

MAKING SUPERHERO CHAPTER LEADERS

BY GLEN R. MCMURRY

“THIS LOOKS LIKE A JOB FOR SUPERMAN!”

For those comic book fans out there, you are no doubt familiar with this tag line regularly repeated by those in need immediately before Superman would swoop in and save the day. Since Superman first appeared in Action Comics #1 in 1938, we have looked among ourselves to find leaders and heroes to guide us through periods of difficulty and maintain periods of calm.

The Federal Bar Association is no different. However, rather than leaving the development of our leaders to chance, the FBA instituted a not-so-top-secret program in 2002 to help mold our

chapter leaders and create superheroes, the National Leadership Training Program (NLTP).

Our most recent NLTP, molding the superheroes of tomorrow, took place in Arlington, Virginia, on May, 1-2 2015. However, everyone knows that a superhero profile is not complete without a good origin story (i.e., Superman crashing to Earth as an infant or Peter Parker being bitten by a radioactive spider). To help us with the origin story of the National Leadership Training Program, we invited a few of our own superheroes to tell us how the NLTP was formed and how it can benefit you as a chapter leader.

OUR SUPERHERO PANEL INCLUDES:



Jonathan O. Hafen [JH]

Code Name: Captain Membership

Superpower: Growing Chapter Membership

Jonathan is one of the co-chairs of the NLTP and chair of the Membership Committee. Jonathan is also an active member of the Utah Chapter of the FBA. He is a partner at the law firm of Parr Brown, where he practices in the areas of commercial litigation and employment and labor law.



Karleen J. Green [KG]

Code Name: Jade

Superpower: Identifying Chapter Leaders (and deciphering the Affordable Care Act)

Karleen is one of the co-chairs of the NLTP and the 2013 recipient of the FBA Labor & Employment Section Chair's Award. Karleen is the former secretary of the FBA's Labor & Employment Section and is an active member of the Baton Rouge Chapter of the FBA. Karleen is a partner at the law firm of Phelps Dunbar, where she practices in the areas of labor and employment and employee benefits.

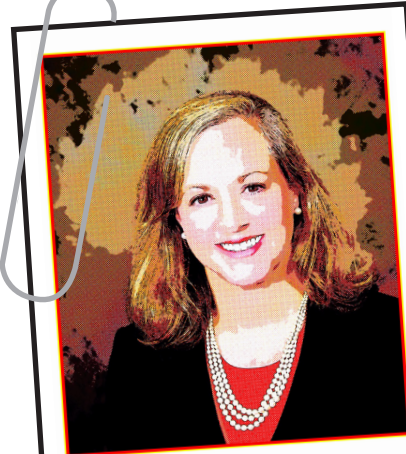


Richard S. Dellinger [RD]

Code Name: Director X

Superpower: Serving on Nearly Every FBA Standing Committee in Existence!

Richard currently serves as one of the directors of the FBA, having previously served as the chair of the circuit vice presidents, chair of the NLTP, member of the Government Relations Committee, member of the Nominations & Elections Committee, and current FBA Foundation Fellow. Richard is partner in Lowndes, Drosdick, Doster, Kantor and Reed PA, and his practice includes complex litigation, intellectual property, and business litigation. Richard also serves by judicial appointment as a Criminal Justice Act panel attorney in the Middle District of Florida.



Christie C. Varnado [CV]

Code Name: The Charleston Crusader

Superpower: Coordinating the Vice Presidents for 12 Judicial Circuits

Christie is the current chair of the circuit vice presidents and also serves as a circuit vice president for the fourth judicial circuit. Christie joined the Selbels Law Firm in Charleston, South Carolina, as a partner in 2009. Since 1993, her civil litigation practice has involved a wide variety of matters and is currently focused on construction-defect claims, employment discrimination and compensation, premises liability, and election challenges. Christie also chaired the NLTP in 2014.

J

How long has the FBA hosted the NLTP?

The NLTP has been around since about 2002. It was started by a group of circuit vice presidents that included Mark Vincent, our current national president-elect. Prior to that time, chapter leadership training was done on a circuit-by-circuit basis. Mark and his fellow CVPs felt that a single national training conference offered significant advantages, and, after the resounding success of the first NLTP, everyone agreed that we should continue with national training organized by the CVPs.

Attending my first NLTP was an incredible experience. Prior to that experience, I knew very little about what the FBA did at a national level. I learned about our lobbying efforts on behalf of the judiciary and public-sector lawyers, I learned about the incredible leaders who steer the ship with a steady hand, and I learned that there were dozens of new leaders from around the country just as excited as I was to take my chapter to the next level. I applied the leadership principles I learned at NLTP with great success as a new chapter president, and I continue to use them in many other areas of my life. Friends that I made at NLTP continue to work with me on FBA issues and have become great sources to accept and send referrals of legal matters.

KG

I first attended the NLTP as vice chair of the Labor & Employment Law Section in July 2013. At that time, there were separate programs for section and division leaders and chapter leaders. The program was one day and was held in the conference room at the FBA national office. In addition to hearing presentations from various FBA leaders and national staff, the section and division leaders sat around the conference table and shared ideas regarding governance, programming, and other best practices. The training was informative and productive, and the intimate setting encouraged open dialogue.

