2024 Annual Edition

Official Publication of the Ramsey County Bar Association

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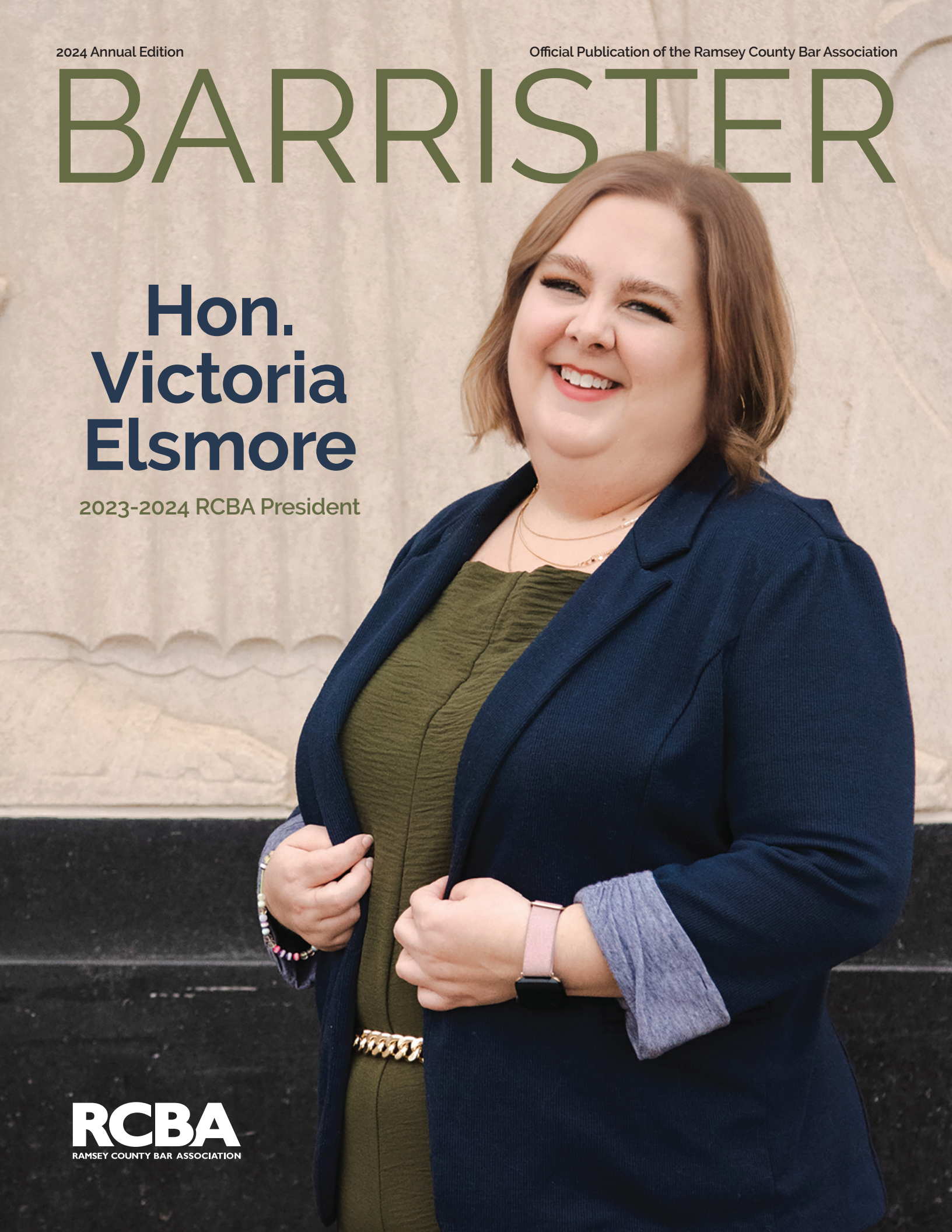

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2023-2024 RCBA President

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Mitchell Hamline scores its highest Minnesota first-time bar passage rate since our combination

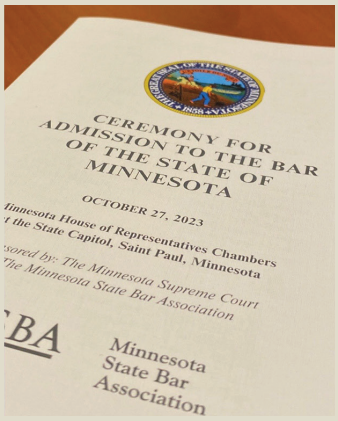
BY TOM WEBER

Mitchell Hamline's first-time bar passage rate for the July 2023 exam was 86.44%—the highest first-time rate we've had since the combination of William Mitchell and Hamline Law in 2015. For our first-time takers who actively worked one-on-one with our Academic Excellence team, the pass rate was significantly higher at 93.33%.

The first-time rate in Minnesota for all test-takers was 85.53%; we were the only Minnesota law school with an increased first-time rate over last July.

