

November / December 2020 Volume 89 Issue 6

Official Publication of the Hennepin County Bar Association

# HENNEPIN LAWYER



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Anderson**  
2020-2021  
HCBF President

+ Profiles  
in Practice



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# HENNEPIN LAWYER

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# Diversity: *E Pluribus Unum*, or *E Pluribus Pluribus*?

“Diversity” is a good thing, but should we not first define it? Is it limited to the color of one’s skin? Is it defined by where we are from? At the end of the day, there are many questions that first must be answered or considered before we talk about it.

For attorneys, the diversity question is more complex. Holding a *Juris Doctor* is reserved for only a small segment of the U.S. population—those licensed to practice is even smaller. According to various surveys, there are only 1.33 million lawyers in the United States. In Minnesota, just over 25,000 people are licensed to practice law here—a very small, and exclusive segment of the population.

We all come to the table with preconceived notions of diversity. Take the all too common interaction of lawyers on the courthouse steps. One is a white woman, the other is a black man, and the last person is a white man. We have no idea where the other person came from, where they work, why they are going to court, whom they represent, or where they went to law school. Each person has a biased notion of who the other person is, and what they are thinking:

- The white woman thinks to herself, “Look at those two men...afraid of a smart, and independent women. How dare they give me patronizing glances!”
- The black man assumes to himself, “Look at those two white people...afraid of a smart black man.”
- The white man cringes inside, “They don’t like me because I am gay.”

We all come from different backgrounds. We live in different neighborhoods. Some of us are single. Others are married. We can choose to worship or not worship as we like. We vote for different political

parties—and others may choose not to vote. We have different social groups, and celebrate different holidays. Most importantly, we often make assumptions based on the human condition that makes us all unique and special. Yes, we are all diverse.

President Ronald Reagan marveled at the richness of our diversity as Los Angeles hosted the XXIII Olympiad. He noted that, “[W]e cheered ... as the flame was carried in and the giant Olympic torch burst into a billowing fire in front of the teams ... And in that moment, maybe you were struck as I was with the uniqueness of what was taking place ... in the stadium .... There were athletes representing 140 countries ... whose people carry the bloodlines of all those 140 countries and more. Only in the United States is there such a rich mixture of races, creeds, and nationalities, only in our melting pot.”

Central to President Reagan’s belief in diversity rested in our national motto—*E pluribus unum*—“Out of many, one people.” We are all heirs to the American Dream that continues to often divide, and hopefully most of the time, unite. The real question is, does diversity seek to make us one people, or should it separate.

Diversity cannot, and should not separate based on what is seen by the human eye. In what should be considered the “Great Dissent,”<sup>1</sup> Justice Marshall Harlan saw the dangers of doing this when the United States Supreme Court reviewed a Louisiana law that made public accommodations based on the color of someone’s skin. He went against the flow of American society at that time and supported the radical belief that, “the Constitution of the United States does not ... permit any public authority to know the race of those entitled to be protected in the enjoyment of such rights.”<sup>2</sup> In pressing the majority on their “separate but

equal” philosophy, Justice Harlan declared, “in the eye of the law, there is in this country no superior, dominant, ruling class of citizens. There is no caste here. Our constitution is color-blind, and neither knows nor tolerates classes among citizens.”<sup>3</sup>

So, what is diversity? Is it based on what we see? Does it take into account preconceived notions—our biases deeply ingrained by the human condition? No! If we allow this to happen, the many can never become one people.

This *Profiles in Practice* issue gives us a chance to reflect on who we are, where we have been, and where we want to go not only as attorneys, but as one people. It is an outlet to share with others our fears and aspirations as we seek justice within the American legal system, as we struggle toward equal justice for all. Many people; coming together as one.

<sup>1</sup> *Plessy v. Ferguson*, 163 U.S. 537 (1896).

<sup>2</sup> *Id.* at 552.

<sup>3</sup> *Id.* at 559.



**Aaron Frederickson**

November/December  
Issue Editor

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Mr. Frederickson is the founder of MSP Compliance Solutions, which is based out of Minneapolis/St. Paul. He has nearly two decades of legal practice experience in the areas of workers’ compensation, personal injury, and Medicare/Medicaid compliance. His passions also include assisting low income persons via pro bono legal representation.

# Engage, Collaborate, Connect

**F**irst of all, I want to thank all of the HCBA members, Board of Directors members, Section Leaders, and staff for the trust that you have given me to lead the organization this year. I am thankful for all of your hard work to make our organization a very successful one! Without your hard work it wouldn't be possible. I also want to thank all of my colleagues, professors, mentors, mentees, law students, clients, friends, and family members for their congratulations and kind words on becoming the 102<sup>nd</sup> president of the HCBA. I am very excited and humbled to serve as the President. The HCBA has been very busy since the 2020-2021 bar year began in July. As stated in my introductory article (See the September issue), due to the unique circumstances of this year, I have two main goals: to provide value to members during the COVID-19 pandemic and to promote racial equity.

Because the killing of George Floyd happened in our backyard and the systematic inequities in the administration of justice, racial equity will be a priority this bar year. The HCBA Finance & Planning Committee will take an in-depth look at racial equity within the profession, the Association, and the justice system. The committee will look at ways the Association can provide resources to members who wish to learn more about this topic and how it affects our profession and our justice system. It will also look at ways we can collaborate with other organizations—including the affinity bars, Diversity in Practice, the courts, the County Attorney's Office, the Public Defender's Office—to be an ally in the quest for more equity in the justice system.

The committee will take input from the Board, the HCBA Diversity and Inclusion Committee, and the leaders of the Sections. We want this to be a collaborative effort to strengthen racial equity and eliminate police brutality.

I acknowledge that in addition to racial inequality, COVID-19 has posed challenges for attorneys, law students, and the courts as well. These are unprecedented times and we have all had to change the way we work and live. We are looking forward to doing in-person events to bring more normality to our lives and the profession as soon as we are able and our members are comfortable gathering again. In the meantime, the Association is finding creative new ways for our members to engage: more virtual and on-demand CLEs, virtual networking events, and virtual programming in general. Many sections, including the New Lawyers Section, have started fun and creative ways for us to be connected during these challenging times.

Besides those two main goals, the Association will also address the recommendations put forth last year by the New Lawyers Task Force on how to better engage law students and new lawyers. We are conscientious that law students and new lawyers are the future of the Association and we want to provide the most value and the best possible programming for them. I have always encouraged law students, my mentees, and newer lawyers to join the organization and be as active as possible because it is very valuable in many aspects for their future careers as well as their personal lives. I am a testament of the value that organization involvement has in early career stages. I joined the HCBA as a new lawyer in 2011 and I became its President in 2020.

Not too many professional organizations offer those leadership opportunities to its members in the early stages of their careers. This is a great value of our organization! I have also been able to network and collaborate with the leaders of the Minnesota legal community.

As a whole I want to encourage all members to keep engaging and please share your ideas on how to make our organization a better one. Especially in this time of turmoil, we welcome your thoughts and feedback. We want to make sure we understand what you need and what we can do to help. Thank you again for giving me the opportunity to serve you as your president. Do not hesitate to contact me. I am always open to suggestions and feedback!



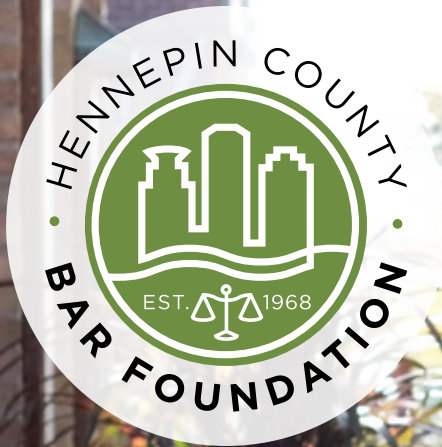
**Esteban  
A. Rivera**

2020-2021  
HCBA President

[esteban@riveralawllc.com](mailto:esteban@riveralawllc.com)

Esteban A. Rivera is an attorney licensed in Minnesota and Ecuador. He practices mainly Immigration and International Law with emphasis in Latin America. He practices investment, employment and family-based immigration law as well as removal defense. He is very active in the local legal community and the local bar associations.





# Meet Alecia Anderson

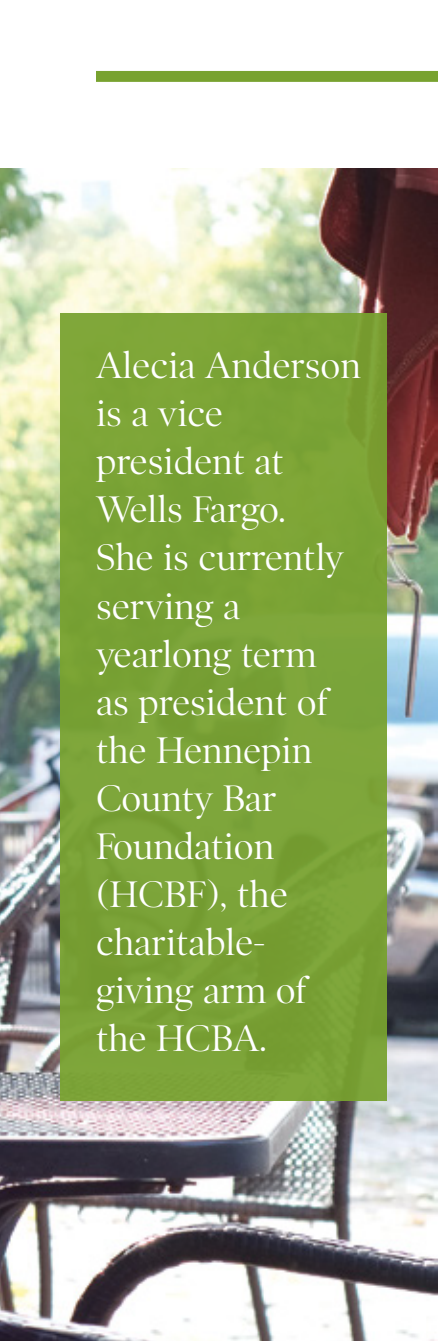
## 2020-2021 Hennepin County Bar Foundation President

### What inspired you to join the Foundation board and serve as an officer?

I initially wanted to join the board for a few reasons. First, I care deeply about the Foundation's mission and wanted to have an active part in helping to guide the organization and fulfill its purpose. I was also interested in learning more about the legal community in Hennepin County and meeting more attorneys around the city. The collegial nature of the board is also what led me to serve as an officer. We have a diverse community that shares a passion for justice and want to work toward it.

### What are your goals for the Foundation for the 2020-2021 bar year?

This is certainly going to be a different year for the Foundation. With that, my goal is still to move the Foundation forward in its objectives. I would like to increase the number of remote events that the Foundation hosts, so that our community can remain engaged and active. I would also like to invite more attorneys to join our ranks as Fellows and maintain a steady source of donations to the Foundation. Finally, I would like to maintain our level of grants. The work that our grantees do is vitally important, and for many people, there are a number of barriers that prevent them from accessing justice. I hope that our work will continue to tear down those barriers.



Alecia Anderson is a vice president at Wells Fargo. She is currently serving a yearlong term as president of the Hennepin County Bar Foundation (HCBF), the charitable-giving arm of the HCBA.

### How has the Foundation adjusted its planning this year in response to the pandemic?

The Foundation has had to adjust to a virtual world. All of our Foundation board meetings are now remote. We are also looking to replace our traditional September golf tournament with some virtual events, and preparing to do the same for our March Bar Benefit, if needed. Since these events represent the bulk of our fundraising, we will need to adapt and become more creative. I know that our staff and volunteers are more than up to the task. The Foundation recently hosted a CLE called Criminal Justice Reform in the Wake of George Floyd with three of our grantees, All Square, Legal Rights Center, and Seward Longfellow Restorative Justice. It was a fantastic program that highlighted the critical work being done in the realm of criminal justice reform, and we hope to host more CLEs in the future.

### What would you like the local legal community to know about the HCBF?

This Foundation belongs to all of us. I think the legal community has a vitally important role to play in our current environment, and the

Foundation can have a crucial impact to those in Hennepin County. Our mission is to improve access to justice in Hennepin County. But what does justice look like? What does access look like? These are important questions that we continually grapple with, and are made even more opaque in this environment. In 1993, the Minnesota Supreme Court Task Force on Racial Bias in the Courts released its report on the first ever study on racial bias in Minnesota courts. Its findings were a wakeup call for the legal community, and many changes have been implemented since. Nevertheless, more work needs to be done. The support the Foundation provides, in the form of grants, to community nonprofits helps to clarify those questions. How and who we fund shows the values our legal community holds. I think it is important that all HCBA members take ownership and pride in our Foundation; we do great things.

### What perspective do you bring to the Foundation?

I think I bring a diverse point of view. I am a non-traditional lawyer that does not work in a firm setting. I'm also a lesbian, half-white, half-Korean, adoptee who became a U.S. citizen when I was 17 years old.

