

# BUSINESS DEVELOPMENT *through the* VBA

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ORGANIZATION PROVIDES PLATFORM ON WHICH  
RELATIONSHIPS AND BUSINESS GENERATION GROW

**O**n The Virginia Bar Association website, you will find 10 great reasons to join this voluntary bar group. But it is reason No. 9 – build a professional network – that is going to be a topic of a lot of conversation during the next year.

VBA President John L. Walker III hopes in the coming year to drive home points about the tangible business benefits of that networking. VBA members can list a variety of professional advantages – from referrals to leadership development to information sharing – that they enjoy through bonds forged by working with other members and participating in association events.

Donald C. Schultz, an attorney with Crenshaw, Ware & Martin in Norfolk, said he has found that those benefits accumulate over time. He can point to measurable results at his 14-lawyer firm. Schultz said he has been on the receiving end of many referrals, which has translated to hundreds of thousands of dollars of business for his firm over the course of more than 15 years of VBA membership.

“I attribute that to relationships fostered at VBA meetings, which over time have strengthened as I’ve become more involved with the organization,” he said.

“Just the other week, a VBA friend of mine had a client who had an issue come up on the Eastern Shore. I was able to get him to the right person quickly,” said Schultz, a bankruptcy and creditors’ rights lawyer and a member of the VBA Board of Governors. “You can know people throughout the state from other groups and associations, but I think the reason that it works so well with the VBA is that the quality of lawyers that belong to the organization is very high, and I’ve found the whole group to be very committed to improving the practice of law.

“One aspect of that is making sure when someone asks for a referral, they’re going to get the best information they can get. It beats the heck out of looking somebody up on Martindale Hubbell.”

## **BUILDING RELATIONSHIPS THROUGH THE YLD**

In 2012, Henry I. Willett III of Christian & Barton, a former Chair of the VBA’s Young Lawyers Division, referred a major piece of litigation to Turner A. Broughton of Williams Mullen, another former YLD Chair. The two

BY JODY TAYLOR

became good friends as they rose through the ranks of YLD leadership. The case culminated in a three-week trial and was one of Williams Mullen's largest business matters in 2013.

Also last year, Broughton called on Daniel E. Ortiz, another former YLD Chair and a lawyer at Blankingship & Keith in Northern Virginia, when Broughton had to argue a case in Fairfax County.

"I had a judge I'd never been in front of before and Dan was very forthcoming with what I should think about," he said.

Relationships – and trust – built through networking and leadership training make it easier to seek that kind of help.

"I got to know these people well through pro bono and the VBA, and I don't think there's any question that the relationships you build make a difference," Broughton said. "It leads to more congeniality, too. You know them as a person and there are a lot of benefits from that.

"That's not why I got involved in the VBA, to network, but at this point in my career, it's one of the best things I've done."

## **ADVANCING YOUR BRAND**

Matthew Cheek, another attorney at Williams Mullen in Richmond, found that his membership provided professional benefits in the Young Lawyers Division, which he cited as the first – and most important – thing he did for his professional development. The award-winning division offers more than 40 committees on which new attorneys can begin to build and showcase leadership skills.

"Through The Virginia Bar Association you really do learn to advance your own personal brand, but also the brand of your firm," said Cheek, who is a former YLD Chair. "That boomerangs back around when there's an opportunity to make referrals. When we have opportunities to make a referral due to a conflict of interest, we'll be more eager to send it



Donald C. Schultz has seen referrals from members rise as he has become increasingly involved in the VBA.

*Photo by Marilyn Shaw*

not only to a trusted friend but also to a trusted brand.”

Cheek also discovered that bar association membership can sometimes provide a counterweight to the imbalance that can sometimes exist between a young lawyer and a more seasoned lawyer when they are representing clients.

“On many occasions early in my career, I felt that some intimidation melted away when the lawyers on the other side realized that I have a connection with their firm through the bar association,” Cheek said. “There’s less misunderstanding and much more mutual respect. It’s an ace of spades to throw down on the table and show that I’m a good guy.”

A culture of collegiality also helps VBA members find the expertise they need as they prepare for cases. Monica Taylor Monday, managing partner at Gentry Locke Rakes & Moore in Roanoke, serves on the VBA’s Appellate Practice Section Council and touts the depth of talent available to help lawyers prepare for cases.

“I’ve helped [lawyers] prepare for appellate arguments, especially if they haven’t handled them before or haven’t handled many,” she said. “The VBA provides a great platform for people to get to know one another and to



Monica Taylor Monday says the VBA is a great platform for lawyers to get to know one another.

become comfortable with one another on both a personal and professional level, so it makes it much easier when you want to refer work or to reach out when you want help.”

In 2012, Monday received a major referral of a litigation matter from now VBA President John Walker. They became friends years ago through their involvement in the VBA YLD leadership.

## NETWORKING PAYS DIVIDENDS

Schultz found that VBA networking has paid greater dividends than he initially expected.

“I joined the VBA because I think the meetings are a great place to meet people and have a lot of fun,” he said. “But when I look at it in retrospect,

I probably should have become active in the VBA sooner. I believe we all have obligations to give back, and it also has been extraordinary for business development and making contacts.” ■

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**Jody Taylor is a freelance writer and editor living in Richmond, Va.**

*If your VBA membership has benefited you professionally or personally, we invite you to share your story. Email your comments to [thevba@vba.org](mailto:thevba@vba.org).*



Turner Broughton and Matthew Cheek credit the YLD with helping build their professional networks.  
*Photo by Dan Iott*