In all, 113 Mitchell Hamline graduates passed the July bar exam in Minnesota. Many of them were at the Minnesota Capitol on Oct. 27 to be sworn into the bar. Congratulations to all our state's newest licensed attorneys!

We love being Minnesota's law school of choice.



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RAMSEY COUNTY BAR ASSOCIATION

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2024 Annual Edition
Volume 35 Number 1

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Hon. Victoria Elsmore is a family court referee for the second judicial district and currently serves as this year's RCBA president.

2023-2024 RCBA PRESIDENT

Finding Your Why

Building a Stronger RCBA Community

By Hon. Victoria Elsmore

Hello, fellow Ramsey County Bar Association members. I want to open up about my "why"—why I'm involved in the RCBA, why I took on this leadership role, and why I've chosen to dedicate my time and energy to our association. Time is finite. Between the expectations at work, at home and in our communities, it can be a difficult proposition to become more involved in the Bar Association.

Throughout my legal career, I've been engaged in varied "extra-curricular" activities in the law but it wasn't until I joined a firm deeply rooted in the RCBA that I considered taking on a leadership position. Receiving encouragement from respected colleagues and witnessing their dedication to this organization made the decision feel natural. I understand that not everyone has had such guidance, and not everyone experiences this kind of mentorship. That's why I'm passionate about fostering a culture of support and mentorship within our legal community in 2024.

In a world where our days are filled with countless demands for our time and attention, we have to make daily choices about how we spend our limited hours. This is my pitch for why the RCBA is an excellent option.

Find Your Cause

Many of us are drawn to the legal profession because of its dynamic nature. Recent legislative changes have had a significant impact on various practice areas. Your "why" could involve educating others about these changes or actively participating in shaping them. Our community needs continuous education to stay at the forefront of these issues, and it also requires representation when legislative decisions affect our practices, clients, and livelihoods. The RCBA offers numerous opportunities for both learning and teaching in these areas.

Find Your Voice

In the previous bar year, former RCBA President Kenya Bodden emphasized giving back to the broader community, recognizing that the RCBA isn't just about us—the members—but also about our role in giving back to our neighbors. Volunteer opportunities were created to allow members to offer service, express gratitude, and understand that our circle of influence extends beyond those with bar numbers. I hope this spirit of giving back continues in the coming year, as your "why" may be rooted in a desire to express gratitude and contribute to the community.

Find Your People

Legal practice can often feel isolating, and the past few years have exacerbated this isolation. Working from home, we may miss the connections we used to have with coworkers and colleagues. Creating a community and support network requires intentional effort. The RCBA can help you find your people, through committee work, attending happy hours, or participating in events. Surrounding yourself with those who understand the intricacies of our work enhances your quality of life, mental health, and professional effectiveness.

Find Your Outlet

While our legal careers are dynamic and rewarding, they can't fill every aspect of our lives. We need time for friends, family, relaxation away from screens, and creative outlets. Personally, my involvement with the RCBA has provided a unique outlet. Initially, I associated it with meetings, agendas, and Roberts Rules, but I soon discovered the opportunity for creativity and fun. My involvement with the RCBA annual Judges Dinner program has been particularly fulfilling. It allowed me to be creative, develop new skills, and build valuable relationships. This program has become my creative outlet, providing a sense of pride and satisfaction that keeps me coming back year after year.

No matter what your "why" may be, I'm delighted that it has led you to the RCBA. Engaged and active members are infectious, and those around us want to know more about what we're doing. So, let's share our "why" as we begin a new year. Let's discuss how the RCBA allows us to find our cause, our voice, our people, and our outlet. Reach out to me at: *Victoria.Elsmore@courts.state.mn.us* and let's keep the conversation going.

In a world where our days are filled with countless demands, we have to make daily choices about how we spend our limited hours. This is my pitch for why the RCBA is an excellent option.

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What's a song that energizes you?
Enya's "Storms in Africa." Don't judge me, I know you still love her, too.

How do you like to start your workday?
On the days I go into the office, I wake up at 4:00 a.m. and exercise. My exercise routine includes weightlifting, cardio, or yoga. This gives me the energy to get through my day and endorphins to start the day off strong.

Where would we find you on a vacation day?
Ideally, up in northern Minnesota at the family cabin.

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What is something you've found you're unexpectedly good at?
I started silversmithing about a year ago and it turns out that I had a hidden talent for metal work and design.

What's a great piece of career advice you've received?
"Bet on yourself." Have confidence that you can figure out and excel at anything. Don't let fear of failure cause you to miss out on a great opportunity.

What's a song that energizes you?
It's either "Enter Sandman" by Metallica or "Enchanted" by Taylor Swift ... and there is no middle ground.

2023-2024

Section Leadership

The Ramsey County Bar Association has 40 sections that are here to help you connect with colleagues, stay updated with developments in your area of law, and provide leadership opportunities to advance your career. Thank you to the volunteer members who are leading our sections this year.