### How can HCBA members get involved with and support the HCBF?

There are numerous ways HCBA members can get involved. You could donate to the Foundation. We always welcome new or repeat donors. For a more sustained commitment, please consider joining as a Fellow. The Foundation started the Fellows program two years ago, and it has already had a significant positive impact on our fundraising efforts. The Fellows Program is an honorary society of attorneys, judges, law faculty, and legal scholars whose public and private careers have demonstrated exemplary dedication to upholding the standard of the legal profession and commitment to increasing access to justice. In the first year, we had 15 Founding Fellows and 60 Fellows who were nominated and initiated into the program. We look forward to initiating a new class of Fellows this year as the program continues to grow. You can also volunteer to be on our Grants Committee. You would be helping to analyze and choose the grantees in a day-long session with other committee members. Finally, you can become a board member. Board members are critical to the operation of the Foundation, and we would welcome more attorneys to apply.

### Previous HCBF presidents have come from a variety backgrounds, large firm, small firm, judiciary, what experience do you bring to this role as a transaction attorney?

I think being a transaction attorney has allowed me to have more varied experiences. It has also allowed me to explore various areas outside of the law. I have had previous experience with nonprofits and working with racial justice and implicit bias issues. I have led on nonprofit boards, such as Ampersand Families, that allowed me to really see the need for foundations such as the HCBF. I was able to serve alongside Justice Alan Page and others on the Racial Fairness Committee (prior to its reorganization). That experience really allowed me to delve into the issues of racial discrimination and bias in the courts. I've volunteered in child protection and am involved in efforts to establish a state child protection ombudsman. I think a diversity of experience strengthens the Foundation and helps us to remain vigilant guardians for justice.

### What has been your favorite hobby during quarantine?

I have been reading quite a bit during quarantine. I generally like to read a mix of fiction and nonfiction but have been leaning more towards non-fiction lately. I would highly recommend *The Usefulness of the Useless* by Nuccio Ordine. It's a fantastic read that justifies all of the random facts floating around in my mind.

### Any other fun facts that HCBA members might not know about you?

I am a Gryffindor.



# A TRUE MEASURE OF JUSTICE

HENNEPIN COUNTY BAR FOUNDATION



In 2020, the HCBF awarded grants to local nonprofits that work to provide legal access and support to those in need. Because each organization is unique in the way they provide services, we would like to highlight the collective work of our grantees to show how your support of the foundation promotes access to justice for the people of Hennepin County.

**\$277,250**  
**2020 GRANTS**  
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## HCBF PARTNER GRANT

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### VOLUNTEER LAWYERS NETWORK

Each year, the HCBF gives a meaningful contribution to Volunteer Lawyers Network – the pro bono arm of the Hennepin County Bar Association. HCBF funding assists VLN in protecting and enforcing the legal rights of low-income Minnesotans.



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VLN ASSISTED

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## FELLOWS

Making a Difference  
in Hennepin County



GAVE

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Established by the HCBF board of directors in 2018, the Fellows Program is an honorary society of attorneys, judges, law faculty, and legal scholars who have committed to financially support the goals and objectives of the foundation. 18 Founding Fellows and 84 Fellows brought in **\$43,200** this year that was given away in community grants. Thank you to our Fellows for this commitment to closing the justice gap in Hennepin County.

## SUPPORTING THE HCBF

With support from HCBA members, law firms, partner organizations, and the legal community, the HCBF provides strategic funding to a variety of nonprofits in Hennepin County. We thank this past year's donors for contributing to this work. The HCBF relies primarily on support from our annual Bar Benefit, Golf Classic, the HCBA dues check-off, and the HCBF Fellows Program. We could not accomplish this work without you.

**53%**  
**BAR  
BENEFIT**

**8%**  
**OTHER**

**9%**  
**DUES**

**13%**  
**GOLF**

**17%**  
**FELLOWS**





## COMMUNITY GRANTS **\$147,250**

The Advocates for  
Human Rights  
**\$5,000**

All Square  
**\$2,500**

Cancer Legal Care  
**\$2,500**

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of Minnesota  
**\$5,500**

Civil Society  
**\$10,000**

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**\$5,500**

Conflict Resolution Center  
**\$5,500**

CornerHouse  
**\$5,000**

Discapitados  
Abriendose Caminos  
**\$10,000**

Division of  
Indian Work  
**\$2,500**

HOME Line  
**\$5,000**

ICWA Law Center  
**\$7,500**

Immigrant Law Center  
of Minnesota  
**\$5,000**

JustUs Health  
**\$7,500**

Lawyers Concerned  
for Lawyers  
**\$5,000**

LegalCORPS  
**\$7,500**

Legal Rights  
Center  
**\$7,500**

Loan Repayment  
Assistance Program  
of Minnesota  
**\$2,500**

Minnesota Assistance  
Council for Veterans  
**\$5,000**

Minnesota Elder  
Justice Center  
**\$5,000**

Minnesota Justice  
Foundation  
**\$5,000**

MN Wills for Heroes  
**\$2,000**

Missions Inc. Program  
**\$5,000**

Seward Longfellow  
Restorative  
Justice Partnership  
**\$5,000**

Sojourner Project  
**\$3,750**

Standpoint  
**\$7,500**

Tubman  
**\$7,500**

## SERVING THE COMMUNITY

The Hennepin County Bar Foundation strives to meet a variety of unmet legal needs in Hennepin County and recognizes value in providing services for different communities. We work to choose grantees with a wide range of targeted services in order to diversify our support.

**13,316**



**WOMEN**

**11,133**



**PEOPLE  
OF COLOR**

**1,346**



**IMMIGRANTS**

**769**



**LGBTQ+**

**1,236**



**DISABLED**

**1,103**



**VETERANS**

**6,996**



**CHILDREN**

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**YOUTH  
(ages 18-24)**

**478**



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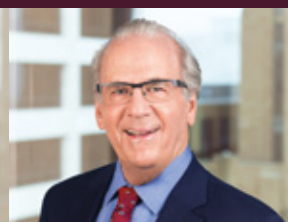
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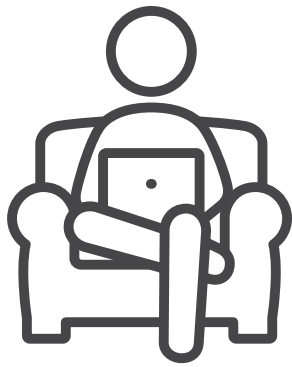
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## New Lawyers Spotlight: Working From Home



**David R. Hackworthy**

Gregerson, Rosow, Johnson & Nilan

**What have been some unexpected, positive outcomes that have come from working from home?**

Working from home gave me the time to rescue a dog. Jarvis, rescued from the wonderful Coco's Heart Dog Rescue, has been my constant

companion (except when working on crate training). He's kept me company and provided a needed excuse to get outside.

**What adjustments have you made to your work-life balance as a result?**

I have found more time to take care of myself, through a more regular at-home fitness routine and meditation. I have also found more time to connect with friends from different parts of the country in a more meaningful way.

**Have you picked up any new hobbies or habits?**

I have leaped feet first into training Jarvis, which involved quite a bit of training myself on how to be a good dog owner. Jarvis also provided the impetus to purchase a state parks pass and start exploring all the wonderful Minnesota parks.

**What's the most creative way you've connected with clients or colleagues?**

A few of my colleagues and I have taken virtual exercise classes and started playing video games together, providing an opportunity for some friendly competition and an excuse to catch up during the week.



**James Reimann**

David M. Jacobs, P.A.

**What have been some unexpected, positive outcomes that have come from working from home?**

A few years ago, I started volunteering at the Midwest Avian Adoption & Rescue Service — local parrot sanctuary—in St. Paul. While I tried to

make it in every Tuesday night it was difficult sometimes with my commute and getting home late after work. Since working from home and no longer having to commute it's become much easier to make it to my volunteer shift on time. Since the parrots need to be fed and we are essential volunteers it's a great way to have purpose during the pandemic and provide essential care to the community. It's an added benefit that interaction with animals has been shown to reduce stress, especially during this uncertain time!

**Have you picked up any new hobbies or habits?**

I was used to working out at my local gym at least three days a week or running outside. With the pandemic I don't feel safe going to the gym so I've started using the Peloton at home. I ride the bike at home after work every day and I really look forward to the classes. It's a great stress reliever and a great source of exercise. One of the instructors, Robyn, is a former attorney and provides really fun classes. I look forward to the classes almost as much as running outside.

**What's the most creative way you've connected with clients or colleagues?**

I attended my first Zoom Trivia night with the New Lawyers Section of the HCBA and it was an excellent way to meet other lawyers and connect. I'm a new lawyer and relatively new to the legal community so it's been great to be able to have an opportunity to connect to other members of the bar. It may be awhile before we can all connect in-person but this was a great and fun substitute. It was an added bonus that our team, Legal Eagles, happened to win.



## Joining the Human and Electronic Elements Together

**Computer Forensic Services (CFS)** and **360 Security Services (360)** are two organizations with one mission: To address your investigative and security needs.

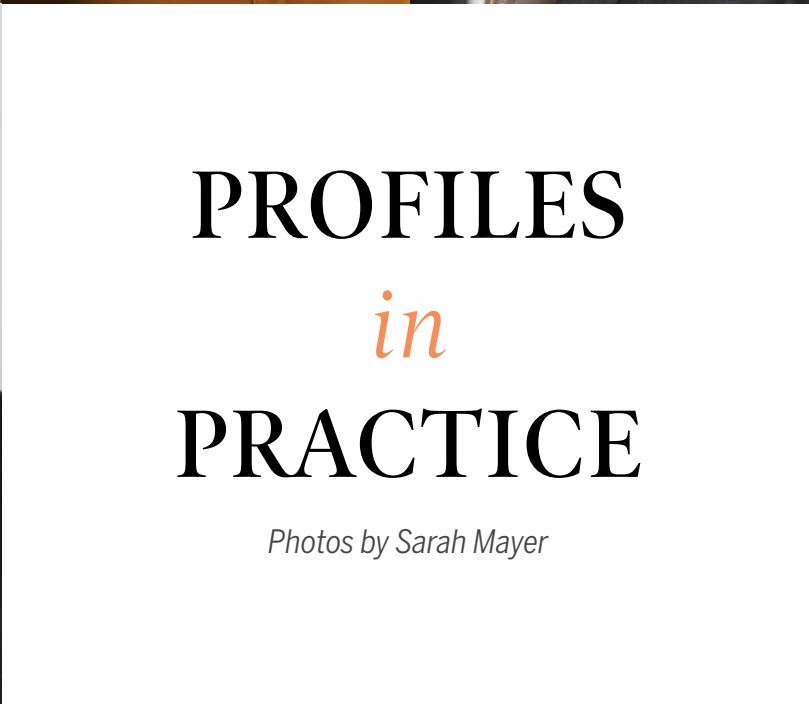
Our digital landscape has dramatically increased the amount and quality of information that is useful to investigations. While electronic information can prove to be the most important factor to consider, it is still one factor. For this reason, Computer Forensic Services ([www.compforensics.com](http://www.compforensics.com)) is proud to announce its new strategic partnership with 360 Security Services ([www.360security.services](http://www.360security.services)).

360 takes a holistic approach to conducting investigations. 360's team is comprised of former federal & state investigators and security professionals who possess an array of experience, ensuring clients receive the targeted expertise they need. 360's diverse team together with CFS is positioned to assist with a variety of investigations including, but not limited to:

- Financial, tax, and complex fraud (forensic accounting);
- Employment and backgrounding;
- Personal injury;
- Corporate espionage;
- Family (custody, marital dissolution);
- Criminal (financial, cybercrime, extortion, stalking, violent offenses);
- Investigative and security auditing.

The strategic partnership between CFS and 360 provides clients with a comprehensive and seamless team-based approach to investigations and security.





# FRANK ABA-ONU

**U**zodima Franklin (Frank) Aba-Onu describes his life's journey as a winding path. Aba-Onu is African American with dual citizenship in Nigeria and the United States. He grew up in New Jersey and attended DePauw University in Greencastle, Indiana, graduating with a double major in classical studies and history.

At DePauw, he was accepted into the Media Fellows program where he was part of a cohort of 20 students immersed in film, radio, television, and photography. Aba-Onu appreciated the 1:1 attention at DePauw and the creativity and freedom to explore his passion for film. Aba-Onu combined this interest with his love of travel and adventure and filmed a documentary in Europe while a student at DePauw.





Even though he loved the film industry, Aba-Onu knew it was a difficult field in which to find steady paying work. Law school was always his backup plan; Aba-Onu thought he could mix film and law and practice entertainment law. While on an archeological dig study tour in Turkey, his classical studies advisor recommended the University of St. Thomas Law School. The rest is history. Graduating *cum laude*, he said, “St. Thomas gave me a different dynamic of what being a lawyer means—humanizing the profession to make it a vocation instead of a job.”

While in law school, Aba-Onu’s path included two clerkships which provided invaluable experience. After graduating from law school, Aba-Onu worked as an associate attorney at Aafedt, Forde, Gray, Monson & Hager, practicing workers’ compensation, and general liability defense. Aba-Onu then moved to the Minnesota Office of the Attorney General where he gained public sector trial experience as an assistant attorney general in the public safety and human services divisions. He is currently a shareholder at Bassford Remele, focusing his practice in the areas of employment, professional liability, and general liability matters.

Aba-Onu said he loves “the people, the vibe, and the opportunity to pick my own path in three areas of law.” He enjoys being able to do impactful work and appreciates the opportunity for self-improvement and self-exploration. He thrives because of the variety of his work, the robust client contact, and working together proactively with clients to solve problems.

