



## MY OPINION

BY JENNIFER EVANS MORRIS

PRESIDENT, TEXAS YOUNG LAWYERS ASSOCIATION

# Becoming the Go-To Lawyer

In November, we welcomed our newly licensed attorneys to the practice of law! The swearing-in ceremonies reminded me of how it felt to be a new lawyer and how valuable good mentors and advice are. With that in mind, I offer some advice to our newest lawyers, and some reminders to the rest of us, as we approach the new year.

### You Are Not Alone

There are experienced lawyers all over the state interested in helping and mentoring you. *But you have to ask!* Start by joining your local bar associations and signing up for a committee of the Texas Young Lawyers Association at [www.tyla.org](http://www.tyla.org). You might also check out *Ten Minute Mentor* and *Office in a Flash*, two practical tools. *Ten Minute Mentor* ([www.tenminutementor.com](http://www.tenminutementor.com)) provides 10-minute segments from experienced lawyers on substantive and procedural issues. *Office in a Flash* ([www.tyla.org/officeinaflash](http://www.tyla.org/officeinaflash)) gives you everything you need to know to open up your own law practice, all on a flash drive. Lawyers are a close-knit group. Regardless of what you do to get involved and how you use TYLA, you will find that you will enjoy your practice more by becoming engaged in your community and bar.

### Do Not Underestimate Shared Experiences

People enjoy spending time with and working with people they can relate to. There is no better way to relate to someone than having shared experiences. When you are asked to grab a drink after work, attend an event (even if you think it will be boring), work late or on a weekend, or take a long drive to a short hear-

ing, know that there is value there in addition to the work you bring to the table. All of the hard work, obnoxious speakers, and cutting loose will tie you to your peers — and to your bosses.

### Become the Go-To Lawyer

Being a young lawyer has always been difficult, but the current economy has upped the ante for us all. Young lawyers have even more pressure to distinguish themselves and to become experts in a specific field — all while learning their craft and attempting to develop business. Looking around at the more senior lawyers with established reputations both inside and outside of your firms can be overwhelming. It is easy to question whether you will ever achieve the knowledge base these veterans possess. I am frequently reminded of the phrase “She has forgotten more than you will ever learn.” And yet, young lawyers continue to be sought after at law schools, to obtain jobs in the market, and to be entrusted with important legal work. What can you do to be viable in this economy? Become a Go-To Lawyer.

Becoming a Go-To Lawyer does not mean becoming a nationally renowned expert in the intricacies of securities or some other equally fascinating area of the law. Instead, a young lawyer can become an expert within a firm by becoming the person in the firm who knows the most about a certain topic, motion practice, or statute — no matter how mundane. In fact, this strategy is particularly successful in areas of the law that are more detailed or less interesting to other lawyers. For example, understanding choice of law or jurisdictional issues backward and forward can make you a

Go-To Lawyer for any number of cases. Being the person in your firm or circle of colleagues who is most familiar with a new statute or regulation, such as the proposed amendments to the Texas Disciplinary Rules of Professional Conduct, can make you a Go-To Lawyer.

There are several steps you can take to become a Go-To Lawyer. First, become the expert by being right, every time. Seek out others in the firm who have worked on your issue and consolidate their knowledge for yourself. You can also keep up-to-date with current law by reviewing leading journals addressing a particular topic and by following new cases on the topic. You should also attend relevant CLEs. Once you have the knowledge base, your next step in becoming a Go-To Lawyer should be to develop and expand your reputation both inside and outside of the firm. Send case updates to members of your firm. Volunteer to write a piece for your internal bulletin or client newsletters. Ideally, you should write an article about the topic. You might also seek opportunities to speak about the topic — either internally or at CLEs where you can educate other young lawyers about the topic. Finally, once you become the expert and develop your reputation as someone with knowledge on a particular topic, be ready for that call for help. Be responsive, timely, and anticipate other relevant issues even if you are not asked about them.

There is not a lot we can do to improve the economy or to change how it is affecting our careers. Asking for help, being engaged, and becoming a Go-To Lawyer are things we can do now to ensure future success. Good luck! 🍀