

THE AWA BRIEF

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LETTER FROM THE PRESIDENT

In July, I was fortunate enough to attend the Bar Leaders Conference sponsored by the State Bar of Texas as a representative of the AWA. The Bar Leaders Conference took place at the Westin Galleria and provided a wonderful opportunity to meet other Bar leaders across Texas and exchange ideas.

What struck me the most about the conference was how our profession impacts the lives of so many. This was most obvious in the presentation about the State Bar's launch of the Texas Lawyers for Texas Veterans program. I am proud to say the State Bar program is based on the model started by our own Houston Bar Association in 2008. Isn't it wonderful that despite the demands on our time, attorneys are reaching out to help those amazing men and women who sacrifice so much for our great country? In Houston, there are numerous opportunities to help our veterans. A legal clinic is held each Friday from 2:00-5:00 p.m. at the Michael DeBakey VA Medical Center to assist these deserving men and women with their legal needs. Other legal clinics are also held at other locations several times a year. I encourage you to learn more about this wonderful program and volunteer if you can. For more information see www.hba.org/home-elements/veteraninfo.pdf.

Another program that highlighted the impact of our profession was the segment entitled, "What Would Atticus Finch Do?" presented by Dallas attorneys Talmage Boston and William Parrish. "To Kill A Mockingbird" is one of my favorite books. Apparently, I am not alone as the book has sold over 30 million copies since its publication in July 1960 and

has been translated into over 40 languages.

According to the presenters, "To Kill A Mockingbird" inspired many to become lawyers, including several prominent leaders in our profession. Kim Askew, former chair of the ABA Litigation Section was quoted as saying, "I have long admired Atticus for the reasons most lawyers do. Atticus represents the best in us. He is the ultimate: the lawyer and person every lawyer wishes to be. He inspires us to greatness because he believed in justice and equality. He embodies our highest ideals and represents the nobility of the profession." This presentation reminded me of all the good our profession does, the high ideals to which we must hold ourselves, even when society blasts us with lawyer jokes. It can be easy to get discouraged, especially when you're dealing with underhanded opposing counsel, difficult clients, demanding partners, or unreasonable deadlines. But remember, we are privileged to be part of this amazing profession. Be proud! If you are ever tempted to take a shortcut, to compromise "just this once," to stoop to the level of underhanded opposing counsel, stop. Take a deep breath. And think to yourself, "What would Atticus Finch do?" You'll make the right decision every time.



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JUDGE KIRKLAND — THE COURTROOM IS A LEARNING EXPERIENCE

By Jenn Rustay

Judge Kirkland's greeting to prospective jurors in the 215th Civil District Court is telling. He welcomes them with, "It is my privilege to welcome you to your courtroom." Anyone who spends time with Judge Kirkland quickly sees that he counts his service to the people of Harris County as a privilege. His words also mirror the respect Judge Kirkland has for jurors, lawyers, and the process of resolving disputes through the judicial system – and is the pervasive theme in the manner by which he administers the 215th Civil District Court.

Judge Kirkland holds a deep-seated belief that the judicial system must be grounded in respect because its effectiveness hinges upon whether those whose lives, businesses, and futures are shaped by it believe that the system itself, and its processes, are fair. He believes that the courtroom process should be a learning experience for all of the litigants because in the end, one party's behavior will have to change when the dispute is resolved. And, he believes, the party whose position is adversely affected will only change, and change for *good*, if the party believes that the system requiring the change was just.

Judge Kirkland spends his days working to make sure his courtroom is a forum for building respect and prompting positive change.