Hidden enemies lurk along every path. Aba-Onu’s invisible enemy is a voice that sometimes asks him if he’s good enough. When this unwanted voice appears, he reminds himself that he has earned what he has, and that he belongs in the room, and at the table. To overcome this momentary self-doubt, Aba-Onu takes stock of what he has done, appreciates his accomplishments, and gets feedback from a variety of people so he has an accurate understanding of how he stacks up in his profession. Aba-Onu finds it comforting to know that some of the most amazing attorneys he’s met have had “impostor syndrome” thoughts, too.

Aba-Onu is grateful to the many people along his path who supported him both personally and professionally—he is hesitant to single out any one individual who has influenced him the most. When pressed, he said his middle brother Jeff has been a strong positive influence. Aba-Onu admires his brother’s ability to make good decisions in life and appreciates his encouragement to learn, to ask the right questions, and to use curiosity to help shape his path. Aba-Onu also appreciates the black attorneys and judges in the community who gave him advice and shared stories that helped shape them and their careers. “I’m thankful to be surrounded by people I trust, who are honest with me and tell it straight, but who also have my back and go to bat for me when needed.” In addition, Aba-Onu leans heavily on the support and encouragement that he receives from his wife, Danielle. As someone who is not in the legal profession, Danielle grounds him and helps him to become a better person.

According to Aba-Onu, diversity is important to the success of every organization—diversity improves the bottom line and makes the workplace better. An environment that fosters empathy, listening, and working together proactively creates a workplace where people can challenge each other to be better; a workplace where people desire to be. These elements need to be more common in the legal profession.

The importance of diversity has driven Aba-Onu to become involved in the Federal Bar Association. He appreciated the work of the dedicated lawyers and judges and the collaboration of the FBAs Diversity Committee to provide intentional programming that encourages learning and awareness of how to increase the pipeline of diverse attorneys. He has been impressed by the buy-in from the court and the civic-mindedness of the judges.

No matter where Aba-Onu’s path takes him in the future, the legal profession is better off because of his curiosity, his willingness to listen and understand, and his dedication to helping people.

**According to Aba-Onu, diversity is important to the success of every organization—diversity improves the bottom line and makes the workplace better.**



by Jewelie Grape

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Jewelie Grape, attorney/owner of J.Grape Law, provides timely, well-informed, and practical legal advice to companies and nonprofit organizations on matters related to employee benefits, human resources, and other important business issues. She enjoys working with clients to provide advice specifically tailored to meet their needs. Grape is a past president of the HCBA.

# CB BAGA

**A**ttorney CB Baga's favorite color is green, and favorite word is "frond." And that's the perfect image for their flourishing, energetic approach to life.

Baga was born to an achievement-oriented and individualistic family that instilled in them the desire for a more equitable world. Learning at a young age that different rules should apply to different people according to their needs, they argue that when it comes to justice, "Traditional concepts of equality don't work." Instead, a nuanced approach with tailored responses should be employed.

After an extroverted bookworm's childhood, Baga discovered an affinity for figure skating, and mock trial. Their love of human movement continues to this day; though their undergraduate diploma reads "Kinesiology: Clinical Movement Science," Baga jokes that they majored in figure skating. They savored the variety and challenge of the University of Minnesota, Twin Cities' kinesiology curriculum, which examined biology, ethics, psychology, and civil liberties through the lens of recreation.



**“Lawyers should look at the whole person they’re serving. They should be their client’s partner.”**

Baga always knew they wanted to practice law. They relish the immersive dive into every case, and the intense education about each industry they represent. While describing themselves as “a bit of a performer,” Baga also appreciates the technical challenges of civil litigation. As for what makes a great attorney, “There’s no one clear answer,” they said. In Baga’s view, you become great by playing to your strengths, figuring out what that strength is in your own story.

This drive to progress permeates Baga’s own practice. “I’ve been complacent in the slow pace of change,” they admit, acknowledging the legal industry’s tepid response to some social issues. Their bent for humanitarianism pushed Baga to open a legal clinic for the LGBTQ community before they even graduated from the University of Minnesota School of Law. After receiving approval and encouragement from the *pro bono* coordinator at Faegre Drinker Biddle & Reath, Baga founded the clinic at a small coffee shop in Minneapolis. “I was stunned,” they recalled. “Stunned that the firm was so supportive.”

With guidance from LGBTQ people, and informed by their own experience as a member of the queer community, Baga quickly grew the clinic into a valuable space to help others. Baga learned as well; for example, realizing that a holistic approach is especially important in *pro bono* representation. Baga encourages volunteer attorneys to consider their client’s overall situation rather than focusing solely on rigid legal principles. “Lawyers should look at the whole person they’re serving,” Baga said. “They should be their client’s partner.”

Though Baga knew from an early age that they wanted to practice law, they readily acknowledge how our justice system falls short of legal practitioners’ romanticized aspirations. “Our community has been harmed by legal structures. I was in high school when the *Lawrence v. Texas* decision came down. I was aware it applied to my community,” they recalled. “We as lawyers often think of the law as a source of remedies and accountability to the [LGBTQ] community, but the law is just a source of more problems.”

The legal community should not accept the status quo. “There’s a lot of people who throw up their hands and say, ‘We can’t change these institutional things,’” Baga explained. Historically marginalized communities avoid seeking legal help because, in their experience, legal systems are inherently harmful or problematic. Baga wants to change this perception and reality, and they push themselves to improve the relationship between the law and those it serves.

Baga also noted that beyond the impact on clients, institutional discrimination prevents the legal industry from recruiting and retaining new, valuable talent. As a self-described queer, nonbinary attorney, Baga believes they bring a unique perspective to the table. They explained that much of the law relies on “tropes and frameworks,” and part of being queer is unlearning those frameworks. LGBTQ people might approach legal issues with greater creativity, by reimagining structures and finding creative solutions to problems without following the traditional “script.”

Baga acknowledged that improving the legal profession will take work. Baga suggested that attorneys put their energy into unlearning racism and studying how it has harmed communities of color. According to Baga, all legal practitioners must behave differently to effect change and reduce harm in the world. “We implicitly uphold racism in day-to-day work. We have to find ways to be more discerning.”

With all their work to improve the lives of others, Baga occasionally needs time to recharge. In the midst of the pandemic, Baga has destressed by cooking, listening to their seasonal music playlist, and showcasing their signature literal sense of humor. “I’m secretly super funny,” they revealed about their love for niche puns and technicalities, which came across when asked a rapid-fire question about what object they would take to survive on a deserted island. “Do I have internet access?” they asked. “Because then it’s obviously a computer.”



by Nora Huxtable

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Nora Huxtable is an associate attorney at Smith Law, in Grand Marais, and an assistant public defender for the State of Minnesota. She is a proud graduate of Northern Michigan University’s journalism program and the University of St. Thomas School of Law. In her free time, she enjoys hiking, theatre, old books, and volunteering with Cook County Search and Rescue.




 A portrait of Alex Trevino, a middle-aged man with short, graying hair, smiling warmly at the camera. He is wearing a dark navy blue suit jacket over a white dress shirt and a colorful, patterned tie. His hands are clasped in front of him. The background is a plain, light color.
 

# ALEX TREVINO

**A**lejandro “Alex” Trevino, like countless others who hold a Juris Doctor, formed a desire to become a lawyer as a young child. Trevino’s journey to a J.D. was not a straight and narrow path, but one of character-building, riddled with twists and turns. Trevino said while at times his fire to become a lawyer was dimly lit, it continued to burn inside him and would burn its brightest decades after its ignition.

Trevino spent the first nine years of his life living in Mexico City. He later moved to the United States and settled in the Burnsville/Eagan area, where he continued to spend his summers in Mexico until he graduated from high school. His ties to his Mexican roots would be an intrinsic part of his journey to a J.D. and his current practice of law. “Our community has a growing need for Spanish-speaking attorneys in diverse areas of law.”

After graduating from high school, Trevino enrolled at the University of Minnesota in 1990, with a plan to study international relations. He took his first detour from his path to a J.D. after three semesters in college. Shortly after that, he decided to focus on his new wife and growing family.

In 1997, Trevino returned to college part time. He drove to St. Cloud every week to attend class while working a fulltime job. By 1999, he was still working on his undergraduate degree when he received a promotion that required him to make the tough decision to stop attending his undergraduate classes.

Notwithstanding these detours, Trevino's dream of becoming an attorney never faded. In 2009, Trevino made a "vision board" as the new year approached and found law school at the center of his creation. After reflecting on his vision, Trevino decided to return to school for a third time. Trevino developed a mantra for himself in pursuing his career endeavors; he called it "his prize." He entered school keeping his eye on the prize, and he was determined to complete what he had set his sights on: a J.D. and a career as an attorney. This third time around, Trevino had a new appreciation for education and was committed to his goal. He completed his undergraduate degree and enrolled at William Mitchell College of Law in St. Paul.

"Law school was one of the hardest things I had to ever do in life." Balancing a fulltime career, family life, and getting back into the routine of attending school after a long hiatus from academia was no easy plight. Through perseverance, determination, and never letting that fire that he lit as a young child burn out, Trevino graduated from William Mitchell.

Trevino spent over 20 years working in the auto industry before he pursued his J.D. While working in car sales, he naturally found himself connected to Spanish speaking and Latino customers, and quickly found success focusing his sales on the Latino demographic. Trevino became a top salesperson and advanced to managerial positions at his dealerships. His accomplishments include competing at and placing fourth at Chevrolet's National Walk-Around competition.

Two aspects of his auto industry career appear in his current practice—serving the Latino community and customer service. As a bilingual attorney and someone who grew up with strong Mexican influences, Trevino has found success in his solo practice representing members of the Latino community in workers' compensation claims. He attributes his early found success to his background in customer service. "I have yet to advertise and I depend on word of mouth to keep my plate full, this is a blessing and has a lot to do with what I learned from customer loyalty in the auto industry," Trevino continued, "I approach my practice with a work-hard play-hard mentality."



Trevino enjoys the flexibility of having his own practice. Despite being his own boss, Alex works tirelessly for his clients. His nonstop work schedule is centered around the needs of his clients. When asked what advice he has to those wanting to build a strong network, Trevino said, "You need to be a nice person and always be prepared."

Preparedness is something he learned from his mentors at his first post-law-school position as an associate at Fitch, Johnson, Larson & Held. "I had two mentors that took me under their wings and pressed upon me the value of preparedness in the practice of law. When I walk into a courtroom, deposition, mediation, I may not be the smartest person in the room but I will be damned if I am not the most prepared."

Trevino said it is not just customer service and preparedness that he attributes to the success of his practice. "I would not be where I am without the work comp bar." Trevino has found the members of the bar extremely generous in providing information and being available for questions no matter how rudimentary they may be. As a new lawyer this resource is extremely valuable.

Living truly by the work-hard play-hard motto, Trevino can be found on a Tuesday afternoon enjoying a day of boating on the lake. He loves to cook and is currently mastering plating food for presentation. Trevino was excited for the return of the NFL and describes himself as bleeding purple. This diehard Vikings fan is also an avid tennis player; you may find Trevino working on his tennis game and preparing for national league tennis tournaments at local parks and clubs across the Twin Cities.

**Trevino has found success in his solo practice representing members of the Latino community in workers' compensation claims. He attributes his early found success to his background in customer service.**



*by Jada N. Lewis*

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Jada Lewis focuses her practice in business torts, product liability, commercial landlord tenant disputes in the business and commercial litigation context. Before joining the firm, she gained invaluable trial experience as an assistant Ramsey County attorney. She prosecuted 18 felony jury trials and worked in the county's civil division, defending the county against employment discrimination, personal injury and excessive force claims.

# OFELIA PONCE

**N**ot one nationality, or culture, can label Ofelia Ponce. Born and raised in Honduras, Ponce describes herself as “a global citizen.” That is because she embraces all cultures from her multinational experience working throughout the globe, as well as her American legal education. Ponce uses her background and personal encounters to shape her role as a legal professional.

Ponce began her legal career in Honduras. She first worked on humanitarian and human rights issues at the Honduran Ministry of Foreign Affairs. As the head of investment, Ponce led a group of seven people to work on foreign investments. This was the start of her legal career where she worked on multinational issues.

The position at the ministry was an opportunity to work with attorneys across the world. She traveled and met attorneys from around Europe, South America, and the United States. From this experience, she felt law school would “fulfill an inner purpose” to connect and help others. She is passionate about helping other people, and law school provided an excellent way to understand and amend the laws surrounding key humanitarian issues. Although she was uncertain if she would move to the United States or stay in Honduras for her career, she was confident she would attend law school.







After graduating from high school in Honduras, Ponce relocated to Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania, for her bachelor's degree. She obtained a degree in international relations and political science. Later, her master's degree in conflict resolution and peace studies complemented her personal experience with international relations.

In 2010, Ponce moved back to Honduras and obtained her law degree. Her study focused on international and commercial law. Unlike the United States, Honduras allows early entry to law school without a bachelor's degree. Many law students in Honduras attend law school after obtaining their high school equivalent education. This did not deter Ponce as she enrolled and completed her degree enriched with knowledge and experience from her international work at the ministry. She was not fazed by returning to school after working as a professional. She successfully obtained her law degree while working at the ministry.

