



ATTORNEY SEARCH

by Stephen Seckler

BBA Lunches: A Great Resource at the Right Price

If you are new to the practice of law, you are most likely facing pressure from the competing demands on your time. As you begin to learn your trade (including everything you never learned in law school), you are also getting used to a new set of office procedures and the culture of your law firm or law department.

As you make this transition, here is some advice that may serve you well in the long run: Be sure to set aside some time to get involved in the Boston Bar Association committee system.

Although internal commitments may seem more pressing (It is hard to argue that anything should take precedence over client service), it is important not to neglect professional relationships outside your firm. It is professional relationships outside of the firm that may someday help you solve a difficult practice issue. It is professional relationships outside the firm that may help you to cultivate business in the future. Outside relationships may also help you to make good career decisions (e.g., what skills you should be trying to cultivate). The lunches offered by the BBA committees can help you build these professional relationships with only a modest investment of time.

The Boston Bar Association offers a broad selection of educational luncheons throughout the year. Some of the topics are substantive legal updates (in virtually every major practice area), but many others address things happening in the business community. In the past two years, for example, there have been presentations on the Big Dig, minority retention in major law firms, the architecture of the new Federal Courthouse, the new SJC rules on Alternative Dispute Resolution, and electricity deregulation in Massachusetts. All of these sessions are free of charge (You can pay five dollars if you want to buy lunch, or you can brown bag it, as many do). Attorneys who are considering membership in the BBA are also invited to attend. In general, these lunches are all informal and educational.

Here are some suggestions on how to begin getting involved in the BBA. Approach each new year like you would the beginning of any college semester. Look for lunch topics that are of interest to you. Select a few committee meetings to attend. Once you have attended several meetings, decide which committee seems to have subject matter and personalities that are the best fit with your professional and personal style.

Make a point of speaking to least one individual at each meeting. Choose a new person each time, and try to learn as much as you can about the person, his/her interests, and his/her professional areas of expertise. Your only objective is to try and get to know more professionals. Try introducing yourself to the committee chairperson, and ask if there is any way that you can be of assistance. Volunteer to make phone calls to remind members

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of the committee about the next lunch (to increase attendance). In doing so, you will have the chance to speak with many members of the committee, and you will be looked at with favor by the committee chairperson.

Later on in the year, you can offer to help the committee chairperson make phone calls to find guest speakers and identify good topics. Some chairpersons will be very good at doing this on their own. But others may be happy to receive the help.

Keep looking at the lunch topics that are being presented at other committee meetings. Be sure to attend meetings of other committees when topics seem interesting to you. Bring your practice questions to the committee meetings. Try to find a more experienced lawyer who might be willing to speak with you for a few minutes to answer your questions (either at the end of the meeting or over the phone). Try to identify ways you can be a resource to the members of committee even if the resources you have to offer are not professional resources (e.g., Perhaps someone needs information about taking a vacation to a place where you have been, or maybe you saw an article on a subject that is of interest to him).

The BBA committee system is a feast for the inquisitive mind. While not every lunch topic promises to keep the audience spellbound, most committee meetings provide great forums for informal learning. The committee system also provides an invaluable way to connect with others who may be able to assist you in shaping your career. It is a very worthwhile investment of time, and it takes very little commitment. More important, there is no substitute for meeting other professionals in person (even if you like to exchange ideas through electronic bulletin boards.)