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ADMITTEDLY, THESE ARE TOUGH TIMES FOR many, and that includes SFVBA and bar associations. A central feature of professional organizations like SFVBA is the prospect of in-person networking with colleagues and bench officers.

In fact, the Association budget is based on the assumption that our members will regularly attend our events and programs, and be energized enough to take an active role on our numerous committees and sections.

To the credit of SFVBA staff and members, the organization has deftly adapted to unforeseen change as our online events have been very well attended. The feedback we receive demonstrates how much our members appreciate the regular updates via our website, email and social media regarding court procedures, openings, and closings. When impactful developments occur, our members learn about them quickly and accurately—truly, a valuable benefit of membership in the Bar.

A few short years ago, SFVBA had some degree of difficulty finding candidates to run for seats on the Board of Trustees, as well as members willing to take on other leadership roles.

Needless to say, we had difficulty in attracting younger lawyers to almost anything the Bar was offering, but, last year, we overcame that challenge by attracting a record number of Trustee candidates, conducting a robust joint campaign effort, and holding a sold-out Installation Gala.

At present, despite last year's successes and given the current state of events, we were concerned that our membership would, understandably, be occupied with their own families and professional issues, and that Trustee candidates would be in short supply. We asked if our remote presence would attract any interested candidates?

To our surprise and delight, our membership answered the call, breaking last year's record number of Trustee applicants.

This cycle, we are blessed with 12 extremely well-qualified candidates to fill six elected positions on SFVBA's Board of Trustees with our Nominating Committee finding that

each would make an excellent Trustee who would bring something unique to the table. Most satisfying to me is the array of younger lawyers who are interested and have decided to run for a position on the Board.

Why the change? I solidly believe that younger lawyers have come to see the benefit of being a member of SFVBA.


The Bar has been making a concerted effort to be actively present on social media and post as many pictures of events as possible. Younger lawyers want to mingle with our great experienced lawyers and the judges they may only see and communicate in court.

Our online webinars are just an extension of that experience. Consider that just a few short years ago, the Bar, with an almost non-existent presence on social media, snail-mailed postcards to attract members to upcoming events.

Now is the time to tap into the unique experience and views of our younger members and Trustees. They will take the Bar to the next level and keep it both relevant and attractive to potential members. Will they be able to help the Bar do even more creatively in challenging times? Will they show us how to maximize engagement and revenue in remote environments?

This issue of *Valley Lawyer* will introduce you to our candidates and you can see for yourself that SFVBA will be in great hands going forward. We encourage them to run active campaigns and attract as many votes as they can in the upcoming election.

We will have a special, easy and early, sign-up program for the 2021 election in order to qualify friends, colleagues and classmates to vote in this election. This could be critical as, one of the Trustee candidates in last year's election fell short by a mere three votes!

It is clear to me that SFVBA is not a generator of tiresome cocktail parties and hotel chicken dinners. It has been great for almost 100 years because of the imagination and innovation of the members that set it apart and make it truly great. 

“

This cycle, we are blessed with 12 extremely well-qualified candidates to fill six elected positions on SFVBA's Board of Trustees.”

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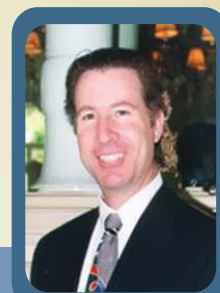
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It's That Time Again

TEMPUS FUGIT. IT IS official. It is election time again. This year, 12 talented and dedicated attorneys are running to be elected to fill six of eight seats on the SFVBA Board of Trustees. Your participation by considering each of them and voting next month to see who will fill those seats is even more important to SFVBA and its work than it was last year.

Why? Last year, before our election, I wrote, "It is important that you exercise your franchise because the SFVBA is important, not only to the attorneys who practice in the Valley, but to the citizenry at large that depends upon it to promote the community's well-being and help provide access to much-needed legal services, particularly those who can least afford it."

Over the past 12 months, particularly in today's challenging environment, the efforts of the Bar to serve the Valley's legal community and the public have become even more crucial to the region's welfare.

Please take some time to give the roster a good going-over and place your stamp on what the Bar accomplishes during the coming year and what course it will take into the future. The actual election begins August 10 with online voting.

This month's *Valley Lawyer* has more than its usual quota of great writing and useful information.

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Forensic accounting specialists Yelena L. Kaminsky and Anna Leh have pieced together a fine MCLE piece on preparing forensic evidence for trial, while

“


The efforts of the Bar to serve the Valley's legal community and the public have become even more crucial to the region's welfare.”

attorneys Taylor F. Williams, Ronald F. Brot, and Glenn R. Kantor share their

views on what law firms should look for in a new hire.

Attorney Maya Shulman and Cheyenne Ismailciuc, Social Media Coordinator at the Shulman Family Law Group, teamed up to put together an informative article with advice on how to best help a client involved in a melancholy and emotionally-charged situation—divorcing a narcissistic spouse.

Also, we have a timely piece recently published in *Attorney at Law* magazine that details a decision by the Los Angeles City Council that gives residential tenants the right under certain COVID-19-driven conditions to sue their landlords.

All in all, a good read. Enjoy and regards. 

MICHAEL D. WHITE
SFVBA Editor



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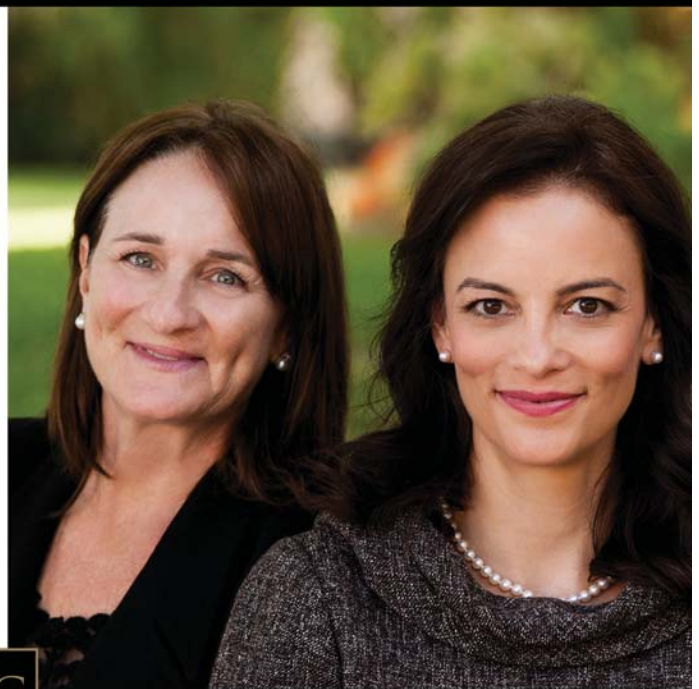


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5	 6	7	8	9	10	11
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26	27	ZOOM MEETING ARS Committee 4:00 PM ZOOM MEETING Executive Committee 5:00 PM 28	29	30	31	



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By reading this article and answering the accompanying test questions, you can earn one MCLE credit. To apply for the credit, please follow the instructions on the test answer form on page 20.

Preparing Evidence for Trial: A Forensic Accountant's Family Law Perspective

By Yelena L. Kaminsky and Anna Leh



The role of forensic accountants is a complex one. In family law matters, they help attorneys by sorting out financial issues based on specific guidelines both before and during trial, presenting and validating their analyses, and reaching conclusions based on the best available information.

FORENSIC ACCOUNTANTS DEAL WITH DATA THAT is absolute, found by defined, fundamental accounting principles.

In family law matters, forensic accountants provide litigation support in sorting out the financial issues in a case by following specific guidelines both before and during trial, presenting and validating their analyses and conclusions based on the best available information that was provided them.

With a focus on family law, this article will provide suggestions on what can assist accounting experts to better serve both attorneys and their clients from first introduction through trial.

