

# *THE STAYING POWER OF BASF AND ITS BARRISTERS CLUB*

## *THE IMPORTANCE OF TEAMWORK AND SUCCESSION PLANNING IN THE LEGAL PROFESSION*

**Blair K. Walsh**

**W**hether an NFL team, a bar association, or a law firm, every successful organization or business depends on teamwork. A solid succession plan is essential to maintaining a winning team that has staying power for years to come. On a broader scale, this also applies to the legal profession as a whole. (See “Succession Planning” on page 40.)

Succession planning is the process of developing the next generation to ensure that there are capable individuals in the pipeline who are prepared and willing to step into key roles as they become available, thereby ensuring the continued strength of the team. The current leaders must first identify individuals with a strong commitment to the team’s mission and the greatest potential for leadership roles; then, they must invest in developing their knowledge, skills, and abilities through training and mentoring. In sports, this is referred to as “building a deep bench.”

# BARRISTERS CLUB REPORT

In a trade association, such as The Bar Association of San Francisco (BASF), where the leadership is composed of volunteers with demanding, full-time law practices, it is inherently difficult to implement a succession plan.

Despite that challenge, BASF has successfully maintained a winning team of leaders who remain committed to the organization and to developing its next generation of leaders.

## **BUILDING A DEEP BENCH**

Since its establishment in 1872, BASF has maintained a solid succession plan through its branches of leadership. A key part of that plan is BASF's commitment to the professional development of its junior members.

For the last ninety years, BASF's new lawyers division, the Barristers Club, has remained a valuable part of the greater bar association, representing approximately 2,500 of the

7,500 BASF members. The Barristers Club was created in 1927 as a way to bring new attorneys together to build relationships with their peers, sharpen their skills, and advance their overall professional development.

According to 2013 BASF President Christopher Kearney, Kecker & Van Nest, "Succession planning is critical in any organization, and particularly so in an organization like BASF. The leadership of BASF knows that our young lawyers—our Barristers—are our future. Getting young lawyers involved and energized in the work we do fosters our future success, as those who get involved early in their careers almost always stay involved with our organization. Indeed, many of BASF's leaders started as Barristers leaders."

The club is governed by its Board of Directors, with each director serving a three-year term. The board's executive committee consists of its four officers (president, president-

# BE A LEADER WITH BASF



Leadership opportunities are available through BASF and Barristers sections and committees. Email [cle@sfbar.org](mailto:cle@sfbar.org) for more information.

elect, treasurer, and secretary), which are elected each year to serve a one-year term.

The Barristers Club board parallels the leadership model of the BASF Board of Directors; however, BASF's officers serve four-year terms on the executive committee (beginning in the secretary position and moving up to assume the presidency). "From the outside, a four-year officer track may seem long, but it has been vital in having smooth and stable transitions year to year," Kearney explained.

This year, I have had the honor of serving as the president of the Barristers Club. Thanks to our leadership model, I have had Barristers President-Elect Adam Kaplan, Munger, Tolles & Olson, as my wingman, and a fantastic team of board members, each of whom has been absolutely essential to the success of our events and initiatives this year.

I have also worked closely with BASF President Michael Tubach, O'Melveny & Myers, and the members of the BASF Board of Directors, which is just one of the many ways in which BASF ensures collaboration among its junior and senior leadership.

BASF gives its Barristers Club leaders a seat at the table, both literally and figuratively. The four Barristers officers sit on the BASF Board of Directors as full voting members to make sure the Barristers Club has a voice in BASF affairs. The Barristers Club leaders play an active role in the monthly board meetings: they provide a "Barristers Report" at each meeting; engage in discussions regarding hot-button issues of local and national significance; and vote on BASF business and policy decisions. Throughout this process, the Barristers Club leaders develop a behind-the-scenes understanding of the organization.

Outside of the board meetings, the BASF board continues to connect with and support the Barristers Club by attending its events, speaking on its panels, and collaborating to host events and CLEs. This year, in the spirit of the "work hard, play hard" mentality, Michael Tubach and I decided to start a new tradition: the First Annual All Boards Reception. It was a wonderful opportunity for the three leadership



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2013 BASF President  
Christopher Kearney

branches of the bar association (the BASF board, the Justice & Diversity Center [JDC] board, and the Barristers Club board) to get to know one another after work in a casual setting, away from the boardroom.

By welcoming the junior leaders into the fold, BASF reminds them of their value and, in turn, promotes within them a greater sense of investment and commitment to the organization. "The BASF tradition of involving and supporting young lawyers—from the new Chris Kearney Community Law Practice Incubator program to the Barristers Club's educational programs—has been the key to its longevity, relevance, and vitality in the legal community," says BASF Secretary Doris Cheng, Walkup, Melodia, Kelly & Schoenberger, who will serve as the 2019 president.

BASF President-Elect Merri Baldwin, Rogers Joseph O'Donnell, will continue this tradition of teamwork among the branches of leadership when she begins her presidency in January 2017. She believes that "promoting the development of the legal profession is an important role that BASF plays, and providing opportunities to newer lawyers for leadership and participation is critical to that mission. New people and ideas keep an organization fresh. Plus, as anyone who has worked closely with the Barristers over the years knows, they are a lot of fun."