In 2018, she relocated to Minnesota for her Master of Laws (LL.M.) degree at Mitchell Hamline Law School. As an attorney from Honduras, she independently navigated the differences between common and statutory law. Honduras law concerns statutory law, where there is almost always a right or wrong answer. Questions such as, "What is a holding?" puzzled Ponce upon her first studies in the United States. Common law requires continuous legal research and analysis, a skill Ponce picked up on right away. She was the only LL.M. student in her graduating class.

Ponce now uses her independent research and analysis skills as a legal professional at the Ceiba Fôrte Law Firm. Her expansive international legal education provides for a well-rounded analysis and interpretation on complex corporate matters. She finds her work is all about "the best research you can do," because you "never know if you have a right answer."

While she is not licensed to practice law in Minnesota, Ponce works closely with her husband Inti Martínez-Alemán at Ceiba Fôrte. Within this past year, Ponce has supported efforts to provide a pathway for qualified foreign-educated graduates to seek admission to the bar in Minnesota. In December of 2019, the Minnesota Board of Law Examiners received public comments on this potential avenue to licensure. It then held an additional public meeting on February 5, 2020, for further discussion. Ponce was one of the petitioners to initiate this discussion with the State Board.

In addition to her regular work at Ceiba Fôrte Law Firm, Ponce is working on opening and welcoming the Minnesota legal community to foreign-educated lawyers. She also seeks opportunities to work with all LL.M. students that hold international law licenses.

Not only does Ponce commit to expanding the legal community, but she dedicates her time and leadership to the Minnesota Hispanic Bar Association (MHBA). You can find Ponce working diligently on multiple community legal events and opportunities through the MHBA. Ponce is currently working with Comunidades Latinas Unidas en Servicio (CLUES) and Global Women Rights on community partnerships.

Ponce was also a mentor for CLUES's Youth in Action Program. This program supports and guides Hispanic high school students as they work to achieve their personal and professional goals through group activities such as monthly coaching, academic support, college preparation, and educational session projects.

Most recently, Ponce has been serving on the Alumni Board of Governors at Duquesne University in Pittsburgh. As a member of the board, she will be organizing and overseeing alumni events.

Ponce continues to lead in the legal community. From her role at the head of investment at the Honduras Ministry of Foreign Affairs, to studying international relations, and now encouraging foreign-educated lawyers to seek licensure in Minnesota, Ponce continues to find ways to enrich the Minnesota community with international leadership. She is a "global citizen" with global ideas.

**Ponce is passionate about helping other people, and law school provided an excellent way to understand and amend the laws surrounding key humanitarian issues.**



by Amy Byrne

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Amy Byrne is an associate with the firm Aafedt, Forde, Gray, Monson & Hager. She represents employers, insurers, self-insured employers, and third-party administrators throughout the state of Minnesota in all aspects for workers' compensation and civil litigation. Oral advocacy is one of Byrne's strengths for clients and she has a detailed and personable approach to her practice, examining legal intricacies that can help resolve client issues at the forefront.

# MURIA KRUGER

**G**rowing up on a wheat farm in far northwestern Minnesota, Muria Kruger learned life lessons from her father's wisdom. Those lessons included the importance of listening, steady growth, trying new things, and helping others. Since then, Kruger has found "soul-filling" work in ensuring stable, affordable housing for diverse communities of the Twin Cities.

Before leaving rural, small-town Minnesota for college at Hamline University and then the University of Minnesota for law school, two particular experiences influenced her decision to be a lawyer. First was her church. "My early religious experiences revolved around community and justice," she said. The second happened during her summer as a guide in the Boundary Waters Canoe Area when she saw a nearby outfitter company quickly displaced in a legal dispute. "I saw the power of having access to a lawyer. I decided then that I wanted to work so that everyone would have equal access to that power."

In law school, renowned human rights professor David Weissbrodt took her under his wing and involved her in the drafting of an international human rights code of conduct for businesses. "It was a big deal at the time, and he allowed me to be part of that," she said. For several summers in a row, she spent all of August with Prof. Weissbrodt and his staff in Geneva trying to get the code of conduct adopted by a U.N. human rights body.



A couple years out of law school she got a more typical attorney job—litigating class action lawsuits for plaintiffs. While she got to work with attorneys all over the country and enjoyed the collegiality of the practice, “Sitting at a desk all day was not for me.” From law practice, she moved back to the University of Minnesota Law School as the Director of International and Graduate Programs where she was able to travel the world.

Notwithstanding her early career successes, Kruger struggled in her twenties. She says she was a people pleaser without much of an identity outside of work and didn’t listen to her own personal boundaries. “True change came,” Kruger said, “when I did the one thing I thought I would never do: have a kid.” After seven years in the workforce, Kruger transitioned from a fulltime program director to a fulltime stay-at-home parent. This abrupt change, however, led to much greater personal happiness and a volunteer opportunity that put Kruger on what she views as the “right” career path for her.

A couple months into fulltime parenthood, Kruger answered a call for volunteers from the Dignity Center, a faith-based social service project based out of the Hennepin Avenue United Methodist Church, that supports people living in poverty on their path to stability. Kruger eventually started a legal clinic at the Dignity Center in partnership with the Volunteer Lawyers Network (VLN). Over a period of eight years, Kruger volunteered weekly and built the clinic to include six other regular lawyer volunteers and a clinic assistant. After about eight years, just as naturally as Kruger left fulltime paid work, she returned to fulltime paid work at VLN as the Housing Program Manager and Resource Attorney.

As a VLN staff lawyer, Kruger oversees VLN’s participation in housing court clinics in Hennepin, Ramsey, and Anoka County. “I’m proud to say VLN has over 300 active housing volunteers who, in 2019, donated over 2,300 hours of free legal consultation to impoverished Minnesotans with housing issues.” Last year, VLN’s housing program also entered into a high-profile partnership with Minneapolis Mayor Jacob Frey. Through the More Minneapolis Initiative, 16 of Minneapolis’s largest law firms agreed to increase their pro bono time on housing matters.

Her efforts have not gone unnoticed. A quick web-search brings up multiple news articles about Kruger and her housing program successes. She was even appointed to the St. Paul Human Rights and Equal Economic Opportunity Commission.

As to her motivation and passion for helping people with housing needs, Kruger stated the problem bluntly, “The racial disparities in evictions are blatant; visible to anyone simply by seeing who is sitting outside of housing court on eviction day.” Statistically, the most likely demographic to get evicted are single, African-American mothers. “The importance of stable housing to individual and community well-being cannot be overstated,” Kruger added.

If Kruger were to name the top issues to improve housing stability for renters, reforming eviction expungement would be at the top. An eviction action remains on a tenant’s record, even if the tenant prevails. This creates an onerous imbalance in the landlord-tenant relationship. Tenants are often afraid to assert their rights for fear of retaliation by a mere eviction notice that could tarnish their future ability to get housing.

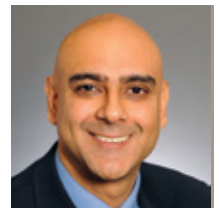
Kruger asserted that Minnesota has one of the fastest eviction processes in the country. Slowing down the eviction process would help tenants and landlords alike. According to Kruger, “Ninety percent of eviction cases are for rent nonpayment.” She continued, “Most landlords just want their rent. But the timing of emergency rent assistance payments is slower than evictions. So a slower process would allow for financial assistance for landlords to get paid; and tenants keep their home.”

When asked what she finds motivating about working with such challenging issues, Kruger said she is inspired by the resilience, humanity, and humor of her clients. “I particularly enjoyed the relationships I was able to develop with Dignity Center clients. They challenged me and helped me grow in ways that made me a better person.”

When asked about leadership qualities of a good legal aid program manager, Kruger admitted she enjoys managing her staff of five and multiple programs. “I enjoy connecting people and building collectively on our strengths.” She also described VLN as a collegial environment where she feels supported in taking risks, which she believes is key to growth and a positive work environment. As a manager, she tries to support her own staff members in taking risks and building upon their individual interests and strengths.

For personal time, Kruger lights up describing her family, running and gardening, including helping her children grow award-winning giant pumpkins for the state fair.

**“The importance of stable housing to individual and community well-being cannot be overstated.”**



*by Satveer Chaudhary*

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Mr. Chaudhary is an immigration attorney in Minneapolis, specializing in criminal defense of noncitizens and complex immigration circumstances. He lectures frequently on immigration topics and writes an immigration blog at [immigrationqa.com](http://immigrationqa.com). He also offers consultations to attorneys representing noncitizens in any matter.



# IRENE KAO

Irene Kao has always been fascinated by people and personalities. According to StrengthsFinder, her own personality strength is an “includer,” which is certainly evident throughout her many achievements. Kao is a first-generation college student and the daughter of immigrant parents. She was born and raised in Fergus Falls, where her parents settled and opened a family restaurant. Kao dreamed of moving to a large city after high school. She attended the University of Minnesota–Twin Cities, where she earned dual bachelor’s degrees in psychology and English literature. Kao later earned a master’s degree at the University of Maryland, where the program focused on diversity and social justice, and counseling. She uses these skills in her current position as she counsels her clients.

After achieving her master’s degree and working her first professional job, Kao and her son returned to Minnesota to be near her family. She served as the assistant dean of students at Macalester College, before attending law school at Hamline University School of Law. When Kao started law school, she was confident that it would open doors to new opportunities for her to serve the public. Kao did not sit back and wait for doors to open though. She became a summer associate with a large Twin Cities law firm, where she worked closely with the managing partner on cases involving higher education issues.



In that position she was able to use her past experiences working in higher education to excel. Kao also sought out externship opportunities with judges in federal and state courts. As an extern, Kao had the rare opportunity to contribute to a state district court written opinion in which she enjoyed figuring out the complexities of the case. Kao has fond memories of each of these incredible experiences.

In her third year of law school, Kao began clerking for the League of Minnesota Cities, where she currently serves as intergovernmental relations counsel. Kao recalls particularly disliking her political science courses in college, but now, ironically, finds herself working hand in hand with politicians. When asked how she can reconcile disliking political science and enjoying political work, Kao shared that she appreciates that in order to create meaningful change, it is important to engage in policy making and develop good relationships with legislators and stakeholders.

She serves as an in-house lobbyist and legal counsel for the lobbying department at the League of Minnesota Cities, where she educates and provides information to the Legislature. Every year, legislators have thousands of bills in front of them and no one can be an expert on all of them. Kao acknowledges that she does not have control over the Legislature's decisions, but she prides herself on helping legislators understand how these bills impact cities. She stated, "At the end of the day, for me the job is about helping cities fully think through issues as they develop legislative policies that drive my work at the Capitol, but it also is about relationship building with legislators and legislative staff so that they can make the most informed decisions possible."

Kao loves working for the League of Minnesota Cities for many reasons, although it is not always easy. She particularly appreciates the organization's reputation and credibility. Kao's colleagues have worked for the League of Minnesota Cities for a long time and they have developed respect around the Capitol because of what they represent. It took years of being reasonable and working with integrity to earn the reputation they have. Kao hopes that she contributes to this good reputation and earned credibility.

As a lobbyist, Kao is an advocate. She is constantly thinking many steps ahead to help shape good policy and predicting potential issues. She is not afraid to ask tough questions, and she is not shy about saying "no." She believes that a good lobbyist is reasonable and provides his or her own perspective, but also allows other perspectives. Much of Kao's work is people centric and relationship building. When presented



with a new issue area or area of the law, she consults with the city experts and stakeholders, establishes relationships, or relies on existing relationships to achieve satisfactory results for everyone involved. Kao understands that organizations will each have unique perspectives, and her goal is to make sure all the relevant perspectives have a spot at the table. Kao believes that the process matters as much as the result.

In addition to being a full-time lobbyist, Kao serves as the president for the Infinity Project, an organization that strives for greater gender and racial diversity in the Eighth Circuit judiciary. She believes that women are not always the best at promoting themselves, so she encourages candidates to be a judge. She has also served on the board of the Minnesota State Bar Association, the board chair of Minnesota Continuing Legal Education, the president of the Minnesota Asian Pacific American Bar Association, and the Deputy General Counsel of the National Asian Pacific Bar Association. She loves serving such worthwhile organizations, and these organizations have recognized Kao's contributions through numerous awards, including a national Best Under 40 Award and Minnesota Lawyer's Diversity & Inclusion Award.

Kao's achievements came from hard work. As a first-generation college student and daughter to immigrant parents, as well as a single mother, Kao earned her achievements by figuring out who she is, surrounding herself with good people, and being strong and resilient through many challenges. Kao's purpose is to continue building meaningful relationships and giving back to the communities she serves.

**As a lobbyist, Kao is an advocate. She is constantly thinking many steps ahead to help shape good policy and predicting potential issues. She is not afraid to ask tough questions, and she is not shy about saying "no."**



*by Chelsea Barr*

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Chelsea Barr is a family law and estate planning attorney at Heimerl & Lammers. She is passionate about helping families navigate some of the most stressful and sensitive times of their lives. Barr earned her J.D. from the University of St. Thomas School of Law where she developed her passion for service and giving back to the community.



# JOSH WILLIAMS

Josh Williams isn't your typical 40-something attorney (to be fair, he just turned 40 in February). Sure, he's a dad and a lawyer, and he takes care of business—but as all attorneys know, attention to detail is important. With Williams, there are a lot of details to his character and solo practice that you may not know or catch on to. And Williams prefers it that way.