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Co-Chair Julie Le

Interested in getting involved in your sections?
info@mnbars.org

Feeling Good

How Being in Touch with Your Emotions Can Make You a Better Lawyer

By Kendra Brodin

The legal profession is often associated with logic, reason, and objectivity. Lawyers are expected to make sound arguments, analyze evidence, and navigate complex legal theories and statutes with precision. While these skills are undeniably crucial, being in touch with your emotions can elevate your abilities as a lawyer. Emotional intelligence (the ability to understand and manage your emotions and those of others) plays a significant role in a successful legal practice.

Enhance Client Relationships

One of the fundamental aspects of practicing law is building strong client relationships. Clients turn to lawyers during some of the most challenging and emotional periods of their lives. Whether it's a divorce, a criminal case, a business dispute, or an estate planning matter, emotions are often running high. Lawyers who are in touch with their own emotions can better empathize with their clients, understand the fear, hope, and frustration of clients, and provide a more supportive and reassuring legal service.

To enhance client relationships, actively listen to your clients, allowing them to express their emotions and concerns. Show empathy by acknowledging their feelings and concerns without judgment. This fosters trust and confidence, ultimately improving the attorney-client relationship.

Negotiate and Resolve Conflict More Effectively

Negotiation is a key component of legal practice. Whether you are settling disputes outside the courtroom or trying to reach a favorable plea agreement, emotional intelligence is vital for successful negotiations. Being in touch with your emotions and those of the opposing parties allows you to read the room, adapt your strategy, and find common ground. It can also help you remain calm and composed in tense situations, which is essential for conflict resolution.

To become a better negotiator and conflict resolver, work on your emotional self-awareness. Recognize your own emotional triggers and learn to control them. This will enable you to remain level-headed in high-pressure situations, making you more effective in negotiations and conflict resolution.

Connect with the Emotions of Decision Makers

For litigators (and others who want to influence others), the courtroom is where legal skills are put to the test. Effective advocacy involves presenting your case persuasively, and emotions often play a significant role in influencing judges and juries. Lawyers who can connect with their own emotions and understand the emotional dynamics of the courtroom can be more compelling advocates.

To improve your advocacy, learn to connect with the emotions of the judge, jury, and other decision makers. This doesn't mean manipulating emotions but rather understanding what is likely to resonate with them. Craft your arguments and presentation to appeal to the emotions that align with your case. Additionally, manage your own emotions effectively to appear confident and credible.

In the legal profession, being in touch with your emotions is not a sign of weakness; it's a sign of strength and effectiveness. Emotional intelligence allows lawyers to better serve their clients, negotiate more successfully, and advocate more persuasively. By actively listening and empathizing with clients, developing emotional self-awareness, and connecting with the emotions of decision makers, lawyers can significantly enhance their practice and become better advocates. Remember, emotions have a valuable place in the legal world, and embracing your emotions will make you a better lawyer.

Kendra Brodin is founder and CEO of EsquireWell, a lawyer wellbeing and professional development company that provides speaking, coaching, consulting, and on-demand learning to help lawyers be happier, healthier, and more successful.

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Temporal Landmarks and New Year's Resolutions

By Joan Bibelhausen

Joan Bibelhausen is Executive Director of Lawyers Concerned for Lawyers where a team of committed professionals helps colleagues with any issues that cause stress or distress. Services are free, confidential, and there is someone to talk to 24/7/365. help@mnlcl.org; 651-646-5590, www.mnlcl.org

Every January, it's hard to find a parking space at my local Y. I celebrate the new people I will meet and try to encourage them to keep coming back. But, knowing that some will only attend briefly, I do look forward to the inevitable drop-off in attendance and quicker access to equipment and lockers.

People often make New Year's resolutions because of tradition—it's something everyone does. This is one example of a temporal landmark, a date or event where we decide to break from the past and move forward with new goals. We experience a "fresh start" effect, which offers a way to envision what could be, rather than what has been. These can be helpful with small goals, but for larger change, we need more. That's why nearly half of those who made a New Year's Resolution were no longer engaged by the end of January.

What can we do to increase our likelihood of success? Here are some steps.

Apply the Stages of Change

These 5 phases can help you envision a path toward a goal. Using the example of reducing stress, here's how they work:

1. *Precontemplation:* You are aware of a potential problem but are not yet acknowledging that change is needed (Everyone is stressed, I can't do anything about it).

2. *Contemplation:* You recognize and acknowledge that there is a problem but may not be sure where to begin, sure that you want change, lacking confidence that you can make a change, or somehow not ready (I would like to do something, but I don't have time and I don't know where to start).

3. *Preparation/Determination:* You want to do something and are open to next steps (What is the first thing I could do? Maybe Lawyers Concerned for Lawyers [LCL] can help).

4. *Action/Willpower:* You take the first step to start doing something different with a goal of changing behavior (you've made an appointment with a counselor, or attended a CLE on stress and resilience, or joined a health club).

5. *Maintenance:* You keep doing something and it becomes a habit or practice. (You're still at the health club in April, you're incorporating practices suggested by a counselor, you've examined your biggest stressors and are addressing them systematically).

