

At Sidebar

ELLEN TOTH

Take a Future FBA Member to Lunch

Have you checked in with your law school lately? I attended a reception sponsored by the alumni association of my law school alma mater just this evening. Although I attend many professional events for attorneys, it is always interesting to go to a law school event and to learn about the career path of people who started out at the same school and graduated with the same degree over a period of decades. It's always fascinating to know where people end up and why. I met a graduate who started out at the Public Defender's Office upon graduation, making \$1,000 a month, and, 20 years later, is proudly still there. Another graduate quickly decided that she didn't want to use her law degree for the practice of law, so she has been teaching special education classes in the public schools for six years. Another classmate is doing plaintiff's class action work but has taken the time and effort to teach courses at a local law school and frequently writes for various law journals.

Attending this alumni event made me think about how much things have changed for law students since I graduated more than 15 years ago. It's harder to get into law school, it's more expensive to attend law school, and it's harder to get a job after graduation. At the highly ranked state school that I attended, students are now paying 80 percent of the cost of their law school education out of their own pockets.

As federal practitioners we are often solicited for funds from our alma maters. At my law school's event this year, I was asked to contribute something different to support the institution. Instead of money, the dean of the law school asked the alumni for *ideas*. We were asked for suggestions on how to innovatively use funds that the law school had already received.

As practicing lawyers, we can help academicians come up with innovations in law school courses, for topics for law journals, in clinical programs, for guest speakers and symposiums, and for career placement. Because of experience in hiring and training new lawyers, we know the opportunities that new law school graduates have missed in law school and the gaps in their law school education. By helping our law schools mold the curriculum for law students, we can help new lawyers be more prepared to enter the practice of law.

We can also teach in our law schools so that students can learn what it's like to be a federal practitioner. We can encourage federal judges and government attorneys to conduct lectures at our law

schools. And we can volunteer to help run legal clinics in our law schools in order to provide law students with the practical experience that they need before they graduate from law school. To give readers a personal example of the benefits: Back in 1990, when I was a third-year law student and anxious to enter the job market, I was fortunate enough to participate in two legal clinics at my law school. Although I had no intention of practicing criminal law, my semesters taking courses in prosecution and in the Criminal Defense Legal Clinic provided me with the real-life experience I needed in order to make the transition from law school to law practice.

As federal practitioners, we can also assist students from our alma maters to move into legal practice by introducing them to professional associations, including the Federal Bar Association. We can help them meet lawyers in private practice, government attorneys, federal judges, and other federal practitioners by inviting them to attend CLEs, social events, and membership events hosted by the Federal Bar Association. Sponsoring a law student, law clerk, or summer associate for an FBA event can help begin their orientation to professional associations. We should also encourage our firms or agencies to sponsor student memberships in the FBA. Contact your law school or a local law school and invite its law students to attend your next local FBA event. We all should be recruiting early and recruiting often. **TFL**

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