In asking about his leather legal backpack, he comments that perhaps other lawyers underestimate him or think he's inexperienced because he doesn't carry the traditional briefcase. Yet, the backpack-briefcase is only one of many details of Williams's practice and personality. Williams's experience, and the calm, confident, and steady demeanor he brings, likely makes him an excellent advocate for his clients.

Williams fondly recalls his younger days practicing, remembering the type of passion he brought to each case. In civil rights/employment law litigation, you have to have a good amount of passion, but it must be measured. Williams states that other attorneys probably thought he was a “punk.” Williams readily admits that he likely was. Only as time went on, he realized how to shape that passion into a very well-balanced, professional advocacy—one with less vinegar, and more reason, than in his younger days. This helped his confidence as well, commenting that “I used to be a trial weenie,” and that he is now a “trial animal.”





As a practitioner in the areas of employment law and civil rights litigation, Williams was quick to point out that they really are one and the same. This is because nearly all employment law cases are considered civil rights cases. Williams's advocacy and understanding in these situations is very high, and it shows with the cadence and calmness with which he speaks.

Adding to this is that Williams runs his practice alone. Coming from a family with a strong entrepreneurial spirit, he brings a certain independence and ambition. This has not only helped him in his career, but certainly in the new COVID-19 world. Particularly, Williams mentions that "early on, I learned to harness technology." He harnessed this skill as a solo practitioner, without much help from support staff or others. This helped not only with his practice but also in having the patience to take on distance learning with his two young sons.

Speaking somewhat in jest, Williams stated that "every case is a special snowflake." In saying so, he means that every case deserves your attention, detailed analysis, and objective advice—it does not by any means represent that each case necessarily has merit. It is again this balanced, thoughtful approach which breeds success—but also can breed disgruntled clients. We all have them—and all of us have trouble at times with that conversation with a client. The one where you tell them they don't have a case. This can happen all too often in Williams's practice, with the harshness of the employment-at-will doctrine.

Williams's reaction to such people though, you can tell, only comes from experience and an understanding gained over time. He explained that clients are sometimes desperate—they are at the end of their rope, physically, mentally,

spiritually, and you have to understand and sympathize with that during those conversations. It's a skill that not all of us have, which Williams seems to, and which makes those conversations much easier.

This skill and understanding, while coming from years of experience, also likely comes from a background filled with varied experiences and communities. Williams grew up in Oakland, California, but moved after an incident in junior high school, which Williams described as a "hood" school. This forced his parents to make the decision that the area was not best for him. In a dispute with his seventh-grade teacher about the compass rose (she transposed east and west on the chalkboard), Williams inadvertently rallied some class members with an impassioned speech that led to the situation getting out of hand. Of course, seen as insubordination by the teacher and principal, this unfortunately led to his suspension.

Williams and his parents then moved to Des Moines. Williams remained there until he left for college at the University of Missouri-Columbia, and later at the University of Iowa for law school. He then worked as a teacher, and later in the Office of Admissions at the University of Iowa.

Williams came out of law school during the recession in 2008, and joined a large Minneapolis firm, where he was the only black male associate. Williams realized quickly that the larger firm culture just wasn't the right fit, and so put up his shingle only a year later in 2009. He applauds and compliments how great the bar association is, and how much they helped him in gaining the competency, confidence, and resources needed to run his own practice. Since then, Williams has run a successful firm dedicated to individuals' employment and civil rights.

Williams is not your typical lawyer. His office is located right off of the Greenway, which allows him to ride his fleet of named bicycles to the office. Yes, named. "Juanita," "Cheetara," "DaShonda," and "Elsa" (his winter bike, of course, named after the popular *Frozen* character). Williams also proudly sports the community bikes throughout the city. Outside of seeing him on a bike, you may hear him talk about his taking adventure travels to various wild places, including trips to Glacier National Park, Alaska, and an upcoming trip to Joshua Tree National Park.

If you are there, do not underestimate him if he shows up with just a regular looking backpack — and likely on a bike.

**Coming from a family with a strong entrepreneurial spirit, he brings a certain independence and ambition. This has not only helped him in his career, but certainly in the new COVID-19 world.**



*by Josh Brekken*

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Josh Brekken practices exclusively in the areas of family law and divorce. With over eight years of experience helping clients with complex and difficult family law matters, he has represented clients in many facets of family law including divorce, spousal maintenance, child custody, parenting time, child support, post-degree modifications, and family law appeals. His experience in civil and business litigation as well as business law gives him a unique and more thorough perspective for all types of family law matters.

# ANISHA MURPHY

**I**nspired by Clair Huxtable, the iconic matriarch on *The Cosby Show*, Anisha Murphy knew at five years old that she wanted to be an attorney. She drew her inspiration from Mrs. Huxtable's approach as the "Renaissance woman" for the Black community. Everything that Clair was—a brilliant civil attorney at a high-powered law firm, a strong wife, and a loving mother to five children—Murphy wanted to be. "So," Murphy said, "I kind of fashioned my life around that."

Murphy pursued her undergraduate degree at Hamline University and entered Hamline University School of Law intending to follow in Huxtable's footsteps and become a corporate attorney. During Murphy's first year of law school, Trayvon Martin was killed. The killing had a profound effect on the direction of Murphy's career. She realized that her future lay in service to her community. "And when I say my community," Murphy explained, "I'm talking Black and brown folks, specifically those who are traditionally marginalized by systems and often left out. Trayvon Martin was a catalyst for change."

When Murphy graduated from law school in 2014, she began doing policy work around youth homelessness and juvenile justice reform. She also holds a master's degree in public administration from Hamline University and worked first for the Minnesota Department of Human Services. She later channeled her efforts at the Children's Defense Fund and various federal agencies.

Although Murphy loved her public policy work, she started to feel burned out by the obstinacy of the system and the deep inequities young Black people faced. "I got tired," Murphy said, "realizing that the system was just designed to marginalize Black and brown boys, and that no matter how hard we worked at it, if the policies and the laws don't change, the work was ultimately going to go in vain."

Murphy's commitment to community service has not waned. Around 2016, Murphy started at the Northside Economic Opportunity Network (NEON), a nonprofit organization that supports small businesses in North Minneapolis. NEON's mission was a natural fit for Murphy, who comes from a family of entrepreneurs. Murphy's mother has owned multiple businesses, her father was "a chef by nature," and owned a restaurant in St. Paul, and Murphy's aunt owned a daycare. Murphy's entrepreneurial roots, her longstanding interest in business, and her dedication to community-focused growth led her to a position as Director of Community Engagement at NEON.

Two years later, Murphy continued her family's legacy of entrepreneurship when she launched Just Law. Just Law is a legal and business firm that provides legal support and resources to promote business development and growth for entrepreneurs and business owners. Through her work at NEON, Murphy noticed that law, business, and finance often operated in silos, and that small business owners in the community were constrained by the myth that access to legal help required consultation with a lawyer at a downtown firm charging exorbitant rates.

Murphy explained, "It's *just law*. It's very simple. It's not this distinct thing from the business world, it literally is just law, and it's a tool and resource that entrepreneurs of color were getting stuck on—tripping over and getting into financial trouble—because they didn't have access to affordable and accessible legal services." Murphy started Just Law to "break the silo" between law and business and provide clients access to legal tools to grow their businesses.

Murphy left NEON at the end of 2019 to join the Community Reinvestment Fund (CRF) as Director of Community Advancement. Her work at CRF and her clients at Just Law provide balance and variety to her career. While CRF provides capital to business owners who have been marginalized from traditional financial streams, Just Law allows Murphy to work directly with clients on legal options and business strategy. In both roles, Murphy remains grounded by her core mission to serve her community. "I answer to community," Murphy replied when asked about her plans for growing Just Law. "Just Law is for the community—it's for us, it's by us, and it will continue to be that even as we expand."

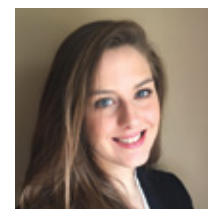
Murphy's commitment to her community stems in part from deep personal roots in South Minneapolis. She grew up just a few blocks from where George Floyd was killed. Murphy remains close to her family and spends much of her free time with them. She credits her family and God for the values that have led to her successes. Murphy's mother taught her grit, while her father taught her the importance of hard work.

Other influences in Murphy's life include Shirley Chisholm (American politician and catalyst for change), Sharon Sayles Belton (former Mayor of Minneapolis), and Marion Wright Edelman (Founder of the Children's Defense Fund). Murphy is influenced most by the underdogs—those who don't give up and who realize that "our life is not ours to have. Our life is to create impact," said Murphy.

That sense of duty drives Murphy in her own career. "Everything that I'm doing with Just Law, everything that I'm doing with CRF, is not really for me to get the glory," Murphy explained. "It's to have impact and close the disparity gaps, eliminate the racial wealth divide, and ultimately disrupt systematic and institutional barriers that result in unequal access to opportunity for Black and brown communities." Murphy continued, "Ultimately, I want to inspire the younger generation. I want little Black and brown children to realize their purpose, and to know that they can overcome anything this world throws at them. They have angels that will guide them along their path, and they will be great. Stepping outside of fear and knowing that everything we want is ours for the taking is something that I hope my life and Just Law shines light on. And," Murphy added, "I hope it gives other people hope to keep going."



**"Ultimately,  
I want to  
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younger  
generation."**



*by Sarah Theisen*

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Sarah Theisen is a 3L at the University of St Thomas School of Law. She graduated from Mount Holyoke College and worked at a garden center before attending law school. She is interested civil litigation.



# EDDIE OCAMPO

**H**e may be freshly-minted as General Counsel of Litigation of Koch Companies, but Eddie Ocampo has levels of strategy and leadership experience a typical lawyer could only dream of.

Ocampo grew up in the northern suburbs of the Twin Cities. His mother knew from when he was only six or seven that he was going to be a lawyer, "Because I just wouldn't shut up on behalf of other people," said Ocampo. He is a creative problem solver and enjoys helping parties look at problems from different viewpoints to achieve a workable solution.

Before graduating from high school, Ocampo enlisted in the United States Marine Corps without knowing how his military service would be of value in the practice of law. He later completed several anti-terrorism schools and courses months before the September 11 terrorist attacks. His training and acumen launched him on a growth trajectory, resulting in a Department of Defense Level 2 Anti-Terrorism Instructor certification.

He found himself engaged with leadership and strategy for some of the highest-level operations in response to the September 11 terrorist attacks. This included: Operation Swift Freedom—a southern front in Afghanistan resulting in the seizure of Camp Rhino, which was the first strategic foothold in Afghanistan; and Operation Enduring Freedom—the establishment of an Enemy Combatant Compound at the Kandahar International Airport, where he and his Marines interrogated over 300 Al-Qaeda and Taliban enemy combatants.

Ocampo attributes much of his formative personal growth and leadership skills to his time in the military. Not only did he benefit from extensive formal leadership training but he also saw many leadership styles in action in the military. Ocampo had the opportunity to learn how leaders effectively motivate people by responding to different personality types and understanding what resonates best with the individuals.



He explained that he has an “Ask – Tell – Make” policy. First, he “asks,” giving a person latitude to work independently. Most people will work effectively when given latitude and opportunities. If that does not work, he implements the “tell” step, where he intervenes with more specific guidance and direction. Finally, if and when all else fails, he goes to “make,” because in his experience there are inevitably a small percentage of people who still require more direct instruction. “It is important to note that just because someone is a ‘make’ individual, it doesn’t mean they are any less capable or less efficient; it may just be their style of communication,” said Ocampo.

Leadership through respect, rather than fear is his style. Ocampo is a model leader because of his ability to see a team objectively rather than taking failures personally. As a leader, he firmly believes it is his job to protect his direct reports and advocate for their best interests. He strives to build personal connections with his team to better understand them and build a level of trust and respect. His understanding of what motivates people and his willingness to be flexible in response to different communication styles has made Ocampo a highly successful leader.

Similar to the experience of most veterans, the transition out of the military was rocky for Ocampo. He struggled with PTSD and reentrance into the civilian world. Ocampo recalls that facing this reality was not easy, and it was not until Ken Snyder (a Vietnam Combat Marine) recognized he was struggling and worked not only to call him out but also one day essentially to dupe him into seeking help. “[Ken] said he was going to take me to lunch, [but instead] he brought me to the VA cafeteria.” Ocampo continues, “In the military we have this metaphorical uniform, which is what really prohibits a lot of us from actually seeking the mental health help that we want and need. So the fact that he took me down, that was a huge hinge pin in my trajectory and in the direction that I was going.”

Ocampo started bartending because he liked the late nights and was motivated by the energy of the job. Not satisfied as a bartender, he eventually regionally managed a chain of restaurants and

further transitioned into consulting in the hospitality, hotel, and music industry. He later went on to manage liquor sales and security teams for large high-profile multi-million-dollar national music festivals.

In 2015, Ocampo began law school at the University of St. Thomas. He graduated in 2018 and started working at Fredrikson & Byron. What he valued the most there was the opportunity to build real, substantive connections with amazing colleagues and clients.

Ocampo recalls that some of the best mentors he has had are the people who surprised him with their willingness to invest in him and in his career, for example, helping him prepare his legal resume and refine his interview style.