While the ideals on which Judge Kirkland bases his judicial philosophy may seem lofty, they are far from being merely aspirational. His commitment to those ideals was formed and forged through years in the courtroom and hundreds of trials – and those ideals are both theory *and* practice. Before arriving at the 215th Civil District Court, Judge Kirkland spent 2001 through 2008 on the municipal court bench, handling hundreds of matters and numerous trials every week. He worked to build respect among litigants for each other and the process. Among Judge Kirkland's favorite quotes is from Rap Artist KRS One, "violence begins when you look to the law and the law betrays you." In the municipal court, Judge Kirkland saw his role in creating respect for the Court as one that was imperative – litigants who felt betrayed would not change their conduct or respect the system that charged them. He made it his responsibility to see that, to the extent he could, no one would believe the law had betrayed them

in his Court. It was in this arena that he also came to see his judicial role as one of a teacher for the parties before him. He believes that good lawyers assist judges in carrying out the judicial role of teacher, and that even aggressive advocates fulfill that role when they keep in mind that the process exists in order to determine a result that the parties will ultimately respect and follow.

Judge Kirkland's commitment to the judicial process extends beyond the litigants in his courtroom. During his tenure on the municipal bench, he learned that many of Houston's homeless men and women were unable to move beyond some of their circumstances because of outstanding municipal violations. He worked with others to create the Houston Homeless Recovery Court. In Recovery Court, homeless men and women were allowed to clear up violations through performing community service work. The program, modeled on similar VA initiatives, added additional hours to his day in order to hear more disputes. These efforts made the judicial process accessible and effective for more people. For this work, Judge Kirkland was recognized by the Coalition for the Homeless of Houston and Harris County.

Judge Kirkland's commitment to standing up for what was right and providing a forum for strongly held beliefs predated his work as a judge. After graduating from Rice University in 1982, he worked as a paralegal at Texaco in order to pay for his studies at the University of Houston School of Law. Despite his busy schedule, from the early 1980s forward, Judge Kirkland made time for political activity. He has worked tirelessly on behalf of human rights in the arenas of lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender rights, the rights of the homeless, and affordable housing. By way of example, his work in the area of responsible redevelopment and historic preservation has led to the creation or restoration of over 350 units of affordable housing in the Houston area.

However, as an officer of the Court, there is no question that Judge Kirkland sheds the role of an advocate for the causes in which he believes in order to protect and defend another ideal he holds – that of the sanctity of the judicial process. By his efforts toward the legitimacy of the courts as a fair forum for disputes, Judge Kirkland ensures that there is a place in which all voices can be heard.

A TIP FROM MEDIA MASTERS — GET BUSINESS FROM YOUR GOOGLE RANK

By Rose Moriarty

If all the latest legal marketing research is correct, the current best way to get new business is through referrals. In many practice areas that also means hefty referral fees. So how can you strategically and cost effectively position yourself in front of a person who can hire you directly?

More people use Google's search engine than any other search engine or publication when they are looking for information about an attorney or a legal practice. Simply put, that means Google carries a lot of influence over whether an attorney or their competitor is hired for a case.

As one search engine optimization expert told me as I was researching this article, improving an attorney's rank isn't about rocket science, it's about ditch digging. In other words, success comes with hard work and persistence, just like everything else. A basic recipe consisting of keyword rich domain names, keyword rich content, and a large number of outside sites linking to your site equal success. However, the timeframe for that success is not set in stone. After all, if there was some magic algorithm to unlock a good Google rank, the search engine wouldn't be nearly as valuable.

If you haven't thought much about your Google rank, start today. Here are some simple steps to help you position yourself and/or your firm to get new business.

Step One: Do a Google search keyword tool exercise. Click [here](#) to reach a page that will evaluate

search words specific to your practice area. Once you have that information, evaluate whether it is a better benefit for you to buy a domain name specific to those important search terms, and place your content there, or just title tag your practice area pages. "Title tagging" is when you title the website page by what it is about instead of what it is. Example: changing "ABC Law Firm Practice Areas" to "ABC Law Firm: DWI Defense". This does not affect your domain name- just the title that appears at the top of each page on your website.

