



GET INVOLVED, STAY INVOLVED

By: J. Tanner Watkins, YLD Chair

I was alarmed to learn that participation in and identification with organizations are down amongst millennials. According to a 2014 Pew Research Center study, millennials are less likely to identify or associate with major institutions, such as politics and religion. This

is also true amongst professional and community organizations, which have also seen declining participation levels over the past 20 years. As lawyers in Kentucky, we need to buck the trend. Practicing law in the state of Kentucky carries with it a duty that extends beyond the four walls of an office. Each and every one of us shares in the collective responsibility of shaping the direction of our profession, mentoring and giving back to the communities in which we live and work. Today, I challenge you to get personally involved. Are you up to the task?

The legal profession is among a small subset of professions in America that remains largely self-regulated, and it is vital that young lawyers take responsibility in guiding its development. In Kentucky, members of the Bar define the rules of professional ethics and ensure that licensed practitioners meet the highest level of competency. This process relies heavily on civic-minded individuals stepping up and advocating for the issues that uniquely affect



YOUNG LAWYERS DIVISION

KENTUCKY BAR ASSOCIATION

our everyday work. Active participation through our local and state bar associations give young lawyers a voice and an opportunity to take charge of our own professional governance.

As we progress in our careers, we must also continue to pay forward the professional guidance we were fortunate enough to have received from our own mentors. Through our local and state bar associations, young lawyers are given a chance to nurture the next generation of Kentucky attorneys. While law schools might provide a foundation for legal thinking, graduates are rarely prepared for the realities and rigors of practice. Experienced attorneys involved in the mentorship programs of their respective bar associations act as an invaluable resource for new associates as they navigate uncharted waters. In our tightly-knit legal community, this act of mentorship creates a connection that truly lasts a lifetime.

But perhaps the most important duty we have is to make an impact on the communities in which we live and work. Privileged with the opportunity of higher education, practicing attorneys are among the select few who can use their skills to make a significant impact on the lives of the less fortunate. From representing residents of Eastern Kentucky, who are currently fighting for their Social Security benefits, to reaching out to school age children to end bullying, members of local and state bar associations are given substantive opportunities to serve the public. Through these efforts, we can make a positive social impact all while demonstrating that lawyers, by in large, are inherently good and compassionate individuals.

Personally, I have found my involvement as a member of the Kentucky Bar Association Young Lawyers Division to be one of the most fulfilling aspects of practicing law. I have been blessed to meet great lawyers from all areas of the state; I have been involved, in a small way, in affecting the direction of the profession; and I have had a great time in attending KBA-sponsored events. More importantly, however, my involvement has allowed me to participate in KBA YLD-sponsored activities such as "Why Choose Law," a program that exposes minorities to careers in the law; "U@18," a program that teaches high school students the rights and responsibilities associated with being an adult; "BullyProof," a program geared towards middle school students that advocates for an end to bullying; and "Project Street Youth," a program that assists homeless youth on a community level. These programs touch, in a tangible way, people in any community.

While no one denies the demanding nature of practice, we must not forget our responsibility to be engaged with the profession on a macro level. To that end, I urge all lawyers, especially young lawyers, to be actively involved in your local and state bar associations. I also urge you to get involved in your local communities. Active involvement provides us with a voice in our own governance, a chance to cultivate lasting relationships, and an opportunity to serve the public. That sounds like a pretty good legacy to me.



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