

What Your Members Need Now

By S. Diane Rynerson, NCWBA Executive Director
Reprinted from the NCWBA March 2010 Newsletter

With continuing economic uncertainty, many of your members are unemployed, underemployed or facing possible layoffs. Whether your members are law students and new lawyers weathering what the [ABA Journal](#) reports is a 17-year low in summer associate offers, stay-at-home parents seeking to re-enter the workforce, mid-career attorneys hoping to enhance their practice or switch their focus, or older attorneys being pushed into an unwelcome [early retirement](#), this is the time the support of a women's bar group can be more important than ever. Offering support is not only the right thing to do, it is the surest way to build a loyal membership.

Resume and Interview Tips: These are no longer topics that can be left solely to law school career services counselors. Experienced lawyers need to learn strategies to explain gaps in their resumes, to re-cast job experience in a manner that improves their fit with their desired new job and to maximize their use of available technology which may be unfamiliar to them. They need to learn strategies for recognizing and addressing possible ageism. They need to learn how and when to ask focused questions about benefits, and how to negotiate compensation and workload.

Information about Available Jobs: Your members want to know what jobs are open in your geographic region and beyond, what new practice areas or nonlegal jobs might be suitable for their skill sets and how to uncover leads on "hidden" job prospects: those that the individual must develop for herself as well as those which may be on the horizon due to a pending restructuring or unexpected turnover. They want to know what the prospects are for part-time, flex time and contract lawyer work.

Free and Low-Cost Networking Opportunities: Any career counselor will tell you that finding a new job or moving into a new area of practice all comes down to networking. Your members will appreciate having as many choices as possible for networking opportunities at different times of day, with different themes and with a variety of people. As you plan high-profile events, think about how to include your lower-income members. Is it feasible to charge a sliding scale for registration? Can you find scholarship dollars from among your membership? Is there a way that a portion of the event can be free? For example, members could be invited to a sponsored reception immediately before the gala. Provide numerous smaller events. Ask a law firm for the use of a conference room for a brown-bag discussion on a topic of interest. Ask the local law librarian to lead a tour for your members to help them get familiarized with available services.

Professional Development Programs: Put together a low-cost career development workshop. [Click here](#) for an example of a program of the Colorado Women's Bar Association. The Kansas Women Attorneys Association will sponsor an informal Saturday gathering on April 17 to address career development issues from a variety of practice perspectives. [Click here](#) for information about Minnesota Women Lawyers *She Said* Seminar Series: a collaboration of the group's Leadership and Professional Development Committees. [Click here](#) for information about the Association for Women Lawyers of Greater Kansas City's Attorney Development Forum: *Jumpstarting Your Practice*. (It even includes a free lunch!)

What to Do? Partner and Publish! As you can see, women's bar groups are doing their best to develop workshops and seminars to address their members' career development needs. But the needs are so great and so diverse that we do our best by collaborating with others. Use newsletters, listserves, websites and social media to publish information about events and services of other groups that would be of potential value to your members. Some will balk about publicizing other groups' events, but your members will appreciate your bringing to their attention events and services which are consistent with your mission. When you do develop your own programs, collaborate with law schools, other professional women's groups and other bar associations to make your program the best that it can be. The support of their women's bar association at a time of need will be remembered by your membership.