QV

2014 was the first year that the training held for the chapter leaders was combined with training for the section and division leaders. Bringing all of the incoming leaders together fosters opportunities for collaboration and increases networking opportunities.

I first attended the NLTP in May of 2008, when I was the president-elect for the South Carolina Chapter. It was such a productive and positive experience. While I had previously attended a Midyear Meeting, the training was still an excellent introduction to the national organization. I learned so much and was grateful for the opportunity take some time away from the distractions of my

law practice and home responsibilities to focus on planning my presidential year. I also formed relationships with chapter leaders from across the country, many of whom I remain in contact with today.

RD

We have hosted the NLTP for as long as I have been a member of the Federal Bar Association. I attended my first NLTP the year before I was installed as president of the Orlando Chapter of the Federal Bar Association. The NLTP was an invaluable opportunity for me to work with leaders throughout the country to plan the activities for my upcoming year of service as a chapter president.

What is the motivation for and purpose of the NLTP?

JH

The motivation behind the NLTP is to allow leaders of chapters and sections/divisions from around the country to get together, share ideas, learn important leadership principles, gain an appreciation for the incredible national FBA staff, and to be inspired to make their time as a leader meaningful to themselves and those whom they lead.

KG

The purpose of the NLTP is to provide incoming leaders with information and tools to help them plan their years as head of their respective section, division, or chapter. The NLTP is intended to acquaint leaders with national staff and other FBA leaders who may support them and their respective sections, divisions, and chapters during their tenure. A critical aspect of planning for a leadership year is to know about available resources and how those resources may be used to benefit section, division, and chapter members.

QV

I was not involved when the program was first created, but it was a brilliant idea to provide this opportunity. In some respects, it is the most valuable resource that our national organization provides to the chapters.

RD

The primary purpose of the NLTP is to prepare our chapter leaders and section and division leaders for success. In doing so, we provide FBA members with an enhanced experience at the chapter level and in the sections and divisions.

Who is the desired audience/attendee at the NLTP?

JH

We hope that each chapter, section, and division will send their president-elect to attend NLTP. If that person is not available, we encourage another leader to attend.

KG Incoming chairs and presidents are the target audience for the NLTP.

CV The program is designed for the president-elect or incoming chapter president on the chapter side and the vice chair or incoming chair on the section and division side. If the incoming leader is not available, however, I recommend that the chapter consider sending someone else from their leadership ladder, because the program always provides so much valuable information that can be brought back and shared with the chapter leaders. In addition, if the current president or chair had not previously attended a training session, he or she will also benefit from attending and spending the time to focus on the remainder of his or her term. I always come away with new information and fresh ideas even when I participate as a presenter.

RD The NLTP is geared toward chapter or section/division leaders who will assume leadership roles in the upcoming year.

What subjects are covered at the NLTP?

JH We cover the roles, responsibilities and personalities of our wonderful national FBA staff. We also train all of our incoming leaders how to make the most of their opportunity to lead a chapter, section, or division. Attendees also learn about the FBA's government relations efforts and how to broadcast what we are doing for our federal judiciary to judges and others in our local areas. Leaders learn best practices in recruiting, engaging, and retaining members. In other sessions, new leaders talk with each other about challenges they face and how to overcome those challenges. Leaders also learn about how to collaborate with chapters, sections, and division to create better programming.

KG The NLTP covers a variety of subjects, including (1) FBA structure and operations, (2) membership and outreach, (3) leadership best practices, (4) achievement plans, (5) programming best practices, (6) bench-bar relations, (7) communications with members, (8) parliamentary procedure, and (9) FBA government relations. The program also includes breakout groups to facilitate the sharing of ideas among section members.

CV Leadership training generally involves sessions addressing all aspects of leading a chapter, section, or division. The program differs somewhat from year to year

but generally includes an overview of the FBA structure and operational information, details on available funding sources and programs, membership-building resources, and several roundtable discussions. In addition, numerous experienced leaders from the organization, such as CVPs and board members, facilitate the process, serving not only as presenters but also as small-group session discussion moderators. These folks generally have a wealth of information that they are pleased to share.

How does the NLTP differ from the Annual or Midyear meetings?

JH At the Annual and Midyear meetings we gather to enjoy high-quality CLE, network, and hear reports from various FBA committees. We also have the opportunity to gather as existing leaders of the FBA's chapters, sections, and divisions to discuss our activities. NLTP specifically focuses on educating new leaders about the FBA's many resources, teaching them to become effective leaders, and facilitating a robust exchange of ideas for programming, membership strategies, and overcoming challenges.

KG The NLTP is intended to provide information about FBA operations and national staff and ideas for leadership and collaboration. The Annual and Midyear meetings have a broader focus, including business meetings, CLE programs, and social events. While leaders have the opportunity to interact at Annual and Midyear meetings, the NLTP is designed to (1) give leaders the tools they need for a productive and effective year and (2) facilitate discussions about collaboration among incoming leaders.

