

DIVORCE DISCOURSE

17 WAYS TO MAXIMIZE YOUR BAR ASSOCIATION MEMBERSHIP

Bar Association membership might be declining, but paying those dues could be a great deal if you know how to max out your membership.

Bar associations (the voluntary kind anyway) are struggling. Membership is declining, and the role they once played is being replaced by various Internet-connected services.

However, they're not dead yet, and, given the pace of change in the profession, they'll be around for a long time to come.

Being a dues-paying member of a bar association can be a good deal. In fact, it can be a great deal if you max out your membership.

Read to get the most out of your annual dues payment? Here are 17 ways.

1. CREATE RELATIONSHIPS

The highest and best use of your bar association membership is building relationships with lawyers who will refer clients to you. Show up and get involved, and the next thing you know, you'll be generating business.

Your bar association is a smorgasbord of networking opportunities. You'll meet people like you who share your interests. People will get to know you, like you, and trust you. Referrals will follow.

However, joining is not the key. You've got to go further. The key is getting involved. Join a committee, go to a luncheon, volunteer to help out, and start meeting people. If you take the first step, then you'll get sucked right into the relationship machine that defines bar associations. Take the first step, and the association staff and leadership will make it easy for you to go further.

2. USE THE FREE LEGAL RESEARCH SERVICE.

Most associations offer some kind of research service. Many practitioners use these services instead of paying for Westlaw or Lexis. These services aren't always as comprehensive as the paid services, but they're good enough for much of the work we do. Plus, the price is right. I know lawyers who join exclusively to use this benefit.

3. **BUY THE DISCOUNTED STUFF.**

Many bar associations negotiate deals on shipping, office supplies, phone systems, practice management software, office equipment, travel, credit card processing, etc. Check the prices against the competition before you buy. In many instances, you'll find that your association is giving you a good deal. However, be skeptical, because there are incentives involved that sometimes result in you paying a premium.

4. **TAKE ADVANTAGE OF THE PRACTICE MANAGEMENT ADVISOR.**

Some associations provide a professional advisor who can help you with everything from the initial setup of your practice to ongoing advice on marketing, management, technology, and financial issues. It's great to have someone you can use as a sounding board. Some advisors provide lending libraries, online courses, and webinars. Find out what kind of consulting your association offers, and take advantage of those resources.

5. GET REFERRALS FOR VENDORS.

Whom should you trust when it comes to buying equipment and supplies? What about phone and data services? Who's reliable for service contracts on printers and copiers? Your association may be a good source of information and leads as you sort through your options. Be careful to distinguish between vendors being recommended because they're good and those on the list because they pay the association for the leads.

My experience is that you're better off asking the lawyers you meet for their suggestions rather than relying on the input coming from someone like the "membership director" who may just be a shill for the vendor. Ask around and find lawyers who've actually used the vendor, and base your decisions on firsthand experiences. Meeting these lawyers with experience is a big part of the value of your membership.

6. GET DISCOUNTS ON CLE.

The member discount on continuing education courses may be sufficient to justify your bar dues for the entire year. In many areas, you'll save a huge amount off the nonmember price, and some bar associations even throw in free courses. I've joined a number of bar associations for this benefit alone.

7. **USE THEIR UNIQUE VENDORS.**

Sometimes bar associations have relationships with vendors especially helpful to law practices. Sort through the member benefits and see what's offered. Banking and credit card services are sometimes tailored to the legal market and offered primarily through the association. Be aware of the offerings available to you.

8. **GET DISCOUNTS ON HEALTH AND OTHER INSURANCE.**

These are big expense items in many firms, and bar associations sometimes form groups sufficient to warrant considerable discounts. It's worth exploring your options and finding out what's available. With the changes in health insurance and the advent of government marketplaces, the insurance situation is in flux. Compare your options and then review your situation each year as the renewal date draws near.

9. READ THE PUBLICATIONS.

Many bar associations, the American Bar Association in particular, have fantastic publications. I served on the editorial board of Family Advocate for a decade, and the group cranked out an awesome magazine that justified the dues. Some publications are essential to your practice as the only reliable way to keep up with a narrow area of the law. Subscribe to all of the pertinent newsletters, e-newsletters, and magazines that your group circulates. The hyper-local, hyper-specific newsletters are essential for keeping up with developments close to home.

