health and well being.

It is also essential that the WSBA lead the way in maintaining high standards of competence and ethics, and we are committed to aligning resources with the requirements of a changing regulatory environment.

## **The WSBA will foster community with and among members and the public.**

Our second goal addresses the fact that there's strength in maintaining and building a strong sense of community throughout the membership, regardless of where you live, your area of practice, or how long you've been in the profession. The WSBA aims to reduce isolation by increasing member access and opportunities to connect with others through sections and through statewide outreach to local, specialty, and minority bar associations. We will continue our focus on sharing information and engaging

with you and the public about programs, member services and decisions, and we'll leverage the value of technology, rather than allowing it to serve as an isolation tool.

## **The WSBA will promote equitable conditions for members from historically underrepresented backgrounds to enter, stay, and thrive in the profession.**

From the membership study conducted in 2012, we have learned about the barriers and disparities that impact members from historically underrepresented backgrounds. We will focus existing WSBA programs and practices to address those barriers and disparities. We will also partner with stakeholders to identify and fill gaps in programming.

## **The WSBA will support member transitions across the life of their practice.**

Careers are dynamic; needs change over time. New members require tools and coordinated support to promote long-term sustainability in the practice of law. Mid-career members could benefit from strategies and support to increase their job satisfaction. Retiring members (end of career or otherwise) need help transitioning successfully out of the practice. The WSBA will focus its programming to help address these varying needs to support members as you transition throughout your law careers.

I commend the Strategic Planning Committee for their thoughtful and deliberate work. I believe these strategic goals align well with the organization's mission, and they provide the focus and direction that enables us to lean in to the future and be a part of finding solutions. Over the next year, I look forward to sharing more about WSBA's plans and progress on its 2013–15 strategic goals. **NWL**

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