Following his work in the law firm environment, former law school classmate Jessica Siakel recruited Ocampo to collaborate with her as in-house counsel at Koch Companies. Siakel was supportive of Ocampo’s daily balance of substantive learning and his continued efforts to address his post-military adjustment. “From day one she was someone I could easily talk to about anything, really,” he said. Koch Companies’ overall culture—an inclusive family-owned business—was appealing to Ocampo. Drawn in by personal connections, he was thrilled at the opportunity to work with a team of real professionals. For Ocampo, the signing bonus was Koch Companies’ enthusiasm in tangibly supporting his commitment to community service and pro bono work on behalf of veterans and children, as well as his service on the board of the Institute for Lawful, Safe, and Effective Policing.

His current duties include managing litigation across the United States. Ocampo recognizes the immense work that goes into learning not only the company but also a new substantive area of law. He is inspired to embrace this challenge because of the trust his colleagues have in him, his background and his values, and feels a strong sense of mutual commitment. Ocampo’s story is one of resilience, and he hopes to inspire others to take opportunities as they come, to build strong relationships, and to invest in themselves and follow their own path.

Ocampo’s diversity of experience in life has given him a thoughtful philosophy on life, which he summed up in this quote from the Shawnee chief, Tecumseh, “So live your life that the fear of death can never enter your heart. Trouble no one about their religion; respect others in their view; and demand that they respect yours. Love your life, perfect your life, beautify all things in your life. Seek to make your life long and its purpose in the service of your people. Prepare a noble death song for the day when you go over the great divide.”

**Ocampo attributes much of his formative personal growth and leadership skills to his time in the military. Not only did he benefit from extensive formal leadership training but he also saw many leadership styles in action...**



*by Lariss Maldonado*

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Lariss Maldonado is an attorney practicing in business litigation and investigations at Stinson. She has been recognized as a Top Hispanic Lawyer Under 40 by the Hispanic National Bar Association. She is engaged in a number of community organizations, currently serving as Secretary of the Board of the ACLU of MN and Co-Chair of the Judicial Endorsements Committee of the Minnesota Hispanic Bar Association.



# AMBER GOODWIN

In this time of certain uncertainty, Amber Goodwin, current 3L and president of the Student Bar Association at Mitchell Hamline Law School, is poised to continue a decades-long fight to bring justice to marginalized communities as a practicing lawyer. Goodwin is the founder and executive director of both the Community Justice Action Fund and the Community Justice Reform Coalition. These organizations are dedicated to building power with, and for communities of color to end gun violence. While Goodwin always wanted to be a lawyer, her road to law school was tough, and she had a few humbling experiences along the way.

It all started at an Olive Garden in the Houston area in 2002. While finding success in the pool as a high school and collegiate athlete, Goodwin, was on the brink of ... nothing. Stinging from the rejection of over 10 law schools, she decided to heed her parent's prompting to get a job. But where? The time commitment of being a hyper-competitive swimmer meant she had never been employed.

Goodwin is an accomplished swimmer. She was 1997 Texas State Championship in the 100-meter backstroke, and one of the first Black scholarship winners and captain of the women's swim team at Florida State University.

Packing her humility into her lunch box, Goodwin found a position at a nearby Olive Garden as a hostess. Soon she was head hostess, and learned these valuable lessons: validate others through delegation; take responsibility for your work product; do not blame others for an unintended outcome; and treat people with respect.

This she considers is a measure of character.

Goodwin carried that humility with her when she decided to move to Washington, D.C. Without a job, but armed with 100 copies of a hand-typed resume, Goodwin physically walked the halls of Congress dropping off the resumes trying to land a paid or unpaid internship. She successfully landed an internship with Congressman Donald Payne. She was later hired by the House Democratic Caucus to work for Senator Rob Menendez, as his staff assistant. Her duties included interacting with House Democratic leadership, providing the staff work to fulfill the caucuses' charge to



PHOTO SUBMITTED  
BY GOODWIN



shape party policy and legislative priorities, acting as the Caucus meetings gatekeeper, and even serving bagels and coffee.

Her humility was tested again when at one meeting a member notified her that there was a problem with the coffee machine. The problem was that Goodwin had never made coffee and had no idea that water needed to be added to the machine. Confessing her lack of barista skills to her boss, she received a compassionate, and understanding response. She quickly learned that powerful people are human too, and she picked up an amazing life skill in how to make coffee.

While Goodwin was happy and successful with policy work at the caucus, she felt called to the political cause. She wanted to focus on campaign field work and grass roots organizing after she had attended a “Campaign Camp” in Dallas, Texas. She later joined Grassroots Solutions; a grassroots political firm based in Minnesota that was in partnership with Wellstone Action. There she met the future Minnesota Lt. Governor, Peggy Flannagan, and future St. Paul Mayor, Melvin Carter. Together these “baby organizers” set off to actualize campaign strategies originated by the late Senator Paul Wellstone. This included building power at the voting booth.

According to Goodwin, the experience at Grassroots Solutions as a campaign camp manager “changed my life.” For the next 13 years of her career, Goodwin committed to grassroots organizing and field work for causes and candidates she believed in. Her work and efforts included working for President Barack Obama in 2008, and Wendy Davis who ran for Governor in Texas after gaining notoriety for a 13-hour filibuster in the Texas Senate. Other achievements included implementation of the Affordable Care Act training, educating, and activating young Democrats, and establishment of a union to protect the rights of janitors in the Houston area. This work fundamentally changed her life and crystalized her perspective on law.

While purposefully protesting on behalf of the janitors on strike, she and 11 other protesters were arrested when they handcuffed themselves to trashcans and blocked traffic. Despite motivating words offered by legendary Congressman John Lewis, nothing could prepare her for being in jail. Though she was only in the county jail for two days, the lack of freedom caused her to think more comprehensively about the justice system and ways to change it.

Goodwin got her chance to fundamentally change the conversation when she moved back to Washington to work at Giffords, a gun violence prevention advocacy organization. While working for this group, she was angry and deeply moved after a group of Black parishioners were shot while attending Bible study in Charleston, SC. This incident forced Goodwin to think about race and class, and she took close notes on how people were impacted by gun violence.

This inequity prompted her to start the organizations she is running now. This included working with civil rights activist Desmond Meade, who was fighting to restore voting rights in Florida. Goodwin became engaged in similar causes across the United States. She hoped to affect the process as a lawyer like Meade, who she considers one of her heroes. She just needed to find an ABA accredited program that offered classes both online and in person.

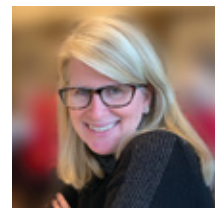
Friends in Minnesota recommended Mitchell Hamline because of its blended learning program. This program enabled Goodwin to continue to run her non-profits from her home in Houston while attending classes online and in Minnesota. The flexibility of the program is especially beneficial when your day job requires you to testify before Congress, as Goodwin did before the House Judiciary Committee in 2019.

What is in store for the future lawyer? A brand of legal advocacy Goodwin has studied called “trauma informed lawyering.” Goodwin will continue to fight for social justice causes and intends to support marginalized communities by fundamentally challenging existing institutional structures and holding people accountable through impact litigation, class actions, and legislative work.

Goodwin’s passion is to promote the belief in a different world free from injustice, and the courage to change the legal system. She cautions us, citing Brené Brown’s message, that courage and comfort are not simultaneously compatible. In this fight, she challenges us all to do the work—assess the systems you have benefitted from, embrace the burden to educate yourself to understand injustice embedded in those systems, and embrace the responsibility to change those systems.

After the killing of George Floyd in May of 2020, Goodwin, along with other student leaders, wrote an open letter to the Mitchell Hamline Student body, “No matter what area of law you pursue, remember you have the power to break down systems that have caused harm to people in our community.”

**“No matter what area of law you pursue, remember you have the power to break down systems that have caused harm to people in our community.”**



*by Nancy Wallrich*

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Nancy Wallrich represents injured workers as an attorney at Teplinsky Law Group. She is also a privacy professional and maintains the CIPP/US. She is a former Adjunct Legal Writing Professor for the Legal Practicum at William Mitchell College of Law and her community service includes serving as mentor at the University of St. Thomas School of Law, co-chairing the Minnesota Association for Justice Women for Justice section.

# Be the Change and Thrive

By Tara L. Smith



“Why what can take place without change? What then is more pleasing or more suitable to the universal nature [...] Dost thou not see then that for thyself also to change is just the same, and equally necessary for the universal nature?”

— Marcus Aurelius

If there's anything in which lawyers excel, it's surely in setting goals and achieving success. Yet, with that same fortitude and grit, we all too often launch into careers charted on paths too narrow and finite. We are well trained to identify and analyze myriad possibilities as well as to pivot without warning. Yet, almost immediately after law school, we tend to fence ourselves in to either some traditional law practice or an alternative non-practicing role. We leave little room to accommodate personal life transitions, like marriage or family, or unexpected events, like job loss or the COVID-19 pandemic. Instead, we just try to work harder and longer, attempting still to traverse what at times becomes an impassible path, even for the most brave and tenacious among us. Such a rigid mindset about one's legal career trajectory—one that resists instead of embraces change—significantly contributes to lawyers' overall dissatisfaction, compromised well-being, and burnout.

If you are not now feeling stuck—dissatisfied, compromised, or burned out—you may very well be stuck in the future. It is all but inevitable that our legal career paths will no longer be viable to some degree when unanticipated changes occur in our lives and around us. Fortunately, lawyers do have permission to chart new paths with the tools we already have. We can meet our ever-changing needs and promote our own overall well-being. In fact, in both my own experience and in the observation of so many others, I have learned that lawyers are uniquely suited to reimagining their careers and even evolving with change. This is because law degrees are remarkably versatile, and our skillsets are highly transferrable.

By way of example, I'm sharing here my own experience with feeling stuck after resisting change to show how, when we embrace change, the resulting possibilities suit our needs and safeguard our well-being far better.

## Traditional Law Practice

I dreamed in law school of practicing at what was then one of the most prominent family law firms in our state, if not the country. Those were the attorneys I aspired to emulate and join, and I set off on an unwavering course to make that happen. I was 36 years old.

Believing I had no time to waste as a non-traditional graduate, I interned and externed my way to an associate attorney position at that firm, giving very little consideration to the competing demand of motherhood to a then ten-month-old baby, not to mention the mental fortitude required to practice law well. As many lawyer parents just tend to do, I worked tirelessly and without any semblance of sleep or balance between career and family. Soon enough, my own divorce followed and, just four years into my practice, I was careening straight towards utter burn out. It would take all the courage I could summon to admit that I was incapable of continuing to practice law in the way I had so diligently mapped. I was on the precipice of failing at my own well-laid plan. It was a devastating time fraught with the most fearsome of questions: what are people going to think when I fail?

## Alternative Legal Roles

When I got honest with myself and began the hard work of both inventorying my skills and interests along with considering what brings me joy and satisfaction, I discovered I could actually fail forward to a more meaningful role for me at that time—one in which I could still provide value and service to clients. Using my twelve-year construction industry background in business and first-hand understanding of what attorneys need to do their jobs well, I successfully transitioned to the role of chief operating officer at the same family law firm for several years. Then, when that firm unexpectedly dissolved, I failed forward yet again by joining a construction law firm in legal operations management, growing still more resilient, developing many more skills, and gaining countless valuable professional relationships along the way.

## Returning to Traditional Law Practice

All along, I maintained my law license, knowing that when the time was right, I may still choose to return to private practice. In January 2020, I did just that by forming a partnership with a former colleague and returning to family law practice. With my daughter now almost twelve years old and a wealth of legal operations management experience, I am better equipped than ever to own a law practice and deliver legal services.

It is well worth mentioning, too, that the excellent legal practice training I received from my early mentors likewise continues to serve me well. I am also getting more sleep and am more confident as a direct result of the experience I gained in other roles. Most notably, I have answered that once fearsome question: I am no longer concerned about what people may think should my legal path evolve again, having learned through these many years and transitions that all change can be reframed as an opportunity to elevate one's legal career.

At no time is embracing change and rethinking the infinite possibilities of one's legal career more critical to safeguarding lawyer well-being. In fact, as we continue to navigate pandemic uncertainties, the very future of the legal profession and its ability to promote access to justice will depend on how we as lawyers show up and move forward through this unprecedented time of change. I am hopeful that my story, just like the stories of so many others, will empower lawyers to move past any fear of judgment or shame to explore opportunities that enhance one's purpose, give meaning, and promote well-being. That said, if the process of a legal career change feels daunting or you are unsure where to start, working with a life coach or attending a workshop may provide a good structure to rechart your course. Change will forever be constant; instead of resisting change, let's support one another in pushing boundaries and reimagining success. All of our futures depend on it.



**Tara L. Smith**

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Tara L. Smith is a partner at Maxim Smith Family Law PLLC. She co-chairs the Minnesota Women Lawyers Alternative Legal Career Affinity Group and serves on the steering committee for the HCBA Institute for Leadership in the Legal Profession, as a member on the Fourth District Ethics Committee, and is a member on the St. Anthony Park Community Council Transportation Committee. Distinguished by a robust background in both business management and legal services, Smith is a classically trained pianist and avid supporter of the arts.



