

Looking at Our Past,

Assessing the Present, and

Anticipating an Exciting Future

Yolanda Jackson

The following are excerpts from Yolanda Jackson's remarks after she was named the executive director and general counsel of The Bar Association of San Francisco (BASF) and the executive director of the Justice & Diversity Center (JDC) during the 2015 Annual Membership Luncheon on December 10, 2014.

Good afternoon to my dear colleagues, friends, and family. Thank you all for being here today. I am your new executive director and general counsel of BASF and JDC and I am thrilled to be standing before you in this new role. I am very excited about what lies ahead for both organizations and I am excited for us all to be joined together on this journey.

I accepted this position because I want to lead these organizations through their missions of continuing to provide access to justice, promote humanity and excellence, and foster diversity in the legal profession.

I also am very passionate about the incredible work done by JDC and I am confident that no other organization in San Francisco has the level of impact on indigent clients, the homeless population, and underserved students as the Justice & Di-

versity Center. I am excited to help lead the charge in advancing fairness and equality by providing pro bono legal services and fostering diversity through our educational programs.

Both BASF and JDC are distinguished national leaders among their association peers and I am extremely proud of the great work that is done at and through BASF and JDC.

Now, please let me walk you through our journey . . .

LOOKING AT OUR PAST

Historically our bar has been known to be front and center in causes related to World War II returning veterans' issues, which led to the creation of our Lawyer Referral and Information Service, LRIS; voting rights issues; civil rights issues; women's rights issues; and young lawyers issues that led to the creation of our Barrister's Club in the 1920s. We were the first organization to design and implement a holistic services homeless advocacy program and we were the first bar association to hire a diversity director and create a robust and complete diversity pipeline that provides services from kindergarten to the bench.

LOOKING AT OUR PRESENT

We have some of the most brilliant lawyers in the world within our membership. Many of you are the providers of our 250-plus CLE programs that we offer each year. Many national organizations and governmental agencies look to BASF and JDC for our opinions, input, and guidance on:

- ▶ Effectively and compassionately servicing a city's homeless population, including our ability to purchase a building and secure a home for the Homeless Advocacy Project in order to better serve this community

Yolanda Jackson speaking at the December 10, 2014, Annual Membership Luncheon



- ▶ Analyzing how the Department of Defense can revamp its military justice system
- ▶ Managing an incredible lawyer referral program that vets 50,000 calls per year
- ▶ Effectively pulling our membership together to take action on same-sex marriage and court funding
- ▶ Quickly responding to the new lawyers job crisis by creating the Mind the Gap program
- ▶ Effectively leading the legal community in increasing diversity in the profession

We do a lot and we do it well and we can only do it because of all of you. We help lawyers become the most exceptional “top of their game” attorneys in the country; we facilitate opportunities for lawyers and clients to meet and network; we facilitate

mentoring opportunities; and we are a one-stop shop for lawyers who want to give back to the community in meaningful ways through pro bono work and through mentoring diverse and underserved students.

LOOKING AT OUR FUTURE

Walk with me if you will down our path toward our future. It promises to be a very exciting journey. Let’s go together to a place where:

- ▶ It will become common knowledge that BASF and JDC are where all new lawyers practicing in the Bay Area will want to be if they want help by receiving pro bono case training and experience, or help navigating their career or determining their options; networking; and resources that

will assist them with hanging out their own shingle.

- ▶ Through our LRIS program, every person who needs a lawyer in San Francisco or Marin County can come to efficiently find the right lawyer, at the right time, at the right price. This will include expanding our services to persons with immigration legal needs. It is our goal that many of these needs can be met through the creation of an incubator program that will provide newer lawyers with an opportunity to receive mentoring and case referrals as they represent modest-means clients to achieve their goals of starting their own community-focused law practices. This is an option currently being explored by BASF.

- ▶ Accessing our website can be easy, efficient, and “clear” on your mobile devices. You will be able to sign up for CLEs, other events, and membership through a mobile platform.

- ▶ We will have a member-only lounge where our members can come to our office, get work done, bounce ideas off of their colleagues, and network. We will be wired with workstations for your downtown convenience.

- ▶ We will have a new Paralegal Section starting in January to help provide value and services to the more than 3,100 paralegals and other legal professionals in the Bay Area.

- ▶ We will have a Military Affairs Committee that will focus not only on the needs of military legal professionals but also on the

From left: Ujvala Singh, Richard Zitrin, Yolanda Jackson, and Elaine Leitner



needs of our military and returning veteran communities.

▶ We will make it even easier and more desirable for you to support our Justice & Diversity Center through giving and volunteering, by providing you with regular information about the great statistics for our programs, sharing program success stories, and providing you with easy access to volunteering.

▶ We will continue building strong relationships with the many corporations in the Bay Area that have legal departments and have a commitment to helping our San Francisco communities.

▶ We will be in a place where we can provide meaningful services and information to support our retiring baby boomer lawyers and at the same time keep them engaged with BASF and JDC through volunteering and mentoring.

▶ We will have refined our efforts toward engaging and developing our X and Y generation of lawyers. This group of lawyers has so much energy and so many forward-thinking ideas and we are excited to bring them into our leadership to help us shape the future of our organizations.

▶ We will marry the two . . . that is the baby boomers and the Gens X and Y . . . for purposes of transitioning practices, mentoring one another, volunteering side by side, and working together on task force committees. We want there to be a seamless and powerful transition.

▶ And finally, we will also be actively involved in exploring and help-

ing our members to shape the future of how law will be practiced in 2020 and beyond—changes that will be driven by technology, the commoditization of services, self-help services, law firm structure changes, and alternative law office models, to name a few. It will look different . . . so let's be ready.

"I am a leader who listens, I am a leader who is direct and honest, I am a leader who is open to new ideas, I am a leader who builds relationships, I am a leader who solves problems, and I am a leader who is experienced in managing change."

—Yolanda Jackson

Please commit to walk with us on this journey. We want and need every single one of you with us. We want to be known nationally as the bar that has:

- ▶ A heart
- ▶ Demonstrated leadership
- ▶ The best lawyers in the nation
- ▶ The right resources and programs to help its members be the best that they can be
- ▶ A community that knows we exist, why we exist, and how we can help them

▶ And . . . the bar that always has the goal to be relevant to the legal and broader communities

I want to wrap up by saying I am a leader who listens, I am a leader who is direct and honest, I am a leader who is open to new ideas, I am a leader who builds relationships, I am a leader who solves problems, and I am a leader who is experienced in managing change.

I invite all of you to call me or come to visit whenever you want to talk or if you have any ideas you want to share with us. Our staff and I are very accessible.

Thank you again for selecting me to lead BASF into the future, standing shoulder to shoulder with our awesome team of staff members and our incredible team of more than 7,500 lawyers, judges, and legal professionals.

Yolanda Jackson is the executive director and general counsel for The Bar Association of San Francisco and the executive director of the Justice & Diversity Center. She also serves as the diversity director for both organizations and can be reached at yjackson@sfbbar.org.