Step Two: Now that you understand the search terms most popular for your particular practice area, pepper your website page content with those terms. I am always so shocked to see my client's webpages that are supposed to be devoted to explaining what it is they do for a particular practice area and there is never a mention of that practice area in the content. Search engine spiders look for the repetition of the terms to help them identify the relevancy of the information for the searcher. Help them help you!

Step Three: Finally, remember a good Google rank is simply put, just a popularity contest. Set up and update as many outside pages as possible on free social media sites with links back to your website. The best sites for lawyers include: Facebook Fan Page, LinkedIn, Twitter, Texas Bar Circles, Wikipedia, AVVO, article syndication, blogs, and an RSS feed. If you want information on how to set any of these up, click [here](#) for step by step instructions.

The most important thing? Be consistent with updating and sharing relevant information with your audience. Then, watch your Google rank bring in new business!

www.mediamastersonline.net

FORMER AWA PRESIDENT UPDATE — SUSAN MYRES

By Lorie M. Robinson

This year, I have been assigned the wonderful task of interviewing some of AWA's past presidents to discover where they are today and how their lives, both professionally and personally, have been impacted by their involvement in the AWA. This is a bi-monthly mission, with each newsletter providing all of our readers the opportunity to connect with amazing women who are recognized leaders within and beyond The Emerald City. My initial interview re-acquainted us with Elizabeth Asher. This month, I'd like to introduce you to Susan Myres.

I walked into Susan's impressive corner office – complete with a view of the Galleria area – and found her feverishly typing and managing case files displayed across two computer monitors perched on her desk. Although she knew the purpose of our meeting that day was for me to interview her as a past president of the AWA, she immediately inquired about my plans for my legal career and the organizations in which I'm involved. She had my mind reeling with a lengthy list of things I needed to focus on to drive my career before I could even find my pen! It was then – right from the get-go - that I detected some of her many admirable qualities that have no doubt contributed to her success – a sincere interest in others; a passion for connecting people and opportunities; and a desire to continuously grow through the exchange of knowledge and experiences.

Susan was our 11th president, serving from 1987-1988. During this time in her career, she was an associate attorney beginning her fifth year of practice. The AWA was one of the first legal organizations in which she pursued a leadership role, and she later served as Vice-President, co-founder and treasurer of the Association of Women Attorneys Foundation. Today, she is one of the leading family law attorney's in Houston, recognized nationally and internationally as a litigator and active contributor to numerous family law organizations.

With almost 30 years dedicated to the specialized field of family law, Susan's experience, credentials and ambition have led her to wear many job titles: co-founder and partner at her firm, Myres, Dale & Associates, P.C.; family law arbitrator; frequent author; lecturer; and community activist; as well as devoted wife to her husband, John, and mother to her daughter, Alexandra.

Her expertise and contributions continue to be recognized by her peers. In 2004, she was elected to the International Academy of Matrimonial Lawyers and to the American Academy of Matrimonial Lawyers in 1998. She has also been selected to Texas Super Lawyers for four consecutive years. When asked how she balances home life and a career, she says, "I manage everything, because I want to participate, and it's important to me." After a slight pause, she chuckles, and then adds, "Although my husband would say it's not always balanced."



Since her AWA presidency, Susan continues to serve as a leader in local, state-wide, and international legal organizations as Chair of the Membership Committee of the American Academy of Matrimonial Lawyers as ex-officio to the Executive Committee. She is also a member of the Board of Governors; a Vice President of the USA Chapter of the International Academy of Matrimonial Lawyers; and serves as Vice-Chair of the Texas Board of Legal Specialization for Family Law Commission.

Susan's passion for the law and desire to cultivate new relationships is infectious to anyone who encounters her. When you ask her why she practices family law, she smiles and says, "I love practicing family law." She believes that you should enjoy getting up every day and look forward to what you do. One of the best pieces of advice she received was, "to always expand your mind in other ways than the law does," and she heeds that advice by taking oil painting classes.