Applied Assumptions

There are assumptions in family law that can apply to a forensic accountants work unless evidence to the contrary is presented. For example:

- Money received during marriage is assumed to be community property;
- Loans, and refinances, during marriage are assumed to be community debts;
- Assets purchased during marriage are assumed to be community property; or,
- Expenses paid during marriage are assumed to be for the benefit of the community.

While discussing financial issues with a client, it is important to make them aware of the assumptions that they have the burden to overcome. Inform the client that those assumptions could guide the accounting process and, at the same time, determine what evidence is needed and available to refute them.

Evidence Relied On¹

Forensic accountants rely on three primary sources of information while developing their conclusions—documentary evidence, the testimony of their client, and the reports/testimony of a third party.

The credibility of the forensic accountant's report in trial relies heavily on the credibility of those three sources.

- Documentary evidence—Tax returns, account statements, property documents (deeds and titles), and disclosures prepared for the court are examples



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of documents that are presumed to be correct and reliable.²

- Testimony of the client—The client provides context for the numbers that the forensic accountant cannot testify to. The reliability of what they present hinges on the reliability of the client.

In areas where the forensics do not have documentation to support the application, they will testify that something is “per the client.”³

Examples include:

- Perquisites: The apportionment of certain perquisites is based on discussions with the client.
For example, the allocation of perquisites in auto, travel, telephone, meals and entertainment, and office expenses/supplies, especially with a sole proprietor, is based primarily on the client's representation.
- Financial decisions and alleged agreements made during marriage, sometimes during “pillow talk.”
- “Understandings” between the parties of one party's separate property.
- “Agreements” as to how finances were to be handled post-separation.
- Representations of who benefitted from specified expenses.

- Reports/testimony of a third party—The forensic accountant is provided with, and relies upon, reports prepared by a third-party.

The third-party, preferably another expert, should be prepared to testify in trial to support their own reports. Such third-party expert reports include real property appraisals, vocational evaluations, and rate-of-return analyses.

Third parties who should be ready to testify, but are not experts, include bookkeepers and CPAs who prepared internal financial statements and tax returns, and business staff who may testify as to how a subject company operates.

To Start

Preparing for settlement or trial should start early in a case with a roadmap prepared that delineates what information needs to be collected and what the forensic accountant will be relying on prior to advising a client to retain an expert.

Within the first client meetings, the client should be asked the appropriate questions to ascertain whether their claim has legal merit.

During initial meetings, such claims as the following may well be put forward:

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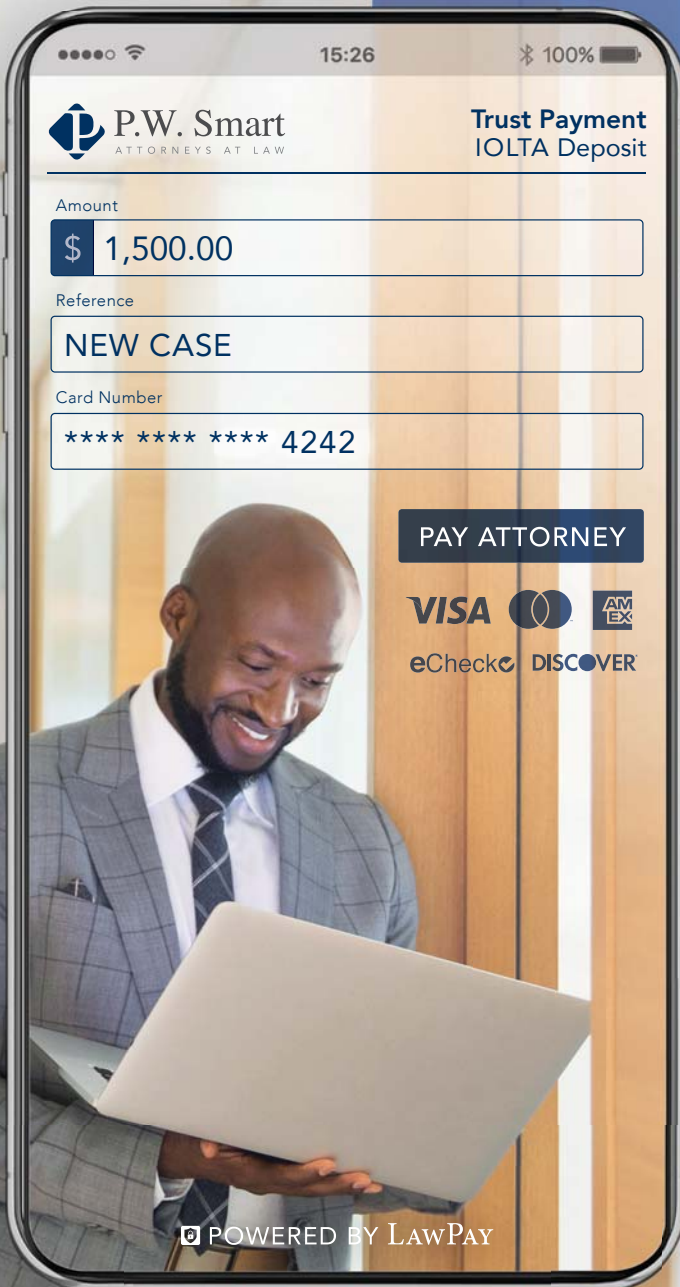
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- “We have separate property accounts.”
- “The house is in my name alone. I paid the mortgage from my paycheck.”
- “My separate property made improvements to the house. I want that money back.”
- “I don’t make very much money from my business.”
- “We made more money than we spent. Where is that money now?”
- “I hardly spent any money during the marriage, but my wife/husband spent a lot of money buying clothes, etc. That’s not fair. How do I get some of that money back?”
- “My wife/husband cashed out our accounts, but I did not approve that. How do I get that money back?”

These uncover issues that need to be looked at forensically and can be followed up with questions that can uncover additional useful information.

Such questions might include:

- What are the sources of separate property and what documents are available to support that claim?
- What types of improvements were made to the house?
- When were the improvements completed and what did they cost?
- What assets were on hand at the date of separation?

A few follow-up questions during the initial interview can help establish what claims have genuine legal merit. They can also help manage the client’s expectations about their case and help in the development of an effective strategy for either settlement or trial.

The information gathered from the client meeting can be used to craft a strategy to pursue a client’s claims and assess the type of evidence a forensic accountant can put to good use.

It is important to find out how much of the client’s claims can be supported with documentary evidence, such as account statements; how much reliance will be put on the client’s testimony and/or a third-party expert.

The importance of an informative initial client interview is immeasurable as it will uncover whether credible evidence exists and how it will be obtained, perhaps from the client, through subpoenas, or from the opposing party.

When the decision is made that a case warrants the services of a forensic accountant, they will need to do a conflict check before discussions start. If no conflict exists, it can be helpful to get a more expansive picture of the financial issues in question.

Whatever course the case takes, the forensic accountant should be considered part of the legal team with access to all pertinent documents, and be kept apprised of the progress of the case as it may affect their retainer.

Necessary Documents

Early discussions should provide some idea of the availability of documents from the client.

The following is a general list of preliminary documents that a forensic accountant will need to review to begin their work:

- Cash Flow Available for Support:⁴
 - Most recent three to five years of tax returns and tax documents, both business and personal;
 - Detailed business general ledgers for the most recent three to five calendar years, and for January 1 through the date of production;
 - Details of Schedule C business income and expenses;
 - Details of Schedule E rental income and expenses;
 - End-of-year mortgage statement(s);
 - Rent rolls for rental properties; and,
 - Earnings statements/paystubs from January 1 to date of production, etc.
- Community Property Balance Sheet:
 - Accounts statements (assets and debts) from date of separation through date of production;
 - Appraised value of real property;
 - Detail and values of autos/household furniture/fixtures/jewelry;
 - Source documents for reimbursement claims; and,
 - *Schedule of Assets and Debts* for both parties, if available, etc.
- Business Valuation:
 - Business tax returns and tax documents for the most recent five years;
 - Electronic copies of bookkeeping program(s) (i.e. Quicken, QuickBooks);
 - Detailed general ledgers for the most recent three to five calendar years and for January 1 through the date of production;
 - Lease agreements;
 - Fixed assets schedules;
 - The same financial information for the date of marriage if there is a pre-marital separate property claim, etc;
 - Inventory reports at the year-ends and date of production; and
 - Accounts receivable and accounts payable aging at the year-ends and date of production.
- Marital Standard of Living:⁵
 - Personal tax returns with tax documents for three to five years prior to separation; and,
 - Number and ages of children in the household in the three to five years prior to separation, etc.

