

Why Knowing the Most Matters

Knowledge is not merely a benefit; for lawyers, it is a responsibility. By committing to staying up to date on law-related developments, legal professionals can better serve their clients and uphold the integrity of the law.

BY THERESA ELLIOTT

In the legal profession, expertise is not merely a badge of honor; it is a cornerstone of successful practice. For lawyers, being an expert in their field instills comfort and confidence in clients, fosters professional respect among peers, and enhances personal satisfaction in their work. As the legal landscape continues to shift with evolving laws and new cases, staying current is paramount. This article explores the multifaceted benefits of legal expertise, the importance of continuous education, and the resources available to attorneys to maintain their edge in a competitive field.

The Comfort and Confidence of Your Clients

When clients seek legal counsel, they are often navigating challenging circumstances fraught with uncertainty. They look for reassurance, guidance, and a sense of security. A lawyer's depth of expertise plays a crucial role in providing this comfort. Here are a few reasons why expertise is vital.

- **Building Trust Through Knowledge.** Clients are more likely to trust a lawyer who can articulate the nuances of their case and the law surrounding it. Expertise allows attorneys to communicate complex legal concepts in a way that is accessible and understandable, making clients feel more secure in their decisions.

- **Guiding Clients Through the Process.** An expert attorney can anticipate potential challenges and prepare clients accordingly. This foresight not only alleviates anxiety but also instills confidence in the client's ability to navigate their legal journey.

- **Reputation and Referrals.** Lawyers known for their expertise are more likely to receive referrals and repeat business. A good reputation helps lawyers build a robust client base,

as satisfied clients share their positive experiences with other people, further solidifying the lawyer's standing in the community.

Professional Success Through Staying Current

In a rapidly changing environment, staying informed about new laws, regulations, and legal precedents is vital for attorneys aiming for professional success. Reasons to be a lifelong learner include the following:

- **Adapting to Change.** Law is not static; it evolves with societal needs and technological advancements. Lawyers who actively engage with ongoing education and training are better equipped to adapt their practices to meet



Theresa Elliott is the director of professional development at the State Bar of Wisconsin. She previously worked with continuing education programs for architects, engineers, insurance agents, and lawyers. Access the digital article at www.wisbar.org/wl.
telliott@wisbar.org



(From left) Atty. Elizabeth Fernandez, Hon. Hannah Dugan, and Atty. Martina Gast present a continuing legal education session on "Five Important Wisconsin Legal Developments Affecting Women and the Women Lawyers Who Advanced Them" during the State Bar of Wisconsin's 2024 Annual Meeting & Conference. Photo: Shannon Green

these changes. This adaptability can differentiate successful attorneys from their peers.

- **Client Satisfaction and Retention.**

Clients appreciate lawyers who are on the cutting edge of their fields. Knowledge of current laws and regulations and recent court and administrative agency rulings allows attorneys to provide informed advice that directly affects their clients' outcomes, leading to higher levels of satisfaction and retention.

- **Professional Development.**

Continuous learning fosters personal and professional growth. Engaging with new material, attending seminars, and participating in legal discussions enhances lawyers' skill sets and keeps the passion for law alive.

Earning Respect and Recognition Among Peers

Subject-matter expertise is beneficial not only for client relationships. It also plays a significant role in how attorneys are perceived by their peers. Such opportunities can arise outside and inside a lawyer's firm or other workplace.

- **Networking.** Being recognized as an expert opens doors to networking

opportunities. Colleagues may seek out the expert attorney's advice or collaboration, leading to professional relationships that can foster growth and innovation.

- **Leadership Roles.** Expertise often positions lawyers to take on leadership roles within professional organizations, further enhancing their visibility and influence in the field. This recognition can lead to speaking engagements, opportunities to write for publications, and other avenues to share knowledge.

- **Mentorship and Guidance.**

Experienced attorneys often find themselves in mentorship roles, guiding newer lawyers. This not only reinforces the mentor's status as an expert but also contributes to the profession's overall standard of practice.

Personal Pride and Job Satisfaction

The journey of honing one's legal craft leads to personal pride and fulfillment, including in the following ways:

- **Confidence in Practice.**

Knowledgeable attorneys approach their cases with confidence, which can be contagious to clients and colleagues alike. This confidence can lead to a more enjoyable work experience and a

positive workplace culture.