Susan claims that the thing she likes best about the AWA is how quickly and easily long-lasting relationships develop, stating, "The relationships you establish in the AWA are more than a connection - they make you feel re-energized and proud to be one of the girls of the AWA."

And she's right. We're each afforded great value through our involvement with AWA - from the connectedness within our broad network and the opportunities that come along with it, to real camaraderie and the chance to promote each other within the legal profession. My time with Susan reminded me of this – thanks, Susan!

ASK A CAREER COACH: HOW TO GET FOCUSED ON YOUR CAREER



By Ann Daly PhD

Editor's Note: This column was originally

published on theglasshammer.com, an online community for professional women where executive coach Ann Daly contributes to the "Ask the Career Coach" section. Do you have a career question? Email Dr. Daly at: anndaly@anndaly.com.

There's no way around it. Career advancement requires strategy: intentional, ongoing, long-term thinking and action. But today's "on-demand" workplace conspires against full presence and total attention. It's a challenge these days for anyone to look away from the current client crisis to focus on her own future.

But look away we must.

If you're serious about giving your career the sustained attention it requires, here are three strategies for developing the habit of deep focus:

First, give up the myth of multitasking. It's not a productivity tool. It's an excuse for perpetual distraction. Our brain does not conduct its activities simultaneously. It works sequentially. When we think we're multitasking, we're actually zigzagging and backtracking between different tasks. This constant "switching," it turns out, is terribly inefficient and even detrimental to higher-level activities such as strategic thinking. Your career strategy isn't going to appear in the cracks between phone calls and text messages.

Second, write it down. Writing—and I mean handwriting—is a form of thinking, and it is a highly effective way to shut out the noise and slow down the rat race. There's something about the physicality of the moving hand and the

pressure on paper that helps us drop down into a kind of concentrated state that's conducive to complexity and ambiguity. Keep a career strategy notebook where you regularly go to review goals, record research, document experiences, play out scenarios, draft plans, reflect on results, and make revisions. The act of writing will clarify intentions and invite fresh ideas.

Third, train your attention. Attention is the earnest direction of your mind. It is, metaphorically speaking, how and when you "turn" your mind. It has three functional components:

- Alerting is the low-level awareness that helps us sense our environment by registering stimuli. (As in "email alert.")
- Orienting is the focus that helps us respond to our environment by selecting information. (Just because a phone rings, it doesn't mean you have to answer it; you choose to respond.)

The executive network directs judgment, planning, and big-picture thinking. (What Stephen Covey categorizes as "important" rather than "urgent.")

In general, we are too adept at alerting, too timid at orienting, and too remote from the executive network. It's very easy to squander our most precious commodity, our "undivided attention." Think of your attentional training as pilates for the brain. Your goals are to:

- filter out more stimuli
- respond more selectively

spend more time in big-picture thinking

Once you get in the habit of focusing on your future, you'll be able to take more control of your career. Chances are, you won't be the one in the office who gets blindsided, left out, or passed over.

Ann Daly PhD (www.anndaly.com) is an executive coach, speaker, and author devoted to the success and advancement of women. Before reinventing herself as a coach, she was a journalist and then women's studies professor at The University of Texas at Austin. Dr. Daly is the award-winning author of six books, including [Clarity: How to Accomplish What Matters Most](#) and [Do-Over! How Women Are Reinventing Their Lives](#). This October she is hosting a series of mini-retreats for women at her private getaway in the Texas Hill Country. For details: www.anndaly.com/workshops.

AWA SCHOLARSHIP RECIPIENT — CANDICE BROWN

The AWA Foundation holds fundraisers throughout the year to raise money to provide scholarships to deserving female law students in the Houston area. Please help this worthy cause by contributing to the AWA Foundation. Candice Brown is a past AWA scholarship recipient. Here is what Candice said about receiving the scholarship:

I was excited to receive the AWA Scholarship during my 2L year of law school and would like to thank everyone for awarding me the scholarship. I used the scholarship to help pay my law school tuition at The University of Houston Law Center (UHLC).