- *Moore-Marsden/Community Investment in Separate Real Property:*^{6 7}
 - Price and first Trust Deed at purchase;
 - Mortgage balance and fair market value at date of marriage, at refinances, at date of separation, and current; and,
 - All title documents, escrow statements and loan applications for refinances, and details and costs of improvements, etc.
- Family Code § 2640 Reimbursement/Separate Property Investment in Community Real Property:⁸
 - Documents that show the separate property investment, such as cancelled checks, bank statements and escrow closing statement; and,
 - Documents to support, and trace the separate property source, etc.
- Reimbursements claims:
 - Detail of reimbursement claims; and,
 - Proof of costs and payments, such as the bill and bank and/or credit card statements evidencing payment, etc.
- Misappropriation or Breach of Fiduciary Duty claims:⁹
 - Detail of misappropriation claims, with proof such as account statements and copies of checks, etc.
- Tracing/Separate Property Claims:^{10 11 12}
 - Detail of separate property claims, and proof of claims such as account statements and copies of checks, etc.
- Arrearage Calculations:
 - Support order; and,
 - Proof of support payment(s).
- Stock Option Analysis:^{13 14}
 - Purchase information, grant and vesting schedules; and,
 - Account statements showing exercise, sale and current disposition of stock(s).

Based on discussions with the client about their claims and available documents, some idea can be formed of what discovery is going to entail, what documents may need to be subpoenaed, and what information the client will need to testify to.

“Non-Menu” Reports

At the onset of a case, and up to trial, a forensic accountant may need to create schedules to assess the reasonableness of the claims made by an opposing party, as well as the credibility of the opposing party. This information could

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be very useful to the court and should be considered when developing exhibits.

A few examples of these reports are:

- A comparative schedule of Income and Expense Declarations filed throughout the case, to highlight any inconsistencies that were presented.
- An adjusted tax return spreadsheet to show whether community earnings were, or were not, exhausted monthly and/or annually.
- A comparative schedule of the business tax returns to the adjusted business financial statements to display why the tax returns are not presumed to be reliable in a case.
- An adjusted Schedule E to show whether a rental property was, or was not, self-sufficient.

Illustrated graphics such as charts of the summarized reports could be very helpful tools to demonstrate important points and to make a clearer, more acceptable case.

Preparing for Trial

Every attorney has their own strategy for the presentation of evidence. When forensic accountants review the exhibit folders for the trial, though, they see it from a different perspective.

Most importantly, they see it with a view from the witness stand rather than from the petitioner's or respondent's table. When they look at any piece of evidence or document, they ask whether it is enough to support their position, be convincing, and covers all the evidence that was reported on and presented in court.

When preparing for trial, it is strongly recommended that attorneys:

- Take the time to understand the forensic accountant's reports.
 - Review the reports and read the notes;
 - Be aware of what information and documents the forensic accountant relied on. This will help in preparing to strengthen any potential weaknesses in the exhibits; and,
 - Forensic accountants try to include as much information as possible in the notes, which are a useful source of information to support findings and to give an idea of what documents will be needed to be included as evidence.
- Share the exhibit list with the forensic accountant prior to finalizing a strategy.
 - A forensic accountant should have a source document supporting every number that they use in their analysis; and,

- ❑ If you choose not to include something as an exhibit, then that should be done with the full knowledge of the forensic accountant.
- Be aware of what the forensic accountant will testify to that is reliant on what they were told by the client and/or a third party.
- ❑ The most common way to rebut an opposing forensic accountant's report and testimony is to highlight how much of the information was not verified by reliable documents;
- ❑ The report will be viewed as deficient if there was no proper validation process—for example, unverified internally prepared financial statements; and,
- ❑ Judges will often look to the credibility of a client, and/or third-party testimony, when assessing the reliability of the forensic accountant's testimony and report in the absence of documentary evidence.
- If it is not in court filings you have available, provide the forensic accountant with the date of marriage and date of separation.
- Inform the forensic accountant of all upcoming dates and deadlines so that they can organize and prioritize their workload and a copy of the case management order.
- Provide a deposition transcripts if financial issues were discussed and put in writing whether the forensic accountant can, or cannot, meet-and-confer with the opposing experts.
- Do not request revisions to notes or declarations that create a contentious tone.
- Remember that a forensic accountant, unlike an attorney, is an advocate for the numbers, not for the client.
- Make sure your forensic accountant is on your witness list and determine if there is anyone else the forensic accountant worked with in their office that should be on the list.


Another valuable benefit of the exhibit list to be shared with the forensic accountant as early as possible before trial.

If the forensic report includes cross-referencing to the exhibit numbers/pages, it makes the testimony flow smoother and helps the process.

Current Rules in Los Angeles County¹⁵

According to the current rules mandated by the Los Angeles County Superior Court regarding civil cases, the following serve as evidentiary standards:

- Court to Hear Evidence—The court may enter a judgment as appears from the evidence to be just pursuant to Code of Civil Procedure section 585(b);
- Authentication—Unauthenticated documents will not be received in evidence unless their authenticity has been pleaded in the complaint and admitted by entry of default;
- Hearsay—The court, in its discretion, may disregard hearsay; and,
- Foundation—The court, in its discretion, may disregard evidence lacking foundation, including declarations on the merits by attorneys or assignees which lack foundation as to their personal knowledge.
- Make the forensic accountant part of the team as a lack of communication has the potential of causing unnecessary, and potentially damaging, surprises during trial.
- When it comes time to requesting fees, include what the forensic accountant is due.

Forensic accountants are required to apply professional skepticism to their work. It is a critical, and frequently undervalued, insight that encourages a questioning mind and critical assessment of the evidence to help clients to understand their true financial position, minus emotions. 

Helpful Tips: A Recap

Some important things to remember:

- Communicate with the forensic accountant before they meet with the client to outline in detail the primary issues of the case. This will help manage the client's expectations.
- Share all available court filings with the forensic accountant prior to sending the client to the meeting with an expert.

¹ "Testimony, writings, material objects, or other things presented to the senses that are offered to provide the existence or nonexistence of a fact." (California Evidence Code § 140).

² "Evidence of a writing made as a record of an act, condition, or event is not made inadmissible by the hearsay rule when offered to prove the act, condition, or event...." (California Evidence Code § 1271).

³ "Except as otherwise provided by statute, the court or jury may consider in determining the credibility of a witness any matter that has any tendency in reason to provide or disprove the truthfulness of his testimony at the hearing...." (California Evidence Code § 780).

⁴ Family Code § 4058.

⁵ Family Code § 4320.

⁶ *In re Marriage of Marsden* (1982) 130 Cal. App. 3d 426, 181 Cal.Rptr 910.

⁷ *In re Marriage of Moore* (1980) 28 Cal.3d 366, 168 Cal.Rptr. 662, 618 P.2d 208.

⁸ Family Code § 2640.

⁹ Family Code § 2602.

¹⁰ *In re Marriage of Mix* (1975) 14 Cal.3d 604, 122 Cal.Rptr. 79, 536 P.2d 479.

¹¹ *Estate of Murphy* (1976) 15 Cal.3d 907, 126 Cal.Rptr.820, 544 P.2d 956.

¹² *In re Marriage of Frick* (1986) 181 Cal.App3d 997, 226 Cal.Rptr 766.