CV The leadership training program is designed to allow the attendees to prepare for their leadership year and provides resources to aid in the process. It is more of a leadership retreat than a legal conference comprised of CLE and business meetings. While there are networking opportunities at the Annual and Midyear meetings, by virtue of the commonality of purpose and focus, the NLTP attendees find they have much to discuss and share with the other attendees. Since there are considerably fewer participants at NLTP, the setting is more intimate, and in recent years, there have been organized Dutch-treat dinner options or alternate baseball game outings that further allow the participants to bond.

RD

The NLTP is different from Annual and Midyear meetings because it is entirely an educational tool to build excellent leaders.

Does the NLTP programming stay the same each year, or does it change from year to year? How do you select the topics presented at the NLTP?

JH

I believe our best NLTP was this year. I say that because each year it gets better and better. I expect NLTP 2016 to exceed even the wonderful experience our new leaders had in 2015. A committee of national staff and circuit vice presidents, with input from others, puts together the program each year. That committee works very hard to make sure that every aspect of NLTP is as interesting, informative, and entertaining as possible. We want all attendees to feel that their investment in coming to Washington, D.C., is one of the best investments they make that year.

KG

The topics covered at the NLTP typically include FBA operations, leadership and programming best practices, membership, and other relevant topics. However, changes have been made to ensure that chapter and section and division leaders receive relevant and timely information.

QV

Because the programs were combined in 2014, there were some changes, but I think the core message and format remains the same.

RD

We try to improve the NLTP every year. The most significant change in the past few years has been consolidating the NLTP for chapter leaders and section/division leaders to stimulate collaboration. Every year we receive feedback from the participants, and we use that feedback to improve the program for the upcoming year.

What was your focus in 2015?

JH

As always, our focus is to give our new FBA leaders a high-quality leadership training experience. We want our leaders heading home from our conference feeling inspired, educated, and excited to be part of the FBA!

KG

In 2015, we focused on programming best practices, membership, and collaboration.

How many people attend the NLTP in 2015?

JH

The 2015 NLTP was not only our best leadership conference but also our largest. We had 96 leaders from around the country attend.

KG

What were some of the highlights from this year's NLTP?

JH

Bruce Moyer and West Allen talking about the tremendous national impact the FBA's government relations efforts have on the federal judiciary, including judicial nominations and confirmations, judicial pay, and ensuring that the judiciary receives sufficient funding. Sheri Mecklenburg sharing her enthusiasm and ideas on ways that FBA members can connect with their communities. Karen Silberman teaching new leaders about what the FBA does at a national level and the many resources available to help new leaders reach their goals in improving their chapter, section, or division. Another highlight enjoyed by our new leaders is the breakout sessions where new leaders meet to share their ideas, challenges, and hopes for the future.

KG

The NLTP included time for collaborative discussions during which section, division, and chapter leaders were able to share ideas. During the Programming Best Practices session, participants were given a case study that involved a challenge with planning a program. Participants were divided into groups, and each group worked together to identify ways to address the relevant issues.

Based on your past NLTP experience as well as your first hand observations from this year, how does the NLTP impact our organization?

JH

I have heard many FBA leaders, including national presidents, say that the NLTP is the most important thing that we do. I believe that is true. The NLTP has become an important part of our organization's culture. It is an opportunity for national FBA leaders to mentor up-and-coming leaders and help them understand not only what it takes to become a great FBA leader, but to do so with very specific, practical ideas on how new leaders can establish and achieve their own leadership vision.

KG

The NLTP provides incoming leaders with the information and tools to plan successful leadership years, but it also provides a forum for those leaders to meet their counterparts and identify opportunities for col-

laboration. Those collaborative efforts are essential to the growth and success of the FBA.



The NLTP serves to educate the future leaders of the organization and fosters stronger relationships among members. It brings the resources of the national organization directly to the chapters.



The NLTP plays a key role in building new leaders, in strengthening our chapters, and strengthening our national organization.

What can we look forward to next year?



More of the same and even better!



A consistent comment from participants was the importance of collaborative, interactive discussions with other leaders. Next year, we will try to incorporate more opportunities for those discussions.



As we did following the 2014 session, I expect that the chairs of the 2015 session will reach out to the participants to get feedback and will use that feedback to improve and strengthen the program. Participants can look forward to a valuable learning experience, an opportunity to prepare for their leadership roles in the organization, and meeting some really great people, as well.

The 2016 NLTP will take place in Washington, D.C., on May 20-21, 2016. With an incredible resource like the NLTP available, only two questions remain for burgeoning chapter leaders:

Are you a superhero?

Do you want to be one? ☺

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Glen R. McMurry is a partner at the law firm of Dungan & LeFevre, LPA in Troy, Ohio. McMurry is admitted to the bars of the state of Ohio, the U.S. District Court for the Southern District of Ohio, the U.S. Bankruptcy Court for the Southern District of Ohio, and the U.S. Court of Appeals for the Sixth Circuit. McMurry's primary areas of practice include business litigation and commercial transactions. McMurry is the current national treasurer of the Federal Bar Association's Younger Lawyer Division, an incoming national director, and a past president of the Dayton, Ohio, Chapter.