When you think of your goals, where are you in the stages of change? It's important to recognize that we may move back and forth through these phases, and that even if we start and stop, we can begin again. Joining a health club and not attending by the end of January is a breakdown between steps 4 and 5. You've already recognized the need and made progress.

Think About Your Reasons

What is the goal you would like to reach and what is your motivation? How do you envision your future self? What is present and what is reduced? Are you doing it for you or someone else? If it's for someone else, a counselor can help you rediscover your self-worth.

Think About Your Goal

Envision yourself at your goal. What happened right before that? What was the step before that one? Walk back to today and consider the reality of those steps. How do you take the first one?

What Are Your Barriers?

As you envision those steps to your goal, what is in the way? Sometimes the simplest things can hold us back. As lawyers we solve problems, and we think we should be able to figure it all out on our own. Don't know what kind of shoes you need to start running? Find a store where someone will evaluate your needs and sell you what you need. Not sure how to find the right counselor? One call to LCL will start the process to make a good match. And you can always ask for a new referral if the connection isn't right the first time.

One Step at a Time

Look at the steps toward your goals and break them down into challenging, but manageable pieces. Find a way to measure so you can track progress when you are feeling discouraged and celebrate small wins. Any celebration is a source of motivation. If you didn't meet a goal, consider setting a smaller goal, then take that step. Set up accountability, whether it is telling someone, setting up a tracking document, or using a coach or counselor.

Reassess

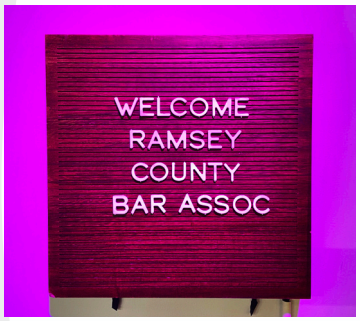
Through your thought and action processes, you will learn about yourself and what really makes sense as you consider and make progress. Adapting to where you are now can help with those forward movements.

Ask for Help

Whether it is how to do something, support through a barrier, or something larger, help is available. We may wish for less stress, but if we are dealing with anxiety or depression symptoms, or drinking or engaging in other behaviors at levels we know are unhealthy, these well-being strategies may not be enough. Lawyers Concerned for Lawyers provides free counseling to legal professionals and their families statewide on any issue that causes stress or distress. Please reach out. You are why we are here.

Connections & Community

What a year! It was great to see so many of you at the spring Judges Dinner, the summer golf fundraiser for the Bar Foundation, the fall Bench and Bar Benefit, community volunteer events, and all of the Section-sponsored breakfast and lunch CLE meetings, happy hours, and socials throughout the year. Looking forward to seeing more members in the months ahead.



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Advice for New Lawyers

By Arielle Pressman

If you find starting out in practice to be an adjustment, you're not alone. That's why it's called the practice of law. To be good at any activity or sport, you need the time to practice. When you're new to practice, you may find yourself working on a case where you feel out of your depth, or sitting across from an attorney with 20 years of experience. It's completely understandable to have some anxiety as a new lawyer.

Start your legal career in an environment that values you.

When evaluating job offers, one of your criteria should be seeking a work environment that cares about *your* success. I began my legal career clerking for a judge who provided me with an invaluable perspective of the judicial system. In my current role, I have mentors who are willing to answer questions and provide feedback when serving clients. If you are starting out, you won't know the answer to everything, but with the right work environment and mentorship, you can learn those answers. It makes sense to factor a growth-oriented work environment into your evaluation of a job, along with salary and benefits.

Incorporate a self-care routine into your law practice.

Would you work if you were sick with the flu? If you have surgery, would you take time off work to recover? We take the time to brush our teeth every day to prevent poor oral health. Looking after our mental health requires the same diligence. I have been a competitive figure skater for many years. I got back into the sport after the bar and found it to be great for my mental health and a diversion from my work. I am also working on finding time to limit my social media use. Incorporating self-care into your daily life comes down to finding what works for you. That could be yoga classes, reading novels, or cooking.

Learn to be resilient in the face of setbacks.

One thing I learned from COVID is that life may not always go the way we planned. Mental toughness and self-care make us more resilient, which helps us better serve our clients. We can become resilient by getting the help and support we need, taking care of ourselves, and gaining self-awareness. Setbacks may set us back, but that doesn't mean we can't continue moving forward.

Most importantly, believe in yourself!

Just because you're not seeing success today doesn't mean you'll never see it. By practice, self-care, and resilience, trust yourself that you will eventually get more comfortable in the practice of law.

Arielle Pressman is a staff attorney at Legal Assistance of Dakota County, where she serves low-income clients in primarily family law matters. After graduating from Mitchell Hamline School of Law, she worked as a judicial law clerk in Rice County. Outside of practicing law, she enjoys figure skating and reading novels.