¹³ *In re Marriage of Hug* (1984) 154 Cal. App.3d 780, 201 Cal.Rptr. 676.

¹⁴ *In re Marriage of Harrison* (1986) 179 Cal.App.3d 1216, 225 Cal.Rptr. 234.

¹⁵ Superior Court of California, County of Los Angeles, Rule 3.205 new and effective July 1, 2011.



Preparing Evidence for Trial: A Forensic Accountant's Family Law Perspective

Test No. 141

This self-study activity has been approved for Minimum Continuing Legal Education (MCLE) credit by the San Fernando Valley Bar Association (SFVBA) in the amount of 1 hour. SFVBA certifies that this activity conforms to the standards for approved education activities prescribed by the rules and regulations of the State Bar of California governing minimum continuing legal education.

1. A forensic accountant's most reliable source of information are client's friends and family.
☐ True ☐ False
2. A forensic accountant can testify to the preparation and reliability of a third-party expert report.
☐ True ☐ False
3. Send a potential client to a forensic accountant before an initial meeting.
☐ True ☐ False
4. Contact your forensic accountant for a conflict check before discussing the case with them.
☐ True ☐ False
5. At the very beginning of the case, discuss and assess the legal merits of your client's claims with the client.
☐ True ☐ False
6. Do not tell your forensic accountant about a deadline until the day before reports are due.
☐ True ☐ False
7. Discuss the availability of documents with your client when you are well into the case.
☐ True ☐ False
8. If your client has a separate property claim, ask what documents exist to support the claim.
☐ True ☐ False
9. Start preparing for settlement or trial early in the case.
☐ True ☐ False
10. Tax returns are used in the preparation of an analysis of Cash Flow Available for Support.
☐ True ☐ False
11. The most common way to rebut an opposing forensic accountant is to highlight all the documents they relied on.
☐ True ☐ False
12. Share all available court filings with the forensic accountant prior to their first meeting with the client.
☐ True ☐ False
13. Business tax returns and tax documents should be provided to the forensic accountant for a business valuation.
☐ True ☐ False
14. A client may testify to "understandings" between the parties.
☐ True ☐ False
15. Only look at the numbers in the forensic report. Do not read the notes.
☐ True ☐ False
16. A forensic accountant is an advocate for the numbers, not for the client.
☐ True ☐ False
17. Include forensic accounting fees in fee requests.
☐ True ☐ False
18. The court has discretion to disregard evidence based on a lack of foundation.
☐ True ☐ False
19. The court always disregards hearsay.
☐ True ☐ False
20. It is helpful to share an exhibit list with the forensic accountant before finalizing.
☐ True ☐ False

Preparing Evidence for Trial: A Forensic Accountant's Family Law Perspective

MCLE Answer Sheet No. 141

INSTRUCTIONS:

1. Accurately complete this form.
2. Study the MCLE article in this issue.
3. Answer the test questions by marking the appropriate boxes below.
4. Mail this form and the \$20 testing fee for SFVBA members (or \$30 for non-SFVBA members) to:

San Fernando Valley Bar Association
20750 Ventura Blvd., Suite 140
Woodland Hills, CA 91364

METHOD OF PAYMENT:

- ☐ Check or money order payable to "SFVBA"
☐ Please charge my credit card for \$ _____.

Credit Card Number _____

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Authorized Signature _____

5. Make a copy of this completed form for your records.
6. Correct answers and a CLE certificate will be mailed to you within 2 weeks. If you have any questions, please contact our office at (818) 227-0495.

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ANSWERS:

Mark your answers by checking the appropriate box. Each question only has one answer.

- | | | |
|-----|-------------------------------|--------------------------------|
| 1. | <input type="checkbox"/> True | <input type="checkbox"/> False |
| 2. | <input type="checkbox"/> True | <input type="checkbox"/> False |
| 3. | <input type="checkbox"/> True | <input type="checkbox"/> False |
| 4. | <input type="checkbox"/> True | <input type="checkbox"/> False |
| 5. | <input type="checkbox"/> True | <input type="checkbox"/> False |
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| 19. | <input type="checkbox"/> True | <input type="checkbox"/> False |
| 20. | <input type="checkbox"/> True | <input type="checkbox"/> False |

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Meet the 2020 SFVBA Trustee Candidates

By Michael D. White

Next month, SFVBA members will have the opportunity to elect a new Board of Trustees from among a slate of 12 highly qualified and dedicated candidates. On the following pages, we profile each Trustee candidate and give SFVBA members the opportunity to gain some perspective into the candidates' individual goals and aspirations for the Bar over the coming year.



MICHAEL L. COHEN



LAW SCHOOL: University of West of Los Angeles School of Law

AREA(S) OF PRACTICE: Personal injury

ADMITTED TO THE STATE BAR: 2004

WHAT DOES THE WORD ‘SERVICE’ MEAN TO YOU?
“Working to make my community a better place.”

WHY DID YOU CHOOSE A LEGAL CAREER?
“I loved the diversity of the profession. Once I had my law degree, I would be free to work in virtually any field, and I liked that I would be in a position to help people every day.”

WHAT DO YOU DO FOR FUN? “I enjoy traveling, going to sporting events and concerts with my family. Due to the pandemic and safer-at-home orders, I have enjoyed reading, cooking and being a ‘girl dad’ to my three-year-old daughter, which includes tea parties, ballet dancing and building Magnet-Tiles castles.”

DID YOU HAVE A CHILDHOOD HERO? WHO WAS IT? WHY? “My father. He was a successful lawyer but had a quiet confidence and a very humble attitude that I always admired. Most importantly, he always made time to be with his family.”

WHAT IS YOUR MOST MEMORABLE CAREER MOMENT?
“Opening the doors of my first office on my first day as a solo practitioner.”

WHAT IS THE BEST THING ABOUT THE VALLEY?
“Between growing up in the Valley, going to school and working here, I have been able to experience its vast diversity.”

Michael L. Cohen was born, raised and educated in the San Fernando Valley. He attended Moorpark College and California State University, Northridge before receiving his JD from the San Fernando Valley College of Law. He was admitted to the Bar in 2005 and the United States District Court for the Central, Northern, Eastern and Southern Districts in 2009.

He started out working for his father, also an attorney, in the bankruptcy field. He then worked for a large California Bankruptcy firm that was headquartered in the Valley. After leaving that firm, Cohen later became a solo bankruptcy practitioner. Cohen is currently working as a personal injury attorney with the Law Offices of Gerald L. Marcus in Calabasas.

A current member of the SFVBA Board of Trustees, Cohen would like to continue his work with the Membership and Marketing Committee, specifically working to continually improve the membership experience.

Cohen has been an active participant in SFVBA programs and events such as its Law Day Lawyers in the Library, Blanket the Homeless, and annual Member Appreciation Day. He also volunteered to answer one-on-one questions and review documents the Bar’s Aliso Canyon Gas Leak Forum, supported and attended past Judges’ Night dinners and Installation Galas.

ANTHONY ELLIS



LAW SCHOOL: Pepperdine University School of Law

AREA(S) OF PRACTICE: Catastrophic injury, wrongful death, product liability, and premises liability

ADMITTED TO THE STATE BAR: 2015

WHAT DOES THE WORD ‘SERVICE’ MEAN TO YOU?
“Doing things for the greater good of the community, even if it may be difficult, uncomfortable or may go unseen. Standing up for what is right.”

WHY DID YOU CHOOSE A LEGAL CAREER?
“I wanted to make a difference. As a plaintiff’s attorney, I could protect the public by taking difficult cases to trial and winning to force industries and companies to make their services and products safer for the public.”

WHAT DO YOU DO FOR FUN? “Fishing with my sons and I am just learning to golf.”

DID YOU HAVE A CHILDHOOD HERO? WHO WAS IT? WHY?
“I had to write a paper on Stephan Hawkins once, and he blew my mind—not with his knowledge but by the fact that he didn’t let anything stop him from being who he wanted to be. He didn’t allow his limitations to hold him back.”

