

The Push for **PRACTICAL SKILLS**

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As an organization tasked with fostering professional growth among our newer attorney members, the Barristers Club is constantly looking for effective ways to help Bay Area attorneys learn and develop. Professional growth in the legal profession involves a host of intersecting aspects: a deeper understanding of the law, building and maintaining a network, and defining and refining your career path.



Arguably, one of the most important and effective ways we can foster growth is by offering opportunities for attorneys to engage in practical skill building—specifically, the kinds of skills that attorneys are using to practice law on a day-to-day basis.

This includes skills related to the ability to research and write effective briefs, manage their practice, speak in public, take depositions, close a deal, advocate for clients, negotiate, communicate with colleagues and staff, and argue in court, to name a few. Since we're spending most of our day utilizing these skills, it makes sense for us to focus a significant amount of time developing them.

Certainly a valuable part of practical skill development is listening to tips, strategies, and advice given by experts and experienced practitioners. But in this context, we can't forget to emphasize the key corollary to listening: actually doing.

With this in mind, in 2016 the Barristers Club launched a Practical Skills Initiative to increase practical skills development opportunities for junior attorneys. That effort has spawned a number of great ideas that we've been able to put into practice, and I mention a few of them here.

If you are interested in participating in any of these programs, I encourage you to contact us directly so we can discuss how you can get involved:

Public Speaking Practice Group

Attorneys are constantly being called on to utilize their public speaking skills: arguing motions in court, addressing groups of colleagues at the office, and pitching potential clients. Last year we formed a bi-monthly public speaking practice group to help our members hone these skills with a little expert instruction and hands-on practice. After fifteen minutes of instruction from a guest speaker, participants break into small groups and take turns giving a short three- to five-minute speech in a videotaped session and receive feedback from the group.

Increased Focus on Workshops

We've been encouraging our CLE organizers to host more workshop-style presentations that allow participants to play an active role. We've hosted and are planning to host more workshops on topics including: organizing your practice, managing your time, mock negotiations, mindfulness, and how to close deals.

Law Student Mentorship Program

If you aspire to lead teams of attorneys or take on a leadership role at your company, understanding how to mentor and guide others is a key skill to develop. This year we created a law student mentorship program, which pairs Barristers Club members with law students from UC Hastings College of the Law, Berkeley Law, University of San Francisco School of Law, and Golden Gate University School of Law. This is a great way to both serve as a resource to students and develop your ability to lead and advise.

Pro Bono Committee

Though our pro bono committee existed long before our practical skills initiative, it's worth mentioning that this committee connects attorneys with a diverse range of nonprofit organizations in an effort to increase pro bono opportunities—an excellent way to serve the underrepresented while gaining valuable experience.

Next Gen Orders

Over the past two years, board members and Barristers Club leaders have met with judges to promote “next generation judicial orders” and court guidelines aimed at encouraging law firms to have junior lawyers argue motions and take speaking roles at trial. This push led to, among other things, the placement of a statement on the San Francisco Superior Court website encouraging parties to allow newer lawyers to play a significant role in litigating cases at the courthouse.

Practical Courtroom Tips for Associates

This bi-annual program is an informal dialogue between judges and lawyers on how to effectively argue motions in court. This event allows newer lawyers to hear tips and best practices directly from the local judiciary.

These are all great options that have been suggested and created by our members—as well as our local judiciary and non-Barristers attorneys—based on needs they identified.

But here's the most important part: we want to continue to expand our offerings and we'd like your help. We're looking to the legal community to let us know how we can continue to help our newer attorneys grow through new and diverse programs. If you see an opportunity to teach a key practical skill, or have an idea for a workshop or training, we encourage you to reach out to us and help build on this momentum.

Giving junior attorney the space and opportunity to practice these important skills is key, not only to the development of our individual members, but to the strength of our entire legal community.

Drew Amoroso is president of the Barristers Club and founder of Move Associates, a company that helps law firms train their associates to achieve their performance and productivity goals, accelerate their professional development, and add value to the firm and its clients. Contact the Barristers Club at barristers@sfbar.org.