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Law, Art, and Social Justice

How the Tools of the Advocate and the Tools of the Artist Can Both Create Powerful Change

By Terrance Newby

Pablo Picasso, *Guernica* © 2023 Estate of Pablo Picasso / Artists Rights Society (ARS), New York / Photo Credit: Art Resource, NY

Some believe that artists and lawyers don't have much in common. Artists create beauty, while lawyers create rules that allow for a peaceful and civil society. One seems essential to society, while the other can seem like a privilege reserved for wealthy people who are generally shielded from the hardships of daily life.

But artists and lawyers are both supremely suited to advocate for social change and justice. The indescribable power of artistic beauty and the insistence on equal justice for all have always driven the most important societal advances in America and worldwide. I contend that both artists and lawyers have a moral obligation to use their talents to advance social progress.

CASE STUDY: The Artist versus the Dictator

In January 1937, Pablo Picasso was commissioned by the Spanish government to create a work to be displayed at the 1937 Paris World's Fair. Although he reluctantly accepted the commission, Picasso struggled to find inspiration. For three months, he tried and failed to find a topic that would motivate him to create art that met his standards. Burdened by personal failings and the rise of the fascist uprising in Spain, Picasso spent many fruitless days sulking in his studio, creating nothing worthwhile.

Everything changed on Monday, April 26, 1937. On that day Nazi aircraft, with the permission of Spain's General Franco, bombed the quiet village of Guernica, a sleepy enclave in the Basque region of Spain. General Franco viewed Guernica as a bastion of resistance to his fascist dictatorship, and many residents of Guernica supported Franco's opponents. Franco, eager to eliminate his perceived political opponents, allowed the Nazis to use Guernica as a practice bombing range to test Germany's newly-developed high explosive and incendiary bombs. The Nazis, with Franco's blessing, bombed the remote Basque village for over three hours, destroying almost every building. When the townspeople fled into nearby fields, Nazi aircraft mowed them down with machine guns as they ran, using fleeing citizens as target practice. Most of those slaughtered were women and children.

News of the massacre quickly spread throughout Spain. Picasso now had his inspiration. Before the bombing, Picasso had avoided politics in general, and had purposely never created openly political artworks. The slaughter in Guernica changed his views of art. After struggling to find inspiration for over three months, Picasso completed his epic, titled simply *Guernica*, in just 35 days, finishing the work on June 4, 1937.

After its initial exhibition at the Paris World's Fair in July 1937, *Guernica* found a home in New York. Strangely, General Franco wanted *Guernica* to be displayed in Spain, but Picasso—who very intentionally wanted his painting to be a thumb in the eye of the Franco regime—refused, declaring that *Guernica* would never be displayed in his home country until the Spanish people lived in a republic, and not a dictatorship. Picasso's wish was granted, and *Guernica* did not touch Spanish soil until 1981, six years after Franco's death and three years after Spain ratified a new constitution. Guernica is now widely considered the most important anti-war painting ever created. The artist had defeated the dictator.

CASE STUDY:
The Lawyer, the Doctor, the Mob, and the Verdict

Unlike Picasso, Clarence Darrow eagerly waded into politics whenever he could. But after working on two of the most important and politicized trials of the 20th Century, the Leopold & Loeb murder trial of 1924, and the internationally known Scopes "monkey trial" of 1925, Darrow was ready to retire. At sixty-eight years old, Darrow was "determined not to get into any more cases that required hard work and brought me into conflict with the crowd." But Darrow immediately postponed his retirement when he learned about a very public and appalling civil rights violation, one that would bring him right back into conflict with the crowd.

In late summer of 1925, a Black doctor named Ossian Sweet purchased a home at 2905 Garland Avenue in an all-white middle-class neighborhood in Detroit. Dr. Sweet's new white neighbors were not welcoming, and had previously driven out other Black people who had tried to purchase homes in the neighborhood. Aware of the racial tensions in his new neighborhood, Dr. Sweet waited until September 1925 to move his wife and daughter into his new home, hoping that his white neighbors' animosity would have ebbed.

Dr. Sweet chose September 8 as his moving day. Before moving in, Sweet purchased nine guns and an ample supply of ammunition. He notified Detroit police of his planned move-in day, and asked for police protection on the day of the move. He left his two-year old daughter with his wife's family. And he asked his brothers and several friends to spend the night with him for their first night in their new home.

The evening of September 8, 1925, was relatively quiet—a crowd gathered, the police watched, but did nothing. The following evening, a larger crowd gathered outside the Sweet home. Around 8 pm, the mob began throwing rocks and bricks, shattering an upstairs window. The mob closed in on the house, while the police moved away, content to let the mob finish its work. At 8:25 pm, as the mob crowded onto the porch, shots rang out from inside the house, killing one mob member and injuring another. The crowd dispersed and the Detroit police, whose primary purpose had seemingly been to protect the mob from harm, entered the Sweet home and promptly arrested all 11 people inside. Sweet and his family and friends were charged with first-degree murder. The police allowed the mob members to return safely to their homes.