- **Passion for the Field.** Engaging with the latest developments in the law can reignite a lawyer's passion for their work. The thrill of new challenges and the satisfaction of mastering new topics can make what might seem a daily grind much more rewarding.

- **Community Contribution.** Expertise also allows lawyers to contribute meaningfully to their communities. Whether through pro bono work or public speaking, knowledgeable attorneys can positively influence society, further enhancing their sense of purpose.

How to Develop Expertise

Like the tasks of getting a physical examination, rebalancing a portfolio, and meeting with an insurance agent to make sure policies and coverage are adequate, assessing the status of knowledge is a personal and professional task that should be done annually. It is the one business asset over which each lawyer has 100% control. Here are some ways to approach this assessment.

- Do you have an "application plan"? That is, do you go into every continuing legal education (CLE) program with a personal learning objective of something you want to ask, know, or explore and for what purpose? How will you apply your new knowledge? Studies show that adult learners who establish goals before they start a class will have a higher rate of success in gaining that desired knowledge. Passive learners – learners who just show up with no expectations – are more likely to say they learned little to nothing from a learning session.

- When attending a CLE program, do you protect that time and space? How do you prevent yourself from interruptions so you can focus on the material being presented? Are you actively engaged with the speakers and material, or are you answering phone calls and sending and responding to emails?

Landex Research, Inc.

PROBATE RESEARCH



**Missing and Unknown Heirs Located
No Expense to the Estate**

Domestic & International Service for:
Courts • Lawyers • Trust Officers • Administrators/Executors

1345 Wiley Road, Suite 121, Schaumburg, IL 60173
Telephone: 847-519-3600 Fax: 847-519-3636 Toll-free: 800-844-6778
www.landexresearch.com

- Do you know if your research materials are up to date? For example, have you missed some supplements and new releases, such as *The Wisconsin Business Entity Handbook*? The State Bar of Wisconsin's customer service team can help you review your inventory and identify where you may have gaps. Contact Customer Service at (800) 728-7788 (8 a.m. - 5 p.m. CST, Monday through Friday).

- Do you know which resources are available and in what formats? In the past year, the State Bar has established several mini-electronic libraries for various practice areas. Worry no more about your supplements being out of date. Electronic books are updated as the changes happen. Check out what's new on the State Bar of Wisconsin PINNACLE's Books UnBound site.

- What types of CLE have you been taking lately? Are you growing, expanding, and challenging yourself

to be the lawyer your clients deserve? Or do you keep taking the same types of programs to complete your credit requirements? Visit the State Bar's website and explore the many options that are available on Marketplace.

- Have you considered using the power of your pen or the influence of your voice to help the legal community learn and grow? Speakers and authors tend to be highly engaged and knowledgeable in their areas of practice. Being in the position of teaching requires a thorough understanding of the material. Join our highly respected teams of authors and speakers who design and deliver our CLE programs and develop and maintain our 83 highly regarded, comprehensive substantive law books and system books. Contact Tim Clark for speaking: tclark@wisbar.org, or Samantha Cherney for books: scherney@wisbar.org.

Conclusion

In an ever-evolving legal landscape, the value of being informed cannot be overstated. Lawyers who embrace continuous learning not only enhance their own practices but also elevate the profession. By committing to staying current with knowledge and resources, legal professionals can better serve their clients and uphold the integrity of the law. Strive to remain or become an informed advocate, ensuring that you are always prepared to navigate the complexities of the field. After all, in law, knowledge is not just power – it is a responsibility. **WL**



MINNESOTA LAWYERS MUTUAL
INSURANCE COMPANY



Conventional wisdom says,
"Don't put all your eggs in one basket."
MLM thinks otherwise.

**Lawyers' professional liability insurance is all we do.
As a result of doing one thing, we do that one thing well.**

Get a no-obligation quote today!

*At MLM "here today, here tomorrow"
is more than just a motto and
our financial strength is your best defense.*



Chris Siebenaler, Esq.
612-373-9641
chris@mlmins.com
www.mlmins.com

Protecting Your Practice is Our Policy.®