“There are few things more rewarding as a bar leader than seeing the next generation come on line with passion and vision, ready to take BASF to the next level.”

2012 BASF President  
Kelly Dermody

## BASF'S HISTORY OF EXCELLENCE IN LEADERSHIP

BASF not only focuses on attracting and developing its present and future leaders; rather, it has created a unique environment that also focuses on engaging its past leaders, thereby securing their continued commitment to the development of the next generation.

From its organized, professional, and caring staff, to its lively events and mixers, to its diverse membership, to its wide array of programs that appeal to practitioners across all practice areas and levels of experience, BASF has created a sense of community that keeps its leaders invested in its mission for decades.

A review of the long list of former BASF presidents highlights the rich history of this organization. While these distinguished men and women are well known in the legal profession and are, in turn, among the busiest attorneys, they are never too busy to join me for lunch, a cup of coffee, or an after-work cocktail to discuss Barristers Club initiatives or provide advice on diplomatically navigating those inevitably difficult situations that arise in a leadership role.

The commitment from past and present BASF leaders to pay it forward is one of the most valuable benefits to junior

members of such a large and powerful organization and, yet, not the type that is advertised in membership brochures.

Though, according to BASF Treasurer (and 2005 Barristers Club President) Malcolm Heinicke, Munger, Tolles & Olson, the mentees are not the sole beneficiaries. “Mentoring serves both generations involved. It promotes longevity and excellence and is also personally rewarding to the mentee and (perhaps more so) to the mentor. Through its Barristers and other programs, BASF does an amazing job of bringing different and diverse groups to facilitate this kind of mentoring and planned leadership transition. It is hard to imagine a better benefit for members.”

Echoes 2012 BASF President Kelly Dermody, Lief Cabraser Heimann & Bernstein, “Given the talent reflected in our new lawyers, it is no coincidence that BASF tends to matriculate a disproportionate number of new innovators, leaders, and stars of the bar who only needed a small window of opportunity to shine brightly. From my own experience working with the Barristers Club over the years, I can say there are few things more rewarding as a bar leader than seeing the next generation come on line with passion and vision, ready to take BASF to the next level.”

The Honorable Jeff Bleich, Dentons, 2003 BASF president and former ambassador (and 1995 Barristers Club president), summed it up as follows: “Every lawyer’s career is built on the help of others—friends and family who supported us through school, professors who mentored us, employers and clients who took a chance on us. But our profession itself is also built on the sacrifice of others—people who came long before us who we never knew. They helped establish the courts, and the rules of conduct, and the training, and the legal services groups that we all take for granted. It’s a gift we all receive as lawyers, and BASF gives us the chance to pay that gift forward. In fact, I recall when I first took a leadership role at BASF I received a letter from the judge for whom I’d clerked. He quoted Teddy Roosevelt, who wrote: ‘Every man owes some of his time to the up-building of the profession to which he belongs.’ I can’t say it any better than that.”

## PRACTICAL SKILLS INITIATIVE

Recognizing the importance of a solid succession plan in the legal profession as a whole, the Barristers Club board has been doing its part to see that its members are equipped with the practical skills necessary to maintain the high standards for excellence, professionalism, and civility set by previous generations of attorneys in the Bay Area.

To that end, the board has created the Barristers Practical Skills Initiative (PSI), which focuses on making room for newer attorneys on the front lines of the various stages of the litigation process.

BASF leaders, past and present, have been vocal in their support of this initiative and its importance to the future of the profession. Arturo González, Morrison & Foerster, 2009 BASF president, explaining the value of a solid succession plan, says, “With fewer trials, it has become increasingly difficult to get trial experience for many partners at large law firms. For associates, the situation is even more challenging. Firm management and senior trial lawyers need to be proactive in identifying courtroom opportunities for the next generation of trial lawyers. If they don’t, they may lose clients who want to know who will be trying their cases five or ten years from now.”

The PSI task force has been working with members of the bench and the bar to increase opportunities for its newer lawyers to develop and sharpen their practical skills. A few examples of the joint efforts by local judges and attorneys this year include:

- The Practical Courtroom Skills for Associates programs at the San Francisco Superior Court, hosted by Judges Angela Bradstreet and Suzanne Ramos Bolanos in February and Judges Harold E. Kahn and Joseph M. Quinn in September
- An increase in judicial orders, at the state and federal level, incentivizing law firms to send junior attorneys to argue motions in court and examine witnesses at trial

- Data collection to understand whether our Barristers Club members are playing active roles in the litigation process (for example, the number of depositions taken, motions argued, witness examinations at trial, and so on)
- Data collection to ascertain the most effective methods used by senior law firm management to measure their associates’ experiences on the front lines of the litigation process (for use in compiling a list of the best practices)

The Barristers Club board has taken great strides toward making sure that newer attorneys have the knowledge and experience necessary to continue to provide their clients with highly skilled advocates. But we are just getting started.

Due to a solid succession plan in place, the 2017 Barristers Club board will continue to push this initiative forward. This group of leaders truly exemplifies the passion and energy that have made the Barristers Club such a strong and powerful force since 1927.

It has been an honor being part of this winning team and, as my presidency comes to a close, I am excited to continue BASF’s tradition of paying it forward in the future.

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