



## MY OPINION

BY BOB BLACK

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# Serving Members, Educating the Public

**O**ur task in the year ahead is basic and central to our mission: To serve you, the lawyers of Texas, and to educate the public on the critical role our profession plays in our democracy.

### Service to You

It is no revelation that we practice in difficult, challenging times. Recognizing this reality, the State Bar will continue to focus on initiatives to make your life and your practice better. We know that more and better health insurance choices are important to many lawyers and their families. We have been hard at work since last summer on a program both to improve your health insurance options and to provide you with greater information about your choices. Look for an announcement in the near future!

Tough times also exact a personal toll on us. Five years ago, Martha Dickie brought forward a remarkable DVD called *Practicing from the Shadows: Depression and the Legal Profession*. In their own words, attorneys shared stories of their battle with addiction and depression, their recovery, and the effect on their personal and professional lives. The program showed us a path to hope and to recovery. Everywhere it was played, people would come forward and share a personal story, sometimes about themselves, sometimes about a friend or colleague. Many lawyers contacted the Texas Lawyers' Assistance Program as a result. Some lives were saved, families were mended, and careers salvaged — but many others still confront these challenges. This year, Terry Tottenham

sponsored *Practicing Law and Wellness: Modern Strategies for Lawyers Dealing with Anxiety, Addiction, and Depression*. Our profession is always stressful, but bleak economic times significantly raise the levels of stress. All of us know someone struggling with one or more of these difficulties. *Practicing Law and Wellness* is a way of reaching out to help. It provides information on how to recognize developing situations and what to do about them.

Our newest lawyers enter our profession burdened by significant debt and with limited job prospects. The State Bar, through the leadership of Roland Johnson, continues programs designed to help: *After the Bar Exam* and *Transition to Practice* are but two examples. In addition, the Texas Young Lawyers Association has launched *Office in a Flash* to help new lawyers get the basics right. While getting the basics right is important for new lawyers, it is also a good idea for all of us.

Finally, the State Bar remains dedicated to serving you through our excellent, cost-effective CLE offerings and by the amazing amount of free legal research material available at [www.texasbar.com](http://www.texasbar.com). Try out these resources.

### Educating the Public

Improving our image as a profession is another central goal. We must educate the public on the role our profession plays and why it is so important. There is a lack of understanding in our country of basic civics. We cannot alone rectify this lamentable situation. We can, however,

do our part. For the year ahead, we are preparing interesting and informative educational programs on the independence of the judiciary and the role of lawyers. These programs will be adaptable for most levels of school and for civic groups. I hope you will join me in taking these programs to your community. We have to open minds that are closed about our profession and educate those who do not know about its central importance to our country. Some of the programs will rely on our rich Texas legal history. Our fascinating history provides a wonderful way to educate about our great profession and, at the same time, entertain. Believe me, parts of our Texas legal history are entertaining.

It will take many years to educate and re-educate the public about our profession. It is critical that we make the effort, however. While some give up or conclude that nothing can be changed, I believe that what we do now matters. Take Terry Tottenham's initiative, *Texas Lawyers for Texas Veterans*, for example. In addition to being a singularly remarkable program that makes a difference in the lives of men and women who have served our nation, we have heard from many individuals who have changed the way they think about lawyers as a result of the efforts of selfless legal volunteers. One program can change minds. What we do matters.

It is a great honor to serve you and our profession. It is an honor and obligation I take seriously. I look forward to the year ahead and will remain focused on serving you and educating the public. ★