At trial, Darrow made it very clear that although the defendants were on trial for murder, the justice system was also on trial: "I know that if these defendants had been a white group defending themselves from a colored mob, they never would have been arrested or tried. My clients are charged with murder, but they are really charged with being black."

After deliberating for 46 hours, the jury could not reach a verdict. The presiding judge declared a mistrial, and a second trial proceeded, this time with Henry Sweet, Ossian Sweet's younger brother, as the sole defendant. Henry Sweet admitted that he fired shots out the front window on that night.

Darrow argued that the "castle doctrine" applied to Black homeowners as well as white homeowners and that the Sweets, facing a threatening mob and a police force intent on safeguarding that mob, had no choice but to use lethal force. The all-white jury quickly returned a not-guilty verdict. Darrow had, for perhaps the first time in American history, successfully argued the "castle doctrine" in defense of a Black family.

Darrow had not just secured an acquittal. He had convinced an all-white jury in 1925 that the laws that protect life, liberty and property apply equally to Black Americans. The advocate had, at least for one day and for one family, secured equal justice under the law.

Both the artist and the advocate have skills that are designed to advance social change and justice. And artists and lawyers alike have a moral obligation to use those talents to advance human progress. Perhaps no one has explained this obligation better than the late Nobel prize-winning author Toni Morrison:

> *This is precisely the time when artists go to work. There is no time for despair, no place for self-pity, no need for silence, no room for fear. We speak, we write, we do language. That is how civilizations heal.*

Terrance C. Newby is an attorney, novelist, and playwright based in St. Paul. His plays T*he Cage, The Body Politic, Reunion Forever,* and *The Piano Teacher* have been professionally staged in Twin Cities theaters. Terry's novel *Dangerfield's Promise* was published in April 2022, and has received five-star reviews from the *Seattle Book Review, Manhattan Book Review, Chicago Book Review,* and the *Midwest Book Review*, among others. The book is available on Amazon and Barnes & Noble. Terry is currently working on a sequel to *Dangerfield's Promise.*

SUPPORTING YOURSELF WHILE SUPPORTING CLIENTS

Finding Grace and Working Through Grief as a Lawyer

By Rachel Schromen

In 2020, much of my life started to unravel, beginning with the death of my father. From the outside, it looked like I was handling the loss as best as could be expected, but under the surface, more was happening.

My father passed away in the fall of 2019, and a few months later after taking a *23 and Me* test, I learned that he had not been my biological father—a revelation which reopened other childhood and life events I had not effectively dealt with. I was just beginning to process this information when the world shut down due to COVID 19, requiring not only personal adjustments but also massive adjustments for my busy law practice. I was coping and surviving—but just barely.

Eventually, I got the help I needed to move forward in a more productive way. I sought the support of a grief therapist, was introduced to somatic therapy, started yoga and meditation practices, and gained tools through Cognitive Behavior Therapy (CBT). As with all healing, it's a journey, not a destination. I continue to learn new skills, and as my life changes, so does the way I relax, recover, and heal.

As I travel the path of healing from these traumas, however, I sometimes face triggers in my work as an estate planning and elder law attorney. My work can bring up difficult topics that can elicit emotional responses, and even closely resemble my personal experiences. In fact, 15 minutes after I learned that my biological father was not who I had been told he was my entire life, I walked into a new client meeting where the woman I was meeting with shared that she had recently learned, through a commercial DNA test, that she had a sibling she did not know about previously. I was still in shock from receiving my news, so, while I did not have an emotional response, the irony of the timing of meeting with a client with this concern was certainly not lost on me.

Of course, this doesn't mean I need to change careers or stop engaging with clients. I love the work that I do, and my lived experiences lend to my passion for supporting families and individuals facing similar challenges. While these conversations with clients can be personally challenging, I don't want to avoid them. So instead, I prepare myself. That preparation can look different on different days.

One thing I do to prepare myself is to prioritize my own grief work. I have practiced sitting with my own emotions and acknowledging them when they come up. Trying to stifle responses or stuff down my emotions in a meeting can be more uncomfortable and disruptive than gently acknowledging them in the moment. I have also learned to communicate my responses and feelings, when necessary and appropriate, and ask to take a moment when I need to.

I lost my father in 2019 to Alzheimer's, and as an elder law attorney, I frequently work with families caring for a loved one with Alzheimer's. Recently I had a client who was caring for her husband whose Alzheimer's was rapidly progressing. Her husband's behaviors and demeanor presented almost identically to my father's—he even had the same hobbies and type of career prior to his diagnosis.

Trying to stifle responses or stuff down my emotions in a meeting can be more uncomfortable and disruptive than gently acknowledging them in the moment.

When working with this client, I found myself getting teary-eyed one day. Rather than trying to shut down the emotion and power through the meeting, I simply shared with her the similarities that not only reminded me of my own sad journey, but also reminded me of fond memories. This led to a beautiful conversation about our shared experiences, which deepened the trust in our attorney-client relationship.