WHAT IS YOUR MOST MEMORABLE CAREER MOMENT?
“An 85-year-old man walked behind a reversing van in a parking lot. The impact was at two mph and it caused him to fall over and hit his head on the ground. I was able to show, through their statements, that the head injury had completely transformed my client, causing anxiety, fear and depression. I was able to secure a \$600,000.00 settlement for him.”

WHAT IS THE BEST THING ABOUT THE VALLEY?
“We have everything here. We are a true melting pot of all kinds of cultural backgrounds, we have every type of cuisine and we are a short drive away from everything you could want, beach, mountains, lakes, big city, farms, and even snow. Most of all, we have the best down to earth people.”

Anthony Ellis is an experienced trial attorney that represents clients all over California in the areas of wrongful death, premises liability, product liability and motor vehicle collisions, with over \$35,000,000.00 in represented verdicts and settlements.

Ellis won his first trial just two months after getting licensed to practice law with the National Trial Lawyers naming him “Top 40 Under 40” and among the “Top 100” Civil Plaintiff’s Attorneys for 2019.

When he is not in the courtroom, he mentors at-risk youth, detained minors, high school students, law students and young attorneys.

Ellis is also Co-Chair of the SFVBA’s Litigation Section and is a published legal education writer with numerous articles published in top educational publications.

KYLE M. ELLIS



LAW SCHOOL: Fordham University School of Law

AREA(S) OF PRACTICE: Government Legal Research

ADMITTED TO THE STATE BAR: 2015

WHAT DOES THE WORD 'SERVICE' MEAN TO YOU?

"What service means to me is trying to help when you don't expect anything in return. Service means trying to do the right thing, to lift people up."

WHY DID YOU CHOOSE A LEGAL CAREER?

"I chose a legal career because I wanted to put the research and writing skills I learned studying history to practical use helping people resolve problems."

WHAT DO YOU DO FOR FUN? "Spending time with friends and family rank high on the list, but I also enjoy a variety of hobbies, including genealogy, gardening, camping, and reading."

DID YOU HAVE A CHILDHOOD HERO? WHO WAS IT?

WHY? "I did not have a childhood hero."

WHAT IS YOUR MOST MEMORABLE CAREER

MOMENT? "While I don't think I can pin down any one moment, I have to say that my experience working one on one with several judges as a research attorney has truly been a highlight of my career."

WHAT IS THE BEST THING ABOUT THE VALLEY?

"While it may sound a bit cliché, I have to say that the best thing about the valley are the people I've met while living here. There is a great reservoir of kindness, dedication, and enthusiasm among the people in my neighborhood, and in the valley more generally, that make it a wonderful place to live."

Kyle Ellis was born, raised, and earned his Bachelor's degree in History in San Diego and chose to enter the legal field after earning his Master's degree in the History of Science from Oregon State University.

He earned his JD from Fordham University School of Law in New York City. From BA to JD, he gained experience working at a varied and eclectic catalog of jobs, including museum docent, county records clerk, diamond grader, and chess instructor.

A current member of SFVBA's Board of Trustees, Ellis presently works as a Supervising Research Attorney for the Los Angeles County Superior Court, where he is responsible for the Court's Family Law Unit and the research attorneys that serve on the staffs of several courthouses in the County.

"I have been lucky enough to have been a member of the Board of Trustees since 2018, and during that time I have worked to create a Mock Trial competition, chaired the Membership and Marketing Committee, and served as a member of the planning committee for Judges' Night 2020."

ALEX J. HEMMELGARN



LAW SCHOOL: University of Illinois at Chicago Law School

AREA(S) OF PRACTICE: Tax, estate planning, probate, corporate law

ADMITTED TO THE STATE BAR: Illinois (2013), California (2015)

WHAT DOES THE WORD 'SERVICE' MEAN TO YOU? "Service means using, and encouraging and equipping others to use, personal expertise, time, and resources to improve the community."

WHY DID YOU CHOOSE A LEGAL CAREER?

"I was on the path towards a career in civil engineering when I found that, while I disliked the impersonal and seemingly tedious work of structural design, the work of attorneys at the company where I was interning seemed infinitely more interesting."

WHAT DO YOU DO FOR FUN? "I read constantly and broadly, with a preference for political and military history and the novels of the Lost Generation expats. I enjoy listening to and playing music, especially blues and jazz. I am also currently trying to improve my French language proficiency from my current survival/travel level."

DID YOU HAVE A CHILDHOOD HERO? WHO WAS IT? WHY?

"When I was in elementary school, I visited the Kennedy Space Center in Florida and purchased John Glenn's autobiography. His story, starting from small-town origins and utilizing education, hard work, and a sense of civic and public service to become an iconic American figure, had an instant and lasting impact."

WHAT IS YOUR MOST MEMORABLE CAREER MOMENT?

"My most memorable moment was on the day that the governor of Illinois signed a bill granting same-sex marriage there. My conversations with tearful and overjoyed clients will be a lasting memory and a reminder of human impact of political and legal issues."

WHAT IS THE BEST THING ABOUT THE VALLEY?

"I most appreciate the feeling of a separate close-knit community but with easy access of the amenities of greater Los Angeles."

Originally from a small town near Charleston, West Virginia, Alex Hemmelgarn attended Ohio State to study civil engineering. While working at an engineering consulting firm, he found that he enjoyed working with the firm's intellectual property attorneys far more than solving structural design problems.

Encouraged by a mentor to apply to law school, he received his JD from the University of Illinois at Chicago, and co-founded a small law firm focusing on estate planning and elder law for Chicago's LGBT community before earning an LLM in Tax.

After moving to Los Angeles, Hemmelgarn worked at Bet Tzedek Legal Services as the coordinating staff attorney of the Holocaust Survivor's Justice Network, where he assisted Holocaust survivors in applying for reparations to assist with estate planning and public benefits appeals.

For the last several years, he practiced tax, estate planning, probate, and corporate law in Encino, first with Goldfarb, Sturman & Averbach before joining Encino-based Lewitt Hackman in 2019.

ERIN M. JOYCE



LAW SCHOOL: Southwestern University School of Law

AREA(S) OF PRACTICE: State bar defense, moral character determinations, professional licensing, and ethics consultations

ADMITTED TO THE STATE BAR: 1990

WHAT DOES THE WORD 'SERVICE' MEAN TO YOU?

"The word 'service' means to give back to my community, since I believe that we reap what we sow."

WHY DID YOU CHOOSE A LEGAL CAREER?

"I chose to go to law school because I have a deeply held sense of right and wrong. I naturally protect the underdog in disputes and have used my legal training to ensure that right does win out in the end."

WHAT DO YOU DO FOR FUN? "I have enjoyed camping all over California with my girls and my troop, and especially like to go hiking, kayaking and river rafting. We are planning a backpacking trip in Yellowstone this summer."

DID YOU HAVE A CHILDHOOD HERO? WHO WAS IT? WHY?

"My childhood hero is Mother Teresa. With the vast problems of poverty and inequality facing her, she did not give up, but took on the challenge one person at a time."

WHAT IS YOUR MOST MEMORABLE CAREER MOMENT?

"My most memorable career moment was when I received the filed decision in a case I argued to the State Bar Court's Review Department. It was the first case I handled from start to finish all the way through the appellate process, and it resulted in an opinion published in the *State Bar Court Reporter*."

WHAT IS THE BEST THING ABOUT THE VALLEY? "I grew up in the San Fernando Valley and remember the Galleria during the 1980's as depicted by Frank Zappa's *Valley Girl*. I enjoy the hot summers and mild winters. And most of all, I met my best friends here in the San Fernando Valley, and they are certainly the best thing about the Valley to me."

Attorney Erin M. Joyce has extensive experience in State Bar investigations and disciplinary proceedings, plus over two decades of civil litigation practice. Erin was admitted in 1990 and practiced for nearly eight years in an intellectual property boutique before joining the Office of Chief Trial Counsel as a prosecutor for the State Bar.