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# Talk Less. Smile More.

By Eric T. Cooperstein

**A**ron Burr's counterintuitive advice to a young Alexander in "Hamilton" might seem equally ill-fitting for lawyers. After all, a lack of communication with clients is often cited as one of the primary drivers of ethics complaints, if not lawyer discipline. But there are situations in which an impulse to communicate can set a lawyer on an equally perilous path to discipline.

Many of these problems are borne of lawyers being very busy, multi-tasking, or emotionally wrapped up in their cases. An unspoken social pressure has developed to respond immediately to communications, whether they arrive by email, text message, Slack, or social media. Furthering the compulsion, we have learned to instantly express our love, anger, surprise, happiness, or approval with very little reflection. Ivan Pavlov would "love" it.

I see this manifest itself amongst lawyers in several detrimental ways. I have represented clients who, upon receiving an email from me about a routine update, will call my office phone, then my cell phone, then text me, and then send me an email, all within the course of several minutes. That's not diligence, it's anxiety.

Certainly, there are times when it is important to respond quickly to a message. But there is no ethical requirement to respond in milliseconds. For a client communication, responding within a day will almost always be acceptable; it is unlikely that taking several days to respond will violate a rule. As for opposing counsel, in many situations there is no obligation to respond at all, as long as the failure to respond does not unreasonably delay litigation or prejudice the client's interests in moving the matter forward.

Responses that are dashed-off tend to be brief, sometimes to the point of being incomprehensible. They typically lack structure. The shorter the communication, the more likely it is that the recipient will misinterpret the tone, inferring irritation, frustration, anger, or apathy contrary to the writer's intent. In a sense, these writings are the opposite of communication because the message obscures the information that the writer intended to convey.

Here are few situations in which lawyers would be well-served to talk a little less:

## The Accusatory Email from a Client

Either you did not get it done fast enough, you charged too much for it, or you never told them it was going to happen. Whatever the client's strife, you will not necessarily make it better by responding quickly, let alone defensively. The client is amped-up; your too-quick response may escalate the client's emotions. Angry, accusatory email threads look ugly attached to an ethics complaint. A carefully thought-out email later in the day, or the next day, may reach a calmer client and help deescalate the situation.

## The Nasty Gram from Opposing Counsel

Here's a novel rule of thumb: the snider the email from opposing counsel, the longer you should take to respond to it. Not to "punish" the other lawyer but to take the time to calm yourself down, be thoughtful, avoid taking bait, and limit your response to only what truly requires a response. Someday maybe a robot will analyze these emails and prevent you from responding for a period of time. Until then, let it mellow a while.

## Talking to Unrepresented Parties

When communicating with a *pro se* opposing party, choose your words carefully. For example, many lawyers will start a letter with "I am writing to advise you" when what they mean is that they want to provide the party with notice of some event or action. A lawyer received a private admonition for a conflict of interest because some poorly worded emails to a *pro se* party in a transactional matter were later construed to have created an attorney-client relationship between the lawyer and that party.

If you want to talk more, remember to remind *pro se* parties, friends and relatives of clients, witnesses, etc., that you are not their lawyer and that you cannot give them legal advice other than the advice to consult with a lawyer of their own. A lawyer may create an attorney-client relationship by drafting a document for someone, in which case a disclaimer may not undo what should not have been done in the first place.

## Responding to Online Reviews

The discipline system isn't good enough for some disgruntled clients. They take their grievances to the gritty streets of Google My Business and other online fora. Don't be tempted to respond with your own version of the "Reynolds Pamphlet." The Lawyers Professional Responsibility Board issued Opinion 24 in 2017, which essentially prohibits a lawyer from trying to bleach the stain on their good name by revealing confidential information about what really happened in the representation. I don't agree with it, but unless you want to be a test case, keep any response brief and limited to apologetic platitudes.

## Responding to Ethics Complaints

Some lawyers respond to ethics complaints with a narrative that makes *Bleak House* look like a novella. Others attack the complainant or throw in every possible argument against a rule violation, some of which do more harm than good down the road. Slow down, step away from the keyboard, consider your response, then reconsider it. Ask a colleague to review it.

Talk less. Smiling more in these situations couldn't hurt either.



**Eric T. Cooperstein**

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Eric T. Cooperstein, the "Ethics Maven," defends lawyers and judges against ethics complaints, provides lawyers with advice and expert opinions, and represents lawyers in fee disputes and law firm break-ups.

## HONORING LAWYERS WHO PASSED AWAY IN 2020

The HCBA's Bar Memorial Committee requests your assistance in its efforts to memorialize Hennepin County lawyers and judges. Please inform us of any colleagues who have passed away this year who should be memorialized at the 2021 Bar Memorial. Plans for the 2021 Bar Memorial are being finalized and more details will be provided in the January issue of the Hennepin Lawyer.

Contact Sheila Johnson at [sjohnson@mnbars.org](mailto:sjohnson@mnbars.org) with names of those to be memorialized. If you are interested in serving on the Bar Memorial Committee, we welcome your participation.



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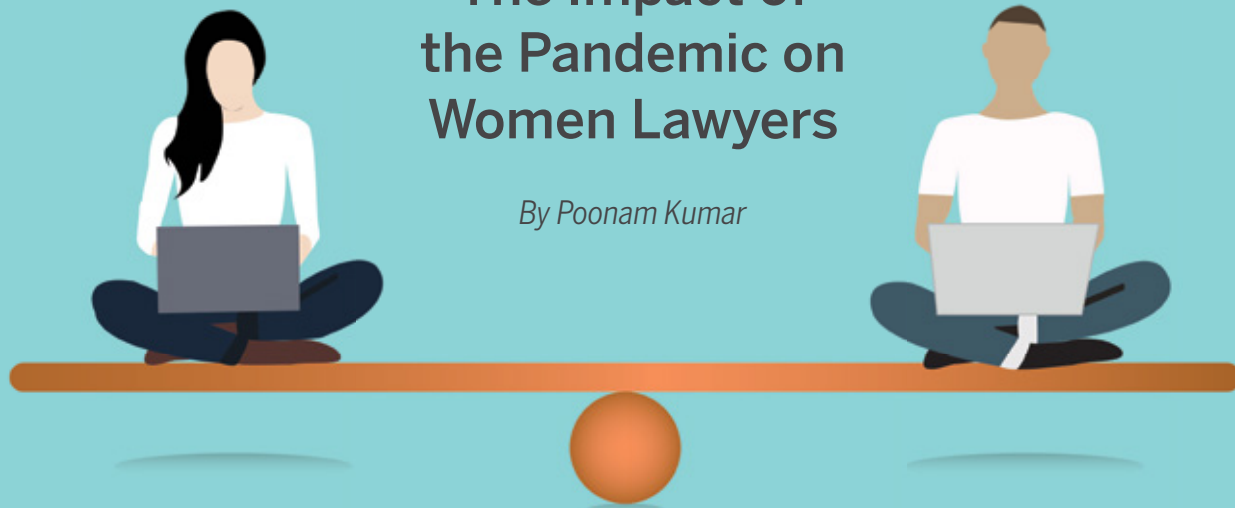
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# Leveling the Field?

## The Impact of the Pandemic on Women Lawyers

*By Poonam Kumar*



**T**here is little doubt that the COVID-19 pandemic has changed the way we live and work. As members of the legal industry, we have witnessed the near overnight shift to remote working. Many have argued that as a section of the workforce that often takes on a bigger share of home-schooling and childcare, women could be hit disproportionately harder by the current crisis. For instance, in a recently published policy brief, the UN Secretary-General stated that across every sphere, from health to the economy, security to social protection, the impacts of COVID-19 are exacerbated for women. However, what are the important takeaways for women going forward? In this article, I share some observations and offer suggestions on how women lawyers can think about the pandemic and our work lives beyond that.

### 1 Rethink remote working as an equalizer.

Remote working should be considered the great equalizer. For instance, consider business development. Since the onset of COVID-19, there are very limited opportunities for business development through traditional client entertainment avenues such as sports, dinners or much sought after theater tickets. All lawyers, men and women, are now forced to rethink and reimagine how to undertake business development efforts.

Remote working has also created a very promising environment for women lawyers to step into roles and take up professional responsibilities which may otherwise be difficult if they are also managing family needs. For instance, leadership or management positions within organizations no longer require travel or in-person meetings and are excellent opportunities to explore at this time.

Some women might be hesitant to undertake such positions because of the messiness of working from home. But please remember that remote working has leveled the field for us in this regard as well. We are all now on the same Zoom calls occupying the same amount of screen space. Most of us (men and women) have been Zoom-bombed with kids and pets in the background. The lines between home life and work life have blurred, and we are all more human, aware and vulnerable to each other. We have seen a window into the chaotic home life of not just women lawyers but their male colleagues as well.

### 2 Continue to build your skills and personal brand.

While organizations are trying to successfully navigate the challenges of COVID-19, the changing nature of our roles and responsibilities does provide an opportunity to assess and build our skill set. Use the time to seek out particular

assignments that enhance your understanding of a different (and hopefully, in high demand) area of the law and work with specific teams that enhance your skills and network. For instance, you can seek to become an expert on the complex array of COVID-19 related regulations in a particular industry. Or as another example, if you are a transactional lawyer, you can seek assignments in the restructuring practice to give you a deeper understanding of a complementary area of the law.

Women lawyers should also think about ways to increase their visibility while not in the office. For instance, they can ask to be part of pitches or client meetings, host webinars, speak on panels—all within the parameters of working from home. Personal branding also remains critical in these times. Review your LinkedIn profile and make sure you have an active online presence. Be sure to keep your professional bio updated and include any presentations that you are giving or have attended. Comment on your colleagues' posts (rather than just liking them) because the latter gets you more visibility on social media algorithms. Create and post original content if you can.

The pandemic has taught us that geographic location no longer matters and that we can effectively work from anywhere as long as we have a strong skillset to deliver.



### 3 Be strategic and comprehensive in your 2020 performance review.

Our current chaos makes us natural multitaskers and that skill is in high demand right now. Be sure to highlight your ability to multitask and successfully juggle various work and personal obligations in your annual performance review. This is an opportunity for us to boldly describe the billable and non-billable contributions we are making to our workplaces. Advocate for yourself in your review and highlight all that you have achieved during this stressful time. Be sure to describe matters that you have completed on time and within budget. Provide details on how you have managed to make your working day more flexible to support other obligations. If you have fallen behind on any metrics, be sure to explain and contrast against another performance metric where you have performed well and excelled.

Women lawyers who lead teams should also include their leadership ability and achievement in their review. We are exceedingly exercising emotional intelligence, resilience and empathy in our interpersonal relationships in this current climate and they make us better leaders. They help us successfully adapt to a changing environment and overcome crisis (big or small) on a daily basis. These accomplishments should be included in your performance assessment. If you are a manager, support your team that is struggling with challenges of work and family. Make sure you document in your review any creative initiatives you have led and any successes with your team.

Your 2020 performance review should shine a light on your holistic approach to problem solving and your ability to deliver value to your organization in these times.

### 4 Think about the elements of your remote working environment you want to retain post- COVID-19.

While it is hard to imagine right now, there will come a time when COVID-19 and the mandatory remote working scenario will be behind us. I would urge women lawyers not to be too quick to give up on the flexibility and other supportive elements of this new normal. Embrace the elements that have worked for you and be prepared to ask for them to be incorporated in your working life post-COVID-19. For instance, do you now want to work remote a certain amount of time? Certain days of the week? Do you want flexible start and end times? Technological advancement has made video conferences easy, accessible and acceptable and can replace face to face meetings. You can

redesign your work week with a few days of remote work. Law firm employers might be more open to these discussions as many of them will actually be looking to reduce their real estate footprint. Workplaces will become more agile so be on the front of that. Be confident that you can deliver high quality work even working remotely.

As always, messaging is critical. When you have these discussions with leadership in your organization, reinforce that you can adapt and stay flexible with the stakeholders. The COVID-19 pandemic has an ever-changing landscape and so acknowledge that the needs of your teams, organization and family will change. Staying flexible will be one of your biggest strengths and no small feat.

### 5 Prioritize your mental and physical health.

Prioritize your mental and physical health. If there is anything this year has taught us, it is that health and wellness is critical to our performance. Identify and carve out time for your mental and physical health and well-being. Then unapologetically work to protect that time and achieve your personal goals.

Many people tend to view 2020 as a write-off year. But this is also a year of significant learning, reflection and growth. And, more importantly, it can also be a year where we take steps to redefine how we think of our long-term careers.



**Poonam Kumar**

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Poonam Kumar is a partner in the corporate practice at DLA Piper and is based in the firm's Minneapolis office. Kumar's practice focuses on complex cross-border transactions for large Fortune 500 companies and includes a wide variety of transactions, such as mergers and acquisitions, divestitures, spin-offs, joint ventures and corporate restructurings. Kumar is active in her firm's diversity initiatives and is a co-chair of Mosaic, DLA's affinity resource group for diverse partners and counsel.

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# Talk Like TED

Summary by Lisa Buck

Most of us will never be asked to give a TED talk. However, we are selling ourselves and our ideas every day, according to Carmine Gallo, author of *Talk Like TED: The 9 Public Speaking Secrets of the World's Top Minds*. Whether marketing your legal services, advocating for a client, pitching an investor, presenting a CLE, or participating in a virtual meeting on Zoom, you are selling yourself and your message.