In addition to working on and tending to my own grief, I also schedule carefully. There are certain days where I don't meet with clients because I know my own grief will feel too heavy. Other days, I schedule virtual meetings or phone calls because I know that meeting in person with clients may be too much. My father passed away on his 70th birthday— October 26, 2019. I make certain this is not a meeting-heavy day.

My experience is not unique and certainly is not specific to the practice of estate planning and elder law. As attorneys, we often support our clients with difficult decisions and in difficult times of life, with many attorneys not only having to navigate personal triggers but also vicarious trauma stemming from the work that they do. In addition to the tools previously discussed, I also provide myself with ample grace and space—the same kind of grace and space I want to extend to my clients and employees, and something I hope more attorneys give themselves permission for as well.

Rachel Schromen is an estate planning and elder law attorney and owner of Schromen Law, LLC. Since starting to practice law in 2013, Rachel has been named one of the Top 3 Best Rated Estate Law firms in St. Paul (2018-2022) and was voted Best Estate Law Firm in Minnesota by readers of the Star Tribune in 2021 and 2022. Apart from her law practice, Rachel is a hospice volunteer as an end-of-life doula.

Congratulations RCBA Award Recipients!

The Honorable James Street

2023 Distinguished Humanitarian Service Award

The recipient of the Distinguished Humanitarian Award was the Honorable James Street, a former referee for Ramsey County Family Court. During his 12 years on the bench, Street presided over thousands of family law cases and was involved in the Early Case Management Committee, which ultimately changed how family court operated in Ramsey County.

Dr. Ellen J. Kennedy

2023 Pro Bono Award

The recipient of the Liberty Bell Award was Dr. Ellen J. Kennedy, the founder and executive director of A World Without Genocide, a human rights organization with Mitchell Hamline School of Law. Kennedy educates students on the legal mechanisms for prosecuting human rights issues. She also established fellowships for recent graduates on human rights law, and has equipped students, attorneys, and the public with "toolkits" for addressing human rights issues locally, nationally, and internationally.

Bill Tilton

2023 Liberty Bell Award

Bill Tilton has been involved in pro bono efforts for his entire career, including community organizing, assisting non-profits in clerical matters, and doing civil petition for protesters of the DAPL Pipeline at Standing Rock. He's also been a volunteer with SMRLS since 1986, where he's assisted in litigation for pro bono clients and participated in Tuesday night legal clinics to provide accessible legal help to Ramsey County residents. Individuals who have seen Tilton in action remark on his significant time investment in each case and client.

Wendy Willson Legge

2023 Liberty Bell Award

Since Wendy Wilson Legge started volunteering at Volunteer Lawyers Network in 2018, she has assisted over 750 clients, spending nearly 2,000 hours of her retirement working on cases for clients in need of pro bono representation. The 2020 eviction moratorium meant that her work shifted primarily to rent escrow cases and eviction expungement. She has also been a particularly strong defender of victim survivors of abuse, getting cases that were maliciously filed by abusers dismissed and expunged in court. The bulk of Willson Legge's work has been in landlord/tenant law. In 2022 alone, she spent 187 hours assisting 83 clients in Ramsey County's housing court.

Racey Rodne

2022 Excellence in Diversity

Racey Rodne has overseen several initiatives to provide resources and support to diverse law students in Minnesota. After a mother approached the RCBA Diversity Committee with a request for a private space to feed and diaper babies at the courthouse, he and the committee took action, working with courthouse staff to create that space. Rodne, a proud member of the Kiowa (kai-ih-wuh) Tribe of Oklahoma, has also worked with the Native/Indigenous community through a field trip CLE to the Wakan Tipi site, and multiple Native-focused CLE. He has partnered with various Minnesota tribes, the Minnesota American Indian Bar Association, and Native community organizers to ensure that Native issues are represented in RCBA programming.

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RAMSEY COUNTY BAR ASSOCIATION

2024 JUDGES DINNER

Thursday, March 7th, 2024

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The Balancing Act

By Melanie Aranda Tawil

Creating routines rooted in her values has helped Melanie Tawil, a law student at Mitchell Hamline, balance responsibilities in all areas of her life.

When you google "work-life balance," there are over 900 million results.

If you're searching for the "magic bullet" to achieving this elusive balanced lifestyle, you aren't alone. And I certainly don't have all the answers. But I have picked up a few nuggets of wisdom while navigating life post-undergrad, grad, politico life, and now as a business owner forging ahead as a student at Mitchell Hamline School of Law. There are ways I've learned to "balance" my life, and strategies I want to share that will help you realize your own goals of a more balanced life.

It starts with a vision and values.

Crafting a Values Statement

When was the last time you were with yourself? I'm not talking about a vacation or a trip—just 5-10 minutes of nothing but you, a pen, and your thoughts. Consider yourself your most demanding client to nail down a meeting with, and treat your needs with according respect. Set a timer and ask yourself questions like "What is it that genuinely makes you happy?" "What basic principles get you fired up and excited to start your day?" "What are your best practices?" Here's the hard part: craft, revisit, revise, scrap, and continue to keep those answers at the forefront of your day. Your practice, and life, should revolve around those answers.

