



(L-R): OCBA Past President Wayne Gross (Greenberg Gross); Jack Robbins (Rainbow Sandals); Amber Enriquez (Earth Friendly Products); Alyson Barker (Drybar); Jennifer Ishiguro (Gateway One Lending & Finance); OCBA Board Member and Circle of Counsel Co-Chair Christina Zabat-Fran (St. John Knits); David Harshman (Toshiba America Information Systems); Jerry Huang (VIZIO); Circle of Counsel Co-Chair H. Josh Ji (Greenberg Gross)

# THE POWER OF CONNECTING OFFLINE

by CHRISTINA ZABAT-FRAN and H. JOSH JI

**W**e recently sat down with a couple of law school graduates, taking a moment to celebrate what we can all recall, at one time, as a very big, career-defining achievement: their admittance to the bar.

These excited new lawyers leaned in, phones down on the table, eyes wide and ears open. Eager to learn what we found to be the most important steps one could take when beginning a journey in the profession, they asked for our thoughts. We both knew what to say first: “Have you joined the Orange County Bar Association?” They had not, their inboxes flooded with possible memberships or subscriptions. Faced with the deluge of opportunities, they wanted to know, “Why the OCBA?”

In a time when so many are more apt to go online than to a meeting, when one can stream CLEs, join a practice-area chat group, or digest legal headlines from the device in the palm of their hand, we would boldly posit that the benefit of membership in one’s local bar association has never been more salient. The OCBA gives you real, personal access.

Unique to itself, the OCBA boasts dozens

of sections and committees representing a wide diversity of practice areas and interests. It has the magnificent capability to leverage the incredible knowledge, talent, and insight from our membership. We build meaningful connections and share resources that can help us strengthen ourselves and, in turn, be the very best advocates we can be for our clients and our community. We may be social media “friends,” but as we tackle the many challenges ahead, it is these creative, collaborative actions together that will help us, and the profession overall, evolve.

Indeed, perhaps the bar’s greatest value is how it can connect us offline.

The value is no more obvious than in its ability to strengthen the relationship between the Orange County legal and business communities. As our business community continues to grow and change through major periods of disruption, it is imperative that the legal community evolves in step.

Case in point: On the evening of October 2, 2017, OCBA members from the Corporate Counsel Section and the Young Lawyers Division came together for a special event, Circle of Counsel, at the Orange County office of Greenberg Gross. The event fea-

tured Orange County’s “Must-Know GCs,” chief legal officers from some of the county’s leading companies, including The Drybar, Earth Friendly Products, Toshiba America Information Systems, VIZIO, Gateway One Lending & Finance, Rainbow Sandals, and ST. JOHN.

The night highlighted the value of real, personal access. The firm hosted a series of intimate roundtable discussions where rising young lawyers and in-house leaders connected with each Must-Know GC, each of whom shared their insights from their seat in enterprise. The conversations were candid, thought-provoking, and insightful. No hashtags, no links in bio, no nonsense.

We would like to highlight a few takeaways from the discussions for the benefit of readers.

*Strategic partnerships are key.* A lot of considerations weigh into the decision-making process for hiring counsel. Common amongst general counsel is the focus on finding a true partner to help plan for, and predict, future issues and pitfalls. Influential counsel who are true partners in practice effectively communicate how their services remove obstacles to the growth and development of the company’s business, reputation, and revenues.

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*It's not all about cost savings.* It's even more about value. When considering beginning a relationship with counsel, GCs prioritize finding lawyers who have a complete and compassionate understanding of the company's challenges, issues, and economics. The GC owes the company a clear understanding of, and explanation for, the legal fees that come with matters. A great partnership, Alternative Fee Agreements or not, will be built on fair, predictive costs and open, honest communication.

*We all have internal stakeholders.* At the company, the GC is ultimately accountable for the performance of the legal talent, including both in-house and outside counsel. Consider the GC as essentially the advocate for us all. When we are supportive of the GC in all ways possible, it not only facilitates goals in the short term for any one particular matter, but also globally reinforces the profession's significant, vital partnership with the business.

In a profession so steeped in tradition, we are thrilled to add to our incredible community a new tradition that highlights this: our Circle of Counsel. This program is just the beginning of many opportunities we have to communicate our value. We hope that many of you can join us this coming year.

And what of those new bar admittees? We are excited to report that they are also now new members of the OCBA. Please join us in welcoming them, and all of our newest members, to an outstandingly collaborative and collegial legal community that makes it one of the most impactful places to practice in the country.

Let's reflect on and celebrate what we each have gained from fostering real-life connections in our legal and business communities. We might even post some online and tag our friends. Wherever the newest technologies take us, we look forward to helping the OCBA continue to enhance the lives of its members as well as the entire community that we serve.



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