TED (which stands for Technology, Entertainment and Design) was launched in 1984 as an annual conference and now posts online videos which are viewed 1.5 million times each day. *Talk Like TED* breaks down what makes the most popular TED presentations so remarkable.

The author identifies three components of great TED talks: they are *emotional* (they touch one's heart), *novel* (they teach something new), and *memorable* (they present content in a way that listeners remember). Within these three components are nine tips you can use to improve your speaking to engage and inspire others.

## Identify Your Passion

You are more likely to persuade and inspire listeners if you express a passion for the topic. Passion is defined as a meaningful or intense connection to the topic.

Starbucks founder Howard Schultz told Gallo that he is not passionate about coffee, but rather about creating a space outside of home and office that provides a relaxing and joyful experience. Coffee is the product, but not the passion.

In identifying your passion, Gallo suggests you ask "What makes my heart sing?" In other words, what is it about your idea/message/topic that gets you fired up? Then share that with your audience.

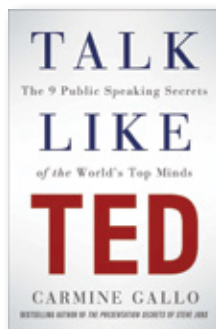
## Tell a Story

Most TED talks begin with a story. In fact, when a person is invited to give a TED talk, they receive a document called The TED Commandments. No. 4 is "Thou shalt tell a story."

Stories create an emotional connection with the listener because they touch the head *and* the heart. Research shows stories that evoke emotion can actually sync the listener's mind with the speaker's mind, a condition called "brain coupling".

According to Gallo, stories are more powerful than data or statistics. In fact, Gallo quotes sociologist and TED speaker Brene Brown in stating "Stories are just data with a soul."

TED presenters often use personal stories or stories about others to bring their point of life. Civil rights attorney Bryan Stevenson's TED talk about injustice received the longest standing ovation in TED history. Sixty-five percent of Stevenson's talk was stories. He spoke of his grandmother and the expectations she had for him and his siblings. Stories about family are narratives that many listeners connect with.



*Talk Like TED: The 9 Public Speaking Secrets of the World's Top Minds*  
By Carmine Gallo

TED speakers also use brand stories, which trace the success or failure of a product or company. Seth Godin shared this brand story in his TED talk about marketing: Silk, which makes almond milk, decided to move their product (which does not need to be refrigerated) to the refrigerated section of the grocery store alongside conventional dairy products. Sales of Silk tripled. Silk did not increase its advertising; it just changed product placement and in turn changed consumer perception about almond milk.

## Have a Conversation

Don't deliver a presentation; have a conversation. A conversation is authentic, but Gallo says authenticity does not happen naturally. It takes practice. Get feedback from others, and refine your message and delivery based on the feedback. Pay attention to your rate/speed (ideal pace is about 190 words per minute), volume, pitch (high or low), and pauses (to set aside a key word or phrase).

Use gestures but use them sparingly. For maximum impact, keep your gestures within the "power sphere", the zone between your eyes and your navel.

## Teach Something New

Gallo says novelty is the single most effective way to capture someone's attention. Humans are curious, and we have a powerful drive to learn. Research shows that learning something new activates the reward center of the brain, releasing dopamine. Gallo calls dopamine the "save button" in the brain. When dopamine is present during an event, we remember it more vividly.

To make your presentation novel, reveal something new or take familiar information and repackage it in an unfamiliar way. Present a new way of solving a problem, or a unique way of looking at the issue.

Robert Ballard started his TED talk about ocean exploration by asking the audience if they were aware that 50 percent of the US lies beneath the sea. (Most were not.) He added that the deep sea contains more history than all the museums on earth combined. These surprising facts forced listeners to view the ocean in a new way.

Susan Cain delivered a TED talk that questioned society's perception that talkative and outgoing people make the best leaders. Cain offered the audience a fresh way of thinking about extroverts and introverts. Her talk has been viewed more than 25 million times.

## Deliver a Jaw-Dropping Moment

A jaw-dropping moment is something unexpected, memorable, impressive, or shocking. It grabs the listener's attention and puts them in a heightened state of emotion. That's why we remember where we were on 9/11 but couldn't find our car keys this morning.

In his TED talk about malaria, Bill Gates opened a jar of mosquitoes and let them swarm around the room. "There's no reason only poor people should have the experience," he said. Gates spoke for 18 minutes but the mosquito moment is the one people Tweeted about and remembered. Gallo says that every remarkable presentation needs a jaw-dropping moment.

## Find Humor

Don't take yourself or your topic too seriously. Give the audience something to smile about. Humor lowers defenses and makes the audience more receptive to your message. Add a story or anecdote that has made your colleagues smile in the past and weave it into your presentation.

## Stick to the 18-Minute Rule

TED talks must not exceed 18 minutes, a length chosen by TED organizers based on neuroscience and strategy. Research shows that too much information, dubbed "cognitive backlog", prevents listeners from absorbing and understanding information.

According to Gallo, you should be able to summarize your message in a "Twitter friendly headline", 140 characters or less. If you cannot explain your idea or message in 140 characters or less, keep working until you can. To pare it down, ask yourself "What is the one thing I want people to take away from my message? What is the one thing I want people to know about this topic?"

## Use Multi-Sensory Experiences

Don't just rely on Power Point or slides. Show photos. Listeners are more likely to remember an idea with a picture that complements it. Use interesting props that bring your message to life. (See Bill Gates' mosquito jar above).

## Stay in Your Lane

Finally, be your authentic self, rather than attempting to be the "sage on the stage". Allow listeners to see the real you, by sharing personal stories and insights from your observations. Don't be afraid to show vulnerability. In her TED talk (which has been viewed over 41 million times), Brene Brown shared that vulnerability takes courage and is key to finding joy and success.



**Lisa Buck**

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Ms. Buck practiced corporate law in Minneapolis and was an adjunct professor at William Mitchell College of Law. She contributes to the *Hennepin Lawyer* and serves on the board of the Hennepin County Law Library.



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### Session 1: February 17

Kickoff: What is Leadership? Why Does It Matter?

### Session 2: March 3

Personal Leadership I: Who Are You as a Leader?

### Session 3: March 17

Personal Leadership II: Leading Authentically through Conflict

### Session 4: March 31

Team Leadership I: Confronting Bias & Creating Inclusion

### Session 5: April 14

Team Leadership II: Cultivating a Healthy Team

### Session 6: April 28

Organizational Leadership I: Avoiding Leadership Landmines

### Session 7: May 12

Final Session (2:00–5:00 pm) Organizational Leadership II: Crisis, Culture & Cohesion



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## Questions?

Contact Kara Haro at 612-278-6329  
or [kharo@mnbars.org](mailto:kharo@mnbars.org)

**Traci (Theresa) Capistrant** and **Dan Van Loh** announce the formation of their new firm, Capistrant Van Loh in Minneapolis.

Bassford Remele announces that **Leah Ceee O. Boomsma** has joined the firm as a shareholder.



Merchant & Gould announces the promotions of **Alpaslan Sapmaz**, **Julie K. Skoge** and **Paige S. Stradley**, to partners.



**Mark Bradford**, a Bassford Remele shareholder, has been accepted into the American Board of Trial Advocates.

Arthur, Chapman, Kettering, Smetak & Pikala announces the addition of attorney **Amber N. Garry**.



Bird, Jacobsen & Stevens, P.C. has changed its name. The firm is now known as **Bird, Stevens & Borgen, P.C.** The name change comes as the firm welcomes **Grant Borgen** as a shareholder.

**John H. Brennan** has joined the Wayzata firm Sanford, Pierson, Thone & Streen in an of counsel capacity.



Henschel Moberg announces that **Amy Yanik Meisel** has been named a Fellow of the American Academy of Matrimonial Lawyers.



**Andrew Landsman** has joined Merchant & Gould as senior counsel.

**Sara Wilson** has joined Lommen Abdo in its Minneapolis office.



**Bruce Goldstein** has joined Bernick Lifson as an of counsel attorney.

Winthrop & Weinstine announces the selection of **Tammera (Tami) Diehm** as the new firm president, effective January 1, 2021.



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## NOV 5

### HCBA New Lawyers

Virtual Cheers to New Lawyers  
— Cocktail/Mocktail Class and  
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## NOV 10

### HCBA Annual Excellence Awards

Postponed from the  
Spring of 2020

## NOV 11

### HCBA/MSBA/RCBA CLE

The 2020 Election — Who won,  
who lost, who sued, and why

## NOV 16

### HCBA Landlord/Tenant

Wild West 2.0 — How Attorneys  
are Solving Commercial  
Leasing Problems During  
the COVID-19 Pandemic

## NOV 18

### HCBA Debtor and Creditor Remedies

A practitioner's view of  
student loan issues —  
CARES Act, litigation, state  
initiatives & bankruptcy

## NOV 18

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Covid and the Caregiving  
Crisis

## DEC 14

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Eviction Update During  
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## COURSE DATES

February 17  
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March 17  
March 31  
April 14  
April 28  
May 12

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# 10 QUESTIONS

with **Emily  
Cooper**

*Owner, Cooper Law*

**1 During your career, you've worked at a large law firm, in-house, for a legal aid organization, and now you own a law firm. How did these different experiences help you develop skills you use today?**

When I first graduated from law school, I did not know what I wanted to do and had no practical experience. The different environments that I worked in allowed me to understand myself, how to apply my legal training and skills and who I wanted to serve. It has allowed me to be more mission-driven and to have a bigger picture view of the impact I want to make with my legal training.

**2 Your law firm offers a low bono, sliding fee structure; can you discuss how that came about?**

After experiencing people of all different walks of life and having to hire attorneys for my own legal needs, I realized that the cost of an attorney is something the majority of households cannot afford. Looking at the statistics of how many people are handling their own cases pro se reflects a growing need for affordable legal representation. With that in mind, I set out to create a law firm that is driven by the clients we encounter to meet them where they are. We craft our fees to reflect the client's financial situation by offering sliding scale fees.

**3 If you weren't a lawyer, what would you be?**

I think I have hit the point where I am what I am. I don't consider myself a "lawyer" but more of an entrepreneur, so I am exactly what I want to be.

**4 Your firm has an office dog, Rufus. What's his story?**

Rufus was a gift from a good friend to help me when I was battling cancer in 2019. He is now my daily walking companion, leftover cleaner upper, and constant spirit lifter. Rufus comes to the office with me daily and he cheers up the staff (he especially loves lunch time). We also help people who are applying for social security disability benefits and he has been well-received by people, especially those with anxiety, when they come to the office. There is nothing like having a big, lovable dog trying to get a scratch on the head from you. Rufus is actually quite popular in our office building and frequently has visitors bringing him treats.

**5 You served on the Minnesota Supreme Court's Committee for Equality and Justice. What do you see as your role in promoting its mission?**

I am a huge supporter of leveling the playing field for everyone within the court system. Justice should not be based on a person's color or socioeconomic status. The mission of my law firm in providing affordable legal services is one way that I strive to carry out the goals of access to justice.

**6 You majored in international studies at Macalester. What is your favorite country to visit?**

My favorite places that I have visited to date are Italy and Austria but I'm hoping that Spain tops them when I get a chance to go there.

**7 What do you like to do when you aren't working?**

If not for the pandemic, I would say traveling. Since I am stuck at home, I enjoy gardening, walking, exploring places with my son, and I love a good nap.

**8 What is your favorite inspirational quote?**

"Here I am. Send me." Isaiah 6:8  
(Please note, I am not at all religious.) I saw this quote while watching the series "Unbelievable" on Netflix and it summed up much of what I feel about what I want to accomplish before I go.

**9 If you were asked to deliver a TED talk of your choice, what would the title be?**

Happiness is a Choice

**10 What advice would you give to a new law school graduate?**

- Pick up the phone.
- Say yes, even if it is scary.
- Every "mistake" I have ever made has produced an opportunity that was unexpected.



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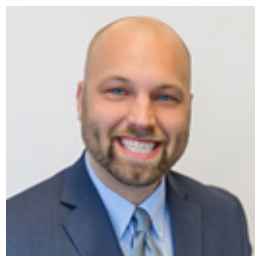
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**Rule 1.1 says:**

"A lawyer shall provide competent representation to a client. Competent representation requires the legal knowledge, skill, thoroughness, and preparation reasonably necessary for the representation."

**Comments 2 and 8:**

[2] A lawyer need not necessarily have special training or prior experience to handle legal problems of a type with which the lawyer is unfamiliar. A newly admitted lawyer can be as competent as a practitioner with long experience. Some important legal skills, such as the analysis of precedent, the evaluation of evidence and legal drafting, are required in all legal problems. Perhaps the most fundamental legal skill consists of determining what kind of legal problems a situation may involve, a skill that necessarily transcends any particular specialized knowledge. A lawyer can provide adequate representation in a wholly novel field through necessary study. Competent representation can also be provided through the association of a lawyer of established competence in the field in question.

[8] To maintain the requisite knowledge and skill, a lawyer should keep abreast of changes in the law and its practice, including the benefits and risks associated with relevant technology, engage in continuing study and education and comply with all continuing legal education requirements to which the lawyer is subject.

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