10. PARTICIPATE ON LISTSERVES.

Many bar associations have thriving listserves in various practice areas. These are a great resource for getting your questions answered as well as building your reputation as someone who's interested, engaged, and helpful. Don't just lurk. Get engaged. Ask questions and provide answers or ideas. The next thing you know, you'll be getting referrals from others on the list.

Once you've subscribed, you'll need to figure out a way to stay on top of the list. Explore the rules offered by your e-mail system and set up folders specific to the list. Participation in the list will require some focus and a systematic approach. These lists sometimes move at the speed of light, and keeping up may prove challenging. However, some lists have tremendous value, so the investment can pay off.

11. **GAIN CREDENTIALS.**

Being the president of this, the chairperson of that, and the winner of such and such award sounds good to those thinking about hiring you. Bar associations bestow all kinds of credentials. They aren't make or break for your career, but they don't hurt, especially if your bio is otherwise thin. Getting involved in the association nearly always results in some sort of honor. It's a bit like being on a seven-year-old's soccer team. Associations love to give out certificates and plaques.

12. **JOIN THE SECTIONS AND COMMITTEES.**

Most associations are divided into dozens of smaller units. Some offer substantive law sections, sections based on years of experience, and sections based on particular needs. Join everything that appeals to you or that is pertinent to your work. You won't know exactly what gets you the most bang for your membership buck until you jump in and explore. Sign up, attend some meetings, and see what gets you excited. There's no easier way to get to know other lawyers than getting involved in a bar association committee. You'll sit side by side and work on projects together. There's a place for everyone in bar associations.

13. **JUMP ON LEADERSHIP OPPORTUNITIES.**

There are leadership opportunities galore in most bar associations. Don't be intimidated by the group when you first get engaged. Showing up is half the battle—and probably more than half. Being a leader is mostly about persistently showing up. If you keep going, you'll eventually chair the committee, serve on the board of governors, and likely be president of the organization. Keep showing up.

Whether it's serving as chairperson of a committee or as president of the association, there are numerous opportunities for growth, visibility, and volunteering. Most associations offer leadership training as a core part of what they do. You'll have the chance to start small and grow your responsibilities over time. The association is a perfect place for you to acquire the skills you'll need to grow your firm. Try leadership on for size, hone your approach, and then use the lessons you learn to manage and grow your team.

14. **FIND TEACHING/SPEAKING ENGAGEMENTS.**

Bar associations are constantly looking for speakers. Sometimes it's for continuing education. Sometimes it's for programs for laypersons. You'll want to listen for the opportunities and volunteer. These events are a great way to get your name and face out in the community of lawyers and citizens. Being the "teacher" results in people assuming you're the expert, so they'll call you when they need help. Teaching naturally forces you to learn the material, and the next thing you know, you truly are the expert.

15. **GET INVOLVED AND VOLUNTEER.**

Jump in with both feet. Get involved. Say these magic words, “Hi, my name is _____. I’d like to get involved in your committee.” You’ll meet new people and build relationships. You might even do something meaningful that makes you feel good.

16. **BECOME A PUBLISHED AUTHOR.**

Bar association publications require fresh material, and the hunt for authors never ends. This is another opportunity to get your name out and be visible. Once the article is out, you can take advantage of your status as a published author. Put it in your bio, tell your referral sources, print copies, circulate them, and use your new status as leverage to gain more speaking and writing opportunities. Being a published author is kind of a big deal.

17. **WORK ON STUFF THAT MATTERS.**

Bar associations are often at the leading edge of changing the law in ways that make a difference in our society. Someone has to consider the legal issues arising from social, scientific, and other changes, and that often falls to the committee structure of the bar association. Once you get involved, you'll find yourself contributing in ways that make a difference. You'll be changing the law and, as a result, changing the lives of others. This stuff is important.

Bar associations continue to deliver valuable benefits to practitioners. If you're going to join—and you should—then be certain to maximize the value you receive. Take advantage of every ounce of value they offer. Let them be your partner in growing a more profitable practice.

DIVORCE DISCOURSE

LEE ROSEN PRACTICES FAMILY LAW IN NORTH CAROLINA WITH OFFICES IN RALEIGH, CARY, DURHAM AND CHAPEL HILL.

ROSEN WRITES ABOUT LAW PRACTICE MANAGEMENT, MARKETING, TECHNOLOGY AND FINANCE AT [DIVORCE DISCOURSE](https://divorcediscourse.com).