Before going into private practice, Joyce served as Chief Special Investigator for the Los Angeles Fire Department, as a prosecutor for the State Bar of California, and as a lawyer for multiple private practices.

She is incoming Chair of the Small Firms and Sole Practitioners Section of LACBA, a member of the Professional Responsibility and Ethics Committee of LACBA, a member of CLA's Attorney Wellness Committee and a member of the Resolutions Committee.

Joyce practiced in public service for over 18 years as a State Bar prosecutor. While at the State Bar, she served as the President of the State Bar Employees Union, on the bargaining team, and as a steward, protecting the rights of fellow employees as a volunteer.

Joyce serves as a volunteer for LACBA's Veteran's Project and a volunteer arbitrator for the LACBA Attorney-Client Mediation and Arbitration Services.

AMANDA M. MOGHADDAM



LAW SCHOOL: Southwestern Law School

AREA(S) OF PRACTICE: Legal malpractice defense

ADMITTED TO THE STATE BAR: 2011

WHAT DOES THE WORD 'SERVICE' MEAN TO YOU?

"Service means prioritizing communal needs and recognizing that the strength of your family is wholly dependent on the tranquility of the world around you."

WHY DID YOU CHOOSE A LEGAL CAREER?

"Like many, I went to law school because I wasn't sure what else to do with my liberal arts degree. However, I fell in love with law my first year in law school. I was immediately drawn to legal malpractice law due to its complexity."

WHAT DO YOU DO FOR FUN? "As a parent to two young children, my fun activities usually revolve around baseball games and tiny tot gymnastics classes. In the time of COVID-19, I've rediscovered my love for historical non-fiction and pie baking."

DID YOU HAVE A CHILDHOOD HERO? WHO WAS IT? WHY?

"My childhood hero was my grandmother, who had six children before she was 30 years old. She worked multiple jobs to provide her children with the best possible life."

WHAT IS YOUR MOST MEMORABLE CAREER MOMENT?

"My husband was out of the country for work and my son fell ill moments before I was going to drop him at daycare and head to an important court hearing. I knew that I could not leave him at daycare and so I took him with me. Before my matter was called, I showed him a pack of Starbursts in my purse and whispered, 'these are yours if you can stay quiet while mommy talks to the judge.' He nodded. I argued for about 30 minutes, worried of course that my child was going to have an outburst, but he didn't. The judge went back to chambers, reviewed a case I cited, and returned to the bench to state he was granting my motion. I turned, victorious, to see that my son had befriended most everyone sitting in the courtroom gallery."

WHAT IS THE BEST THING ABOUT THE VALLEY?

"It's hard to pick one thing, but I'd have to say all of my friends and colleagues. A close second would be the food."

Amanda M. Moghaddam is seeking a second term on the SFVBA Board of Trustees.

She currently serves as a Claims Attorney at Lawyers' Mutual Insurance Company and is a California Bar-certified specialist in legal malpractice law.

"I have spent my career helping other lawyers," she says. "This truly is a noble profession and I am grateful for the continued opportunity to serve you and our community. I am a very active member of the bar, serving on the Membership & Marketing and Mock Trial Competition Committees, as well as the Women's Law and New Lawyers Sections."

The mother of two children, ages seven and one, Moghaddam enjoys spending time hiking, playing board games, and watching movies.

SAMUEL R.W. PRICE



LAW SCHOOL: Boston College Law School

AREA(S) OF PRACTICE: Business litigation

ADMITTED TO THE STATE BAR: Massachusetts (2005); California (2008)

WHAT DOES THE WORD 'SERVICE' MEAN TO YOU?

"To me, service means giving back to, addressing the needs of, and striving to improve one's community."

WHY DID YOU CHOOSE A LEGAL CAREER?

"I truly believe the law is a profession that allows all of us the opportunity to make a positive impact in so many aspects of the world."

WHAT DO YOU DO FOR FUN? "I love attending live comedy shows, concerts, and sports events. Sadly, these are all things that have been eliminated (at least temporarily) by the pandemic. So I'm in the market for other ideas."

DID YOU HAVE A CHILDHOOD HERO? WHO WAS IT? WHY?

"I never really had a hero in my childhood, although I did look up to my older siblings, as I suspect most do."

WHAT IS YOUR MOST MEMORABLE CAREER MOMENT?

"Early in my career, a majority of my practice was bankruptcy, primarily representing individual and business debtors. One family in particular stands out. They had experienced several unfortunate and unexpected hardships and were on the verge of losing everything. We attended a hearing at which time it was determined that they would receive a discharge and be able to start their lives over. The tears of relief they shed and the hugs of gratitude they shared still stay with me."

WHAT IS THE BEST THING ABOUT THE VALLEY? "I think the best part of the Valley is its incredible level of diversity. In a relatively small geographic area, people from all walks of life, with different backgrounds, ethnicities, races, religions, sexual orientations, lifestyles, and countless other characteristics, live together in flourishing communities and work together in a broad range of businesses and industries."

Samuel R.W. Price is a partner with the Santa Clarita-based firm of Poole Shaffery & Kogle, LLP, where he focuses on civil litigation, representing both plaintiffs and defendants in complex business disputes and commercial litigation; intellectual property litigation; employment litigation; bankruptcy-related litigation; and construction, construction-defect, and construction defect-related product liability matters.

In addition to civil litigation, he also has extensive experience in bankruptcy, having represented both business entities and individuals in proceedings under Chapters 7, 11 and 13. He continues to represent both debtors and creditors in litigation arising out of bankruptcy proceedings.

Price has served as a member of the San Fernando Valley Bar Association for five years and currently sits on its Board of Trustees. He has also been on the Executive Board of the Santa Clarita Valley Bar Association for the past ten years, including two years as President.

ERIN PRUTOW



LAW SCHOOL: Emory University School of Law

AREA(S) OF PRACTICE: Estate planning and equine law

ADMITTED TO THE STATE BAR: 2016

WHAT DOES THE WORD 'SERVICE' MEAN TO YOU?

"Service means truly showing up for people, consistently, with earnest. It means actually listening not just looking for a way to respond in a conversation. It means removing yourself, your calendar, caseload, attitude and truly showing up to each client meeting."

WHY DID YOU CHOOSE A LEGAL CAREER? "I have always been drawn to advocacy work, plus I am terrible at math."

WHAT DO YOU DO FOR FUN? "I train and ride horses in the hunters and jumpers, surf, mountain bike and hike."

DID YOU HAVE A CHILDHOOD HERO? WHO WAS IT?

WHY? "Ruth Bader Ginsburg. I have never read more well-reasoned and forward-thinking opinions. She is a beautiful example of what it means to be a woman in a male-centric profession. She loved her husband fiercely, but not at the expense of herself and her own career. And of course, her tireless advocacy for minorities and social justice."

WHAT IS YOUR MOST MEMORABLE CAREER MOMENT?

"Taking the leap of faith required to start my own law practice and watching it grow before my eyes. That leap of faith is attributed in no small part to the encouragement and mentorship of many SFVBA members to whom I am eternally grateful."

WHAT IS THE BEST THING ABOUT THE VALLEY?

"I moved here in November of 2015 for a temp position as a contract attorney. The day I arrived, my car overheated and seized in the Ralph's parking lot. I had just driven all the way from Atlanta never setting foot in Los Angeles. I was not prepared for what followed. No less than four people stopped to help me, one gentleman going so far as to go into Ralph's, buy some coolant and help pour it in my car."

Erin Prutow is a solo practitioner in Lake Balboa whose practice focuses primarily on equine law and estate planning.

A summa cum laude graduate of Oklahoma State University, she has received numerous honors for her community service, leadership, and athletic activities, and was captain of the NCAA's Division I nationally-ranked equestrian team.

Having worked in business management prior to opening her own law practice, she brings a holistic approach to asset protection using her experience working in both tax and accounting.