My law school career following the scholarship was very rewarding. For the remainder of my 2L year in law school and

during my 3L year, I continued to actively participate in UHLC's Association of Women in Law (AWIL), becoming Vice President of Public Service. AWIL continues to grow and develop at UHLC, and part of that growth is due to the support of the AWA. In addition, during my last two years in law school, I worked at the UHLC Legal Aid Clinic and gained valuable experience litigating actual cases. I am so thankful for the support from AWA, and I look forward to becoming an active member when I move back to Houston later this year.



AWA GENERAL MEETING — JAGUARS, COCKTAILS, AND DWI

By Rebecca Thai, Newsletter Editor

Attorney Chris Tritico entertained and educated us in his encore presentation "One Too Many, Now What? DWI's for the Non-Criminal Practitioner." Attendees enjoyed cocktails, won door prizes, and viewed the new Jaguar XJ at Jaguar Houston Central while earning CLE credit. The grand prize was the use of a Jaguar for the weekend. Chris is a legal analyst for Fox 26 news and has appeared on Good Morning America, World News Tonight, Night Line, CBS Evening News, Meet the Press, Dateline NBC, 20/20, CNN, and Court TV. It was a great evening for everyone.





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MEMBERS ON THE MOVE

Lynette Fons, AWA board member and Secretary, was elected chair of the board of Lone Star Legal Aid.

The AWA is now on Facebook! Visit us at www.facebook.com/awahouston to view our photos, upcoming events, and more! Please enter the URL above in your web browser address bar to visit the AWA fan page without having to open an account on Facebook.

Have something you'd like to share with the AWA members? E-mail Rebecca Thai at rthai@IntlCorpCompliance.com with your special announcement!

If you need to update your membership information, please email Linhuyen Pham at linhuyenp@yahoo.com.

DON'T MISS THESE UPCOMING EVENTS...

September 22, 2010, 6:00 p.m.: AWA General Membership Meeting at the Daily Review Cafe, 3412 West Lamar, Houston. Our speaker will be **Kimberly Cutchall, President/CEO, Accendo International: "Using the X Advantage to Achieve Greater Success."**

Accendo International is a human capital strategy firm that transforms leaders, teams, and organizations into elite performers. No charge for AWA members; \$15 for non-AWA members. To RSVP or for more information, visit www.awahouston.com or email Stacy Grant at sgrant@ogblh.com.

October 26, 2010, 5:30 p.m.: AWA Judicial Reception at the River Oaks Country Club, 1600 River Oaks Boulevard in Houston. This year we will honor the women serving as District Court judges in Harris County. Sponsorship levels are as follows:

Diamond Sponsor	\$ 2,500	10 tickets to the event
Platinum Sponsor	\$1,000	7 tickets to the event
Gold Sponsor	\$ 500	4 tickets to the event
Silver Sponsor	\$ 250	2 tickets to the event
Bronze Sponsor	\$ 100	1 ticket to the event

Please mail your check no later than September 20, 2010 (to allow for printing of the invitations). Every sponsor will be recognized on the invitation.

\$ 35.00 Judiciary attendees

\$ 25.00 Law student attendees

Tickets purchased prior to September 30, 2010:

\$ 55.00 AWA members

\$ 65.00 Non-AWA members

Tickets purchased after September 30, 2010:

\$ 75.00 AWA members and Non-AWA members

October and November 2010: AWA Book Club. Please join the AWA book club for an evening of great conversation. On October 14, 2010 at 6:30 p.m. we will return to the Museum of Fine Arts for a tour and discussion of Pictures at an Exhibition by Sarah Houghteling. In November, we will discuss The Death of Ivan Ilych by Leo Tolstoy. To RSVP for future meetings or for more information, please contact Lisa Isgitt at lisgitt@isgitt-law.com.