Bill Yourself

With that same mindset, practice keeping track of your time, as though you're billing yourself for your time. At the end of every day, from a nonjudgmental space, look at how you budgeted your resources. What aligned with your values statement? What didn't? Not everything will fall in line, and that's okay. Meditation expert and teacher Sharon Salzberg promotes the focus technique "One breath, it's just one breath." While you can't control everything that invades your calendar space, having objective information about where your time goes can make it easier to identify and cut out things that aren't in line with your values.

Understand and Avoid Decision Fatigue

Before the pandemic hit our country, most workers' days were structured similarly. Working from home gave more of us the privilege (and drawback) of being in control of our own schedules. As many of us return to the office, and continue trying to fit everything into the 24 hours we have in a day, even small decisions can leave us feeling like we're in quicksand.

It's important to develop a routine, so that there are some things you can accomplish without even thinking. Carving out 30 to 60 minutes a day to take care of your physical needs—exercising, showering, eating breakfast—can make a world of difference.

Your routine should work for you. We're told over and over to exercise, but that doesn't have to be a six-mile run every morning. Maybe you'd rather dance for three minutes while humming to songs from Broadway musicals (Six! The Musical is a Tawil family favorite) or start a yoga practice. Spend some time caring for your mental wellbeing in this "you time" as well.

Routine in Practice

The magic happens when you infuse your professional life with balanced routines. The work routine should be adaptive like your personal routines. Hold yourself accountable to this time, and do not let anything get in the way, not even that fun lunch that someone invited you to. Productivity apps like Motion, Asana, Notion, and TiiMO have become popular to catapult productivity. Even with the best of intentions, you will look for any distractions because it's scary to focus on your big task of the day.

Have fun with your harmony.

Melanie Aranda Tawil is a serial entrepreneur with a passion for business development. She and her husband founded SwipeTrack Solutions, LLC in 2011, after seeing a void in the mobile software and hardware industry. In 2022, she pivoted to advocacy work while pursuing her J.D. at Mitchell Hamline School of Law through their Blended Learning Program, and continues to serve as a member of San Antonio's VIA Metropolitan Transit Board of Trustees.

RCBF

RAMSEY COUNTY BAR FOUNDATION

2022-23 IMPACT REPORT

The Ramsey County Bar Foundation provides financial support to programs in the Ramsey County geographic area that benefit the legal profession, improve the quality and accessibility of justice, and would otherwise attract the interest and support of Ramsey County lawyers.

COMMUNITY GRANTS

$49,250

Advocates for Human Rights
$2,000

All Parks Alliance
$500

All Square
$2,000

Bridges to Safety
$5,000

Children's Law Center of MN
$4,000

Domestic Abuse Project
$2,000

Foster Advocates
$2,000

Gender Justice
$500

HOME Line
$1,000

Immigrant Law Center of Minnesota
$1,500

International Institute of Minnesota
$1,000

Lawyers Concerned for Lawyers
$4,000

LegalCorps
$1,000

Loan Repayment Assistance Program
$1,000

MN Assistance Council for Veterans
$1,000

Minnesota Elder Justice Center
$1,500

Minnesota Justice Foundation
$2,000

Minnesota Wills for Heroes
$1,000

Missions Inc
$500

Neighborhood Justice Center
$2,500

Rainbow Health
$1,000

Restorative Justice Community Action
$1,000

Standpoint
$2,000

Transforming Generations
$1,750

Tubman
$1,500

Tubman
$500

Volunteer Lawyers Network
$500

WILD
$500

The RCBF raises funds through the annual Bench and Bar Benefit, Charity Golf Tournament, and donations from RCBA members. The Benefit, held in the fall each year, is the major fundraiser for the foundation.

SERVING THE COMMUNITY

LOW-INCOME
52,962

WOMEN
23,718

PEOPLE OF COLOR
31,713

IMMIGRANTS
6,502

LGBTQ+
976

DISABLED
8,706

VETERANS
1,477

CHILDREN
30,462

YOUTH (18-24)
16,474

HOMELESS
2,891

Help fund legal services in our community: www.ramseybar.org

DONATE

Half of the 2022 Bench and Bar Benefit proceeds are given directly to:

SMRLS
SOUTHERN MINNESOTA
REGIONAL LEGAL SERVICES

$22,482

LAW STUDENT SCHOLARSHIPS

$6,000

The RCBF awarded 13 scholarships totaling $6,000 to law students who attend a Minnesota law school and who are members of a group traditionally under-represented in the legal profession.

Grantees report numbers served from RCBF funding.

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The Ramsey County Bar Association brings the legal community together, providing 3,000+ members with CLE seminars and programming, professional resources, and opportunities to connect, learn, grow, and give back. RCBA members can access free and discounted programs, events, and offerings throughout the year. Thanks for being a part of the RCBA. Your membership makes it happen.

And thanks also to our annual RCBA sponsors listed here. Their annual financial support contributes significantly to the programming we provide for our members and we encourage you to support them this year.

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