In addition to estate planning and probate, Erin represents her equine community in contract disputes and assists with their business incorporations. When she's not riding horses, Erin can be found mountain biking, surfing, or hiking with friends.

JESSICA W. ROSEN



LAW SCHOOL: Golden Gate University School of Law

AREA(S) OF PRACTICE: Franchise, distribution and business litigation

ADMITTED TO THE STATE BAR: 2013

WHAT DOES THE WORD 'SERVICE' MEAN TO YOU?
"Helping others achieve individual and collective goals."

WHY DID YOU CHOOSE A LEGAL CAREER?
"For as long as I can remember, I wanted to be a lawyer. The idea of being an advocate always inspired me."

WHAT DO YOU DO FOR FUN? "It's hard to remember 'fun' in the age of COVID-19. Currently, there are puzzles, virtual hangouts, Zoom happy hours, and Starbucks runs."

DID YOU HAVE A CHILDHOOD HERO? WHO WAS IT?
"My mom. I even dressed up as her for Halloween when I was six. I won most creative costume that year."

WHAT IS YOUR MOST MEMORABLE CAREER MOMENT? "As an attorney for the appellant in the Ninth Circuit, my first reversal in a published opinion."

WHAT IS THE BEST THING ABOUT THE VALLEY?
"It's home."

Jessica Rosen grew up in the San Fernando Valley, in West Hills.

She received her undergraduate degree in History from University of California, San Diego and her a Master's degree in History from California State University, Northridge.

Rosen attended law school at Golden Gate University School of Law where she graduated top of her class and received numerous accolades. She also interned at both the United States Court of Appeal for the Ninth Circuit and the First District Court of Appeal.

After law school, Jessica volunteered at Legal Aid Foundation of Los Angeles as she waited for her bar results.

She began her professional career as an associate attorney at a Westside firm with a focus on appellate work in both federal and state appellate courts, and the U.S. Supreme Court.

She then transitioned into trial litigation before joining Lewitt Hackman. As an associate at Lewitt Hackman in the firm's Franchise & Distribution and Business Litigation Practice Groups, she has successfully advised clients and prosecuted and defended cases, receiving positive results for her clients.

When she is not working, she can be found baking pies, refurbishing mid-century furniture, and hanging out with her family, friends, and her pups.

STEVEN M. SEPASSI



LAW SCHOOL: Southwestern University School of Law

AREA(S) OF PRACTICE: Insurance defense, personal injury and mediation

ADMITTED TO THE STATE BAR: 1995

WHAT DOES THE WORD 'SERVICE' MEAN TO YOU?
"Service means giving of yourself to others to make their lives better."

WHY DID YOU CHOOSE A LEGAL CAREER?
"Initially, I was attracted to a legal career for its prestige. T.V. shows like Perry Mason, L.A. Law, and Law & Order were influential as well. However, learning the law in law school, especially Constitutional Law, fascinated me. Being able to help those that need legal help gives me satisfaction now."

WHAT DO YOU DO FOR FUN? "Golf. And then, some more golf!"

DID YOU HAVE A CHILDHOOD HERO? WHO WAS IT? WHY?
"I cannot put my finger on any one person. I have always been an underdog supporter, and get a kick when the underdog achieves the impossible."

WHAT IS YOUR MOST MEMORABLE CAREER MOMENT?
"I was serving as a temporary judge in traffic court in El Monte some years back presiding over a trial where the officer had ticketed a lady for cell phone use while driving. The defendant was adamant that she was not talking on the telephone. I asked the officer what made him believe that the defendant was talking on the telephone. The officer, with an obvious contempt for me as a temporary judge, and my question, retorted: 'Because her mouth was moving!' I don't recall the outcome, but I was not too thrilled with the officer's attitude toward the court!"

WHAT IS THE BEST THING ABOUT THE VALLEY?
It seems to me like the Valley has kept its traditional suburban lifestyle. Whereas other parts of Los Angeles, such as the Westside, or downtown, are hustling and bustling, the Valley is the one place that has kept its relative quiet."

Steven Sepassi's career has melded divergent professions—engineering, real estate and the law—into a single symbiotic endeavor. Building on an undergraduate degree in civil engineering and a Master's in Structural Engineering from the University of Missouri, Sepassi went on to earn a Doctorate in civil engineering from USC in 1985.

While attending law school, Sepassi interned with the U.S. Attorney for the Civil Tax Division of the Central District of California, as well as Judge Arthur M. Greenwald of the U.S. Bankruptcy Court's Central District of California.

Early in his career, he worked as a solo practitioner representing clients in business litigation, and personal injury cases, before helping found the firm of Sepassi & Tarighati in Encino. Along the way, he also found time to become a licensed real estate broker.

"I've served on the SFVBA Board for almost three years now, and have come to realize how dedicated the staff, officers, and Board are on the well-being and growth of the organization," says Sepassi. "I wish to continue to participate and serve the organization in any way I can."

PRAVIN A. SINGH



LAW SCHOOL: Pepperdine University School of Law

AREA(S) OF PRACTICE: Workers' compensation

ADMITTED TO THE STATE BAR: 2012

WHAT DOES THE WORD 'SERVICE' MEAN TO YOU?

"Genuine service means putting the interests of another or others before your own interests."

WHY DID YOU CHOOSE A LEGAL CAREER?

"In school, I always enjoyed reading, learning, writing and public speaking. I am also naturally a skeptic, so the idea of trying to find 'the smoking gun' appealed to me. After working at a law firm after completing my undergraduate work, I saw that my personality would serve me well as an attorney."

WHAT DO YOU DO FOR FUN? "Reading, watching documentaries and exercising at the gym. Also, I could watch Don Rickles, Eddie Murphy, and Larry David forever."

DID YOU HAVE A CHILDHOOD HERO? WHO WAS IT?

WHY? "My parents because they came to this country with very little, but through hard work, discipline and persistence, achieved the American dream. When I need motivation to work harder, I think about them."

WHAT IS YOUR MOST MEMORABLE CAREER MOMENT?

"Early on in my career, I was working on a contentious matter against an opposing counsel with decades of experience who knew everyone at the local courthouse. In dismantling my arguments, and again later before the judge, he was zealous for his client, but measured, respectful and welcoming. After the hearing, we shook hands. That hearing forever defined my career because I knew that I had to model myself after this consummate professional if I wanted longevity and success in the legal field. I ran into him years later and thanked him for that experience."

WHAT IS THE BEST THING ABOUT THE VALLEY?

"The variety of different cuisines in any given five-mile radius."

"I didn't know where the San Fernando Valley was until I attended Pepperdine, moving from Laguna Hills to Woodland Hills," says Pravin. "But after about 11 years here, my life is as Valley centric as one can get."

Pravin represented insurance companies for a few years, but now advocates on behalf of injured workers at Rowen, Gurvey & Win in Sherman Oaks.

"Living and working in such a diverse community inspired me to get more involved as well," he says.

When not attending an SFVBA committee meeting or event, Pravin is active in SOLID – Support of Law Enforcement in Devonshire, which raises funds to support the LAPD Devonshire division, and sponsor events for the community to interact with the brave officers that serve them.

BENJAMIN E. SOFFER



LAW SCHOOL: Loyola Law School, Los Angeles

AREA(S) OF PRACTICE: Business, business litigation, product liability

ADMITTED TO THE STATE BAR: 1995

WHAT DOES THE WORD 'SERVICE' MEAN TO YOU?

"Service means volunteering and donating time to the community. Military service is an obvious example."

WHY DID YOU CHOOSE A LEGAL CAREER?

"I had prior careers as a civil engineer, as a computer programmer, and as project engineer for a large company that develops master-planned communities. In that last job I dealt with lawyers who were involved in the land acquisition deals for the real estate development company, city attorneys, and attorneys for utility companies. I was getting tired of engineering and looking for a new challenge, so this encouragement gave me the impetus to quit a great job and enroll in law school full time."

WHAT DO YOU DO FOR FUN?

