



MY OPINION

BY BOB BLACK

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Helping in Tough Times

In my 31 years as a practicing lawyer, I have never experienced tougher times for our profession. Good jobs are hard to come by and hard to keep. Good clients are even harder to come by and harder to keep. Moreover, it is difficult to envision any substantial change in the legal economic climate in the next few years. This grim fact makes it all the more important that we at the State Bar of Texas provide maximum value to all members. How can we help?

Law books and legal subscriptions are expensive. Few of us can afford an extensive library. Fortunately, most of us conduct research online and the State Bar provides a great service: Casemaker. Casemaker provides *free* online legal research, including material from all 50 states and a federal library. During the last year, 25,000 Texas attorneys signed up to become registered users. Every day, 800 of us conduct 1,700 searches. This already robust legal research platform will soon become even better. Casemaker is being upgraded. The new service, Casemaker Elite, will be available later this year.

The State Bar is committed to providing training and informational tools to help new lawyers and those who may be transitioning. "Practice Tips in Good Times and Bad" is a terrific series of webcasts focusing on career development and law practice management. The webcasts are available *free*. More than 4,000 of us took advantage of these webcasts in the last year. Here are just three of the pertinent topics that were covered:

- *Jumpstart your Law Practice with Social Media;*

- *Navigating the Storm: Going Solo in a Down Economy; and*
- *Strategies for Weathering the Recession*

In addition, you can sign up to receive by email a *free* Law Practice Management newsletter published several times a year that provides timely, topical advice. The State Bar is trying to help in these difficult times.

The Texas Young Lawyers Association is also helping. TYLA has developed "Office in a Flash" and other innovative programs to assist young lawyers as they get started and ensure they do it right. "Ten Minute Mentor," a long-time project, is a superb program. It receives 1,800 visitors a month. Visitors can select from hundreds of segments. The two most visited topics are "A Recipe for Conducting an Effective Voir Dire" and "Hanging Out Your Own Shingle."

From time to time, the State Bar provides *free* CLE. In fact, every two months, you can obtain a half-hour of *free* CLE at www.texasbarcle.com. There are other opportunities for *free* CLE as well. Be sure to check the website regularly.

The State Bar is pleased to provide a member discounts program, available through www.texasbar.com/discounts, which features dozens of discount service providers. Members use the services more than 200,000 times a year! Participants saved an average of \$410 last year on FedEx services. Members also saved an average of more than \$500 a year on car insurance through GEICO. Check out the website. Everyone loves a discount and the savings really add up.

There are three other programs I would like to mention that may be of assistance to you in your practice.

First, the Lawyer Referral Information Service (LRIS) helps Texans find lawyers in more than 240 Texas counties where there is no local lawyer referral service. In the last year, LRIS made more than 67,000 referrals to members of the program. Though members must carry significant professional liability insurance, the program provides Texas lawyers an opportunity to serve their community and build their practice.

Second, the State Bar has a revamped, online Career Center where job seekers can post resumes for *free*. (Go to www.texasbar.com and click on "Career Center" at the top of the page.) You can also list available jobs with the Career Center. Emails are sent monthly to job seekers who have signed up.

Third, we cannot overlook, especially in tough times, the need to promote diversity and inclusion in our profession. The State Bar Office of Minority Affairs conducts numerous diversity efforts throughout the year. Last year's Texas Minority Counsel Program, for example, welcomed almost 500 attendees and provided them with the opportunity to interview with 17 different corporations and government agencies for outside counsel work. This marvelous program continues this year in Austin, Sept. 7-9.

Times are tough. We at the State Bar are working hard to help you make the best of them. ★