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ORANGE COUNTY BAR ASSOCIATION YOUNG LAWYERS DIVISION

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YLD: ENGAGING THE YOUNG LAWYER

by KELLY L. GALLIGAN

My name is Kelly Galligan and I am the Chair of the Orange County Bar Association's (OCBA) Young Lawyer's Division (YLD). Since joining the OCBA, I have received outreach and support from its members. You have made it clear that you are a resource for young lawyers and are eager to discover how to best reach and engage us. I am frequently asked what professional support we need and how you can entice us to get more involved. It's challenging to answer these questions because our group is so diverse that each member's response would likely differ from the next. For that reason, the YLD leadership team and I conducted an informal, ten-question survey of our members to check their pulse. Turns out either most of them don't have a pulse or the survey got lost in their sea of endless incoming emails. Despite the low response rate, I have made a variety of assumptions and generalizations based on this unscientific and mostly humorous study.

Young lawyers are, in fact, driven to get involved and contribute to the community, perhaps just not in the way it was done in the past. I conclude that the keys to engaging young lawyers are (1) hosting fun, light events, (2) increasing the diversity and inclusiveness of groups and programs, and (3) providing opportunity to develop meaningful connections.

SOMETIMES WE JUST WANT TO PLAY PING PONG

There is a significant drop-off in participation in the OCBA once lawyers age out of the YLD. While there are likely many reasons for this shift, our survey raised a few considerations. First, when asked which types of events are most enjoyable, about 44% of our members said they prefer attending happy-hour mixers or casual get-togethers, while only 1.6% said they prefer to attend galas or

fancy dinners. And when asked which characteristics of an event are most important, 37% of our members noted that they prefer to attend events where the crowd will be casual and not too stuffy.

YLD events tend to fit this bill, thanks to Social Chair **Alexander Avery**. Alex is authentic and easygoing, qualities that are reflected in his events. He has creative ideas, such as bowling in onesies, a Tiki Cruise in the Newport Harbor, and a party bus trip

down to the Del Mar Racetrack. Alex has a way of hosting uniquely entertaining events at affordable prices. Affordability is important to YLD members. When asked the most likely reason they won't attend an event, the highest response given is that they don't want to spend money on a ticket.

Behind happy-hour mixers and casual get-togethers, 25% of our members selected that they prefer attending events with a sporting or fitness component. Our Sports and Fit-

ness Co-Chairs, **Sean Lynch** and **Johanna Rodriguez**, have kept the YLD moving with hikes, yoga classes, paddle-boarding, softball, soccer, and Angels and Ducks games. Sean brings energy, laughter, and playfulness to our events, keeping the mood light with his contagious sense of humor. Johanna is bubbly, always has a huge smile on her face, and is the life of the party.

The fact that these rock-stars consistently host well-attended events goes to show that there is a huge need for active, out-of-the-box get-togethers. So, if you are hoping to entice young lawyers to attend your event, consider trying something new and down-to-earth. You'd be surprised at how many young lawyers will attend an event if you tell them there will be a ping-pong table.

MAKE IT DIVERSE

One of my favorite qualities about the YLD membership is its demand for diversity. Approximately 20% of our members noted that, most importantly, events need to be diverse in terms of attendees and welcoming to individuals from a broad variety of backgrounds and experiences. YLD Diversity and Inclusion Chair **Joseph Ursic** has a genuine passion for promoting diversity. Having tackled the demand for diversity with ambition, he has drastically changed the dynamic of our membership. Joe assisted with our sold-out, inaugural Spring Diversity Mixer, where we welcomed all affiliate bar members to join us for a night of mingling and photo-boothing. Joe is also partnering with affiliate bars to provide our members the opportunity to attend affiliate bar meetings and programs. In addition to hosting events that promote diversity, Joe's warm and hospitable personality helps increase the diversity of our group by making all members feel welcome and included.

In addition to Joe's efforts, Education Chair **Nicholas George** (quite possibly the most enthusiastic person I have ever met) hosts CLE programs that both promote diversity and appeal to a broad audience. When starting in his role as Education Chair, Nick said he wanted to provide presentations that will interest attorneys in all fields of law, including litigation, transactional, and both the private and public sector. Nick has already met his goal with dynamic programs such as the Women in Leadership panel, where YLD members were able to hear from and ask questions to a panel of female leaders in the community. Nick is also working on an Elimination of Bias CLE panel where

a diverse panel of judges, in-house attorneys, and other community leaders will speak on their experiences as minorities rising through the legal ranks.

The OCBA has made a visible effort in improving the diversity of our county's legal community by reviving its Diversity Committee, placing diverse candidates into leadership positions, and supporting and uniting the OCBA affiliate bar associations. These changes have not gone unnoticed by the YLD, and if the OCBA continues the diversity initiatives, it will likely increase the retention and involvement of young lawyers.

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IT'S ALL ABOUT THE RELATIONSHIPS

When we asked our members what is most important to them with respect to their careers, the majority selected that they want to work with great people. This trait beat out "prestige," "compensation," "job security," and "flexible working opportunities." YLD members want to make connections and develop meaningful relationships. They desire civility in the profession and want to have positive experiences with other attorneys.

Community Outreach Chair, **Michelle Miu**, gives YLD members the opportunity to collaborate outside of the work environment while giving back to the community. For example, Michelle coordinated a day to give back to students in need at the Annual

CASA Back To School Bash, a 5K walk/run in support of the Pediatric Cancer Research Foundation and a Super Pet Adoption Day. Michelle has an ability to connect with a broad range of people, within and outside the legal community. She understands that networking and getting involved is about the connections made. For these reasons, Michelle is able to give YLD members unique opportunities to develop relationships with others while doing good.

MOVING FORWARD

It's safe to assume that the YLD will continue to advance these priorities. Chair-Elect **Kristin (Garcia) Gomez** naturally emerged as a YLD leader because she embodies the interests and priorities of the young lawyers we surveyed. Kristin has an energetic and fun-loving personality that makes all YLD get-togethers she attends more fun. Kristin promotes diversity by being considerate to and valuing the input and personality of every YLD member, giving a broad range of individuals a voice, and making them feel welcome within the YLD. Kristin is the ultimate connector—she is amiable, charismatic, easy to connect with on a personal level, and everyone who meets Kristin walks away thinking of her as a friend.

I hope this article provided some perspective about best practices to engage young lawyers. I urge you to keep prodding, approaching us from new angles. From my vantage point in the young lawyer trenches, I assure you that this group of young lawyers is bursting with enthusiasm and determination; we just might have unique or different styles of engagement.



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