"I like to garden. We have a large yard with lots of fruit trees and a few raised beds in which I grow vegetables year-round. I am also an enthusiastic follower of English Premier League soccer, and my wife and I enjoy going to the theater and attending concerts of the L. A. Philharmonic."

DID YOU HAVE A CHILDHOOD HERO? WHO WAS IT? WHY?

"I would not characterize it as a 'hero,' but growing up in Israel, I was a big fan of George Best, an amazing football (soccer) player, who was a winger at Manchester United."

WHAT IS YOUR MOST MEMORABLE CAREER MOMENT? "It was in a litigation matter in which the parties had filed cross summary judgment motions, which were heard together. The court's tentative ruling was to grant my motion and deny my seasoned opponent's motion, so I was elated. But in the course of oral argument, opposing counsel very skillfully convinced the judge to grant her motion and deny mine. The judge turned to me and said, 'that's why it's called a tentative ruling.' My elation turned to stunned disbelief."

WHAT IS THE BEST THING ABOUT THE VALLEY?

"The Valley has many good attributes. But the best "features" of the Valley are Lake Balboa Park, the Japanese Garden, the Center for the Performing Arts, and the Nethercutt Museum."

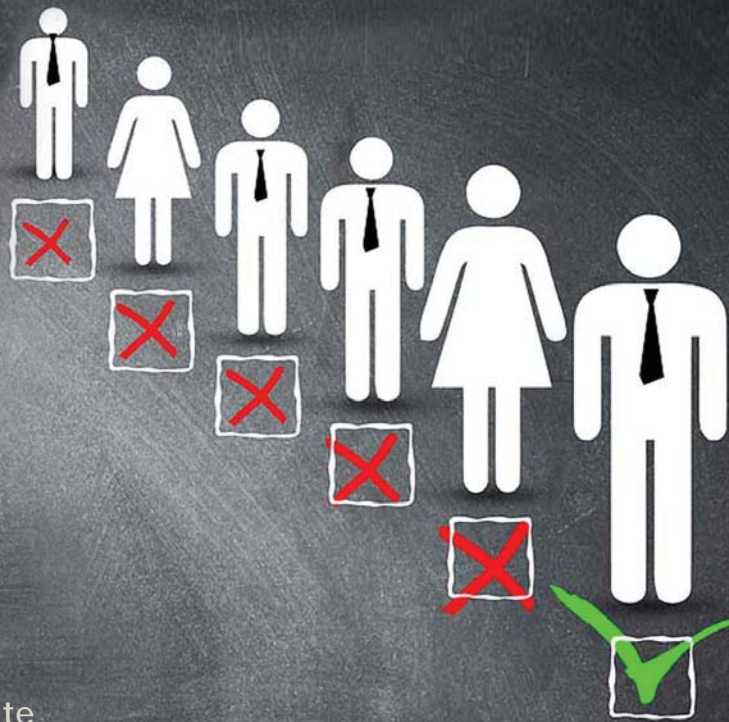
Before founding The Soffer Law Firm in Woodland Hills in 2015, Soffer served as a partner at Perkins Coie LLP—a prominent international law firm with more than 1,000 attorneys on staff.

Soffer earned a BS degree in civil engineering from Pennsylvania State University, and had careers in project and construction engineering and computer programming, before embarking on his career in the law.

In the 1970s, his family relocated from Tel Aviv, Israel, to New York City when he was a teenager. He remembers the move as a "culture shock that is difficult to describe, especially because I could barely speak English."

He has been an active member of SFVBA for several years, the past two as a member of the Bar's Board of Trustees.

Hiring a New Lawyer: What to Look For



By Michael D. White

THE PROCESS OF EVALUATING a new attorney before bringing them into a firm is, perhaps, not surprisingly, similar to the same menu of qualities, comfortability, experience, and personality as that of a potential client appraising a lawyer to take a case to court.

Whether a recent law school graduate or a seasoned veteran attorney, the decision rests on several key factors that rest on whether the candidate is “well rounded,” says attorney Ronald F. Brot, founding and senior partner at the family firm of Brot, Gross, Fishbein LLP in Encino.

Well-Rounded

“We have ten lawyers and a staff of 20 and want to bring in people who will mesh into the fabric of our firm,” says Brot. “So when we see people who have well-rounded backgrounds, and an interest in whatever outside activities they may have, and that runs the gamut.”

That indicator, he adds, “demonstrates that we are dealing with a well-rounded personality who can bring to us something we don’t already have. We’re not looking to replicate ourselves, but to grow because of our differences, not in spite of them.”

According to Brot—a long-time member of the San Fernando Valley Bar Association and current President of the 21,000-member Los Angeles County Bar Association—an “inner commitment” to learning and professional excellence are also critical factors.

“We want to work with people who are not looking to just get by, put in their hours, hopefully prevail here and there, and collect a check,” he says.

“We value the position that lawyers were given in our system of government and justice. We look for lawyers who value what lawyers do and are looking to be the best they can be, whatever that may be.”



Michael D. White is editor of *Valley Lawyer* magazine. He is the author of four published books and has worked in business journalism for more than 35 years. Before joining the staff of the SFVBA, he worked as Web Content Editor for the Los Angeles County Metropolitan Transportation Authority. He can be reached at michael@sfvba.org.

"No matter at what level, the first thing we're looking for is a strong academic and intellectual background," adds Brot.

"Our practice of law is sophisticated in that we deal with complex and high conflict cases, so we do very little on the fly. We look for people who have demonstrated their ability in the past and can carry that through their work here."

Fitting-In

Attorney Glenn R. Kantor, founding partner of Kantor & Kantor LLP, looks for people who will be "enjoyable to work with, responsible, diligent and thorough."

The firm, based in Northridge, focuses on cases involving ERISA—the Employment Retirement Income Security Act—and representing individuals seeking to obtain their rightful insurance benefits.

"To start with, if I'm hiring someone who is smart and, yet, they know nothing about our area of law, I don't really care as long as they're willing to learn," he says.

"A good third of our attorneys came from the defense side; most were lawyers that I had litigated against. I respected them and felt that they would fit in our firm's personality. They are smart and reasonable and when their client was wrong, they conceded it. They sought resolution rather than arguing over every point."

In reality, says Kantor, "We aren't hiring someone with experience as much as we are hiring someone that we know and have seen in action. I would look for someone to fit in to our firm culture and bring with them what we need and want in a lawyer."

A Willingness to Learn

Taking a similar tack, says Ronald Brot, regarding his own firm, a knowledge of procedure or family law, or family law experience, is not as critical a standard as some may think.

"I think people can develop that if

they're smart, energetic and thirsty," he says. "We can provide the opportunity to learn procedure and substantive law and get experience. Those things turn out to be wonderful if a lawyer applying to our firm has those three things in their kit. A knowledge of procedure in the state's court system, a knowledge of family law, and some experience in family law are probably among the least important items that we look for."

Attorney Taylor F. Williams' strategy when appraising a potential new hire takes its own path.

Williams is a partner with the Valencia-based firm of Donahoe & Young LLP, which focuses its practice toward civil litigation, including real estate, business transactions and bankruptcy matters, as well as probate, estate planning, and landlord/tenant issues.

"We have five attorneys and seven or eight staff, so we're not a big or small firm," she says. "Ideally, we would like to have ten attorneys in our Valencia office by the end of 2021."

A Team Player

One of the keys to success, Williams says, is that "we all genuinely like each other we all get along. We would look for someone who can roll with the punches and has a quirky sense of humor who wants to be part of a team."

People do their best when they trust each other and feel comfortable around one another," says Williams.

"That adds another dimension to a person that others can relate to. That creates a bond and when that bond exists, not only are you going to try to do good work for the firm, you know that someone else has your back."

With a seasoned attorney, "it wouldn't matter as much as to their record in school nearly as much as their professional experience."

The firm, says Williams, "would typically look for someone with at least five years of litigation experience, preferably with a firm. Experience in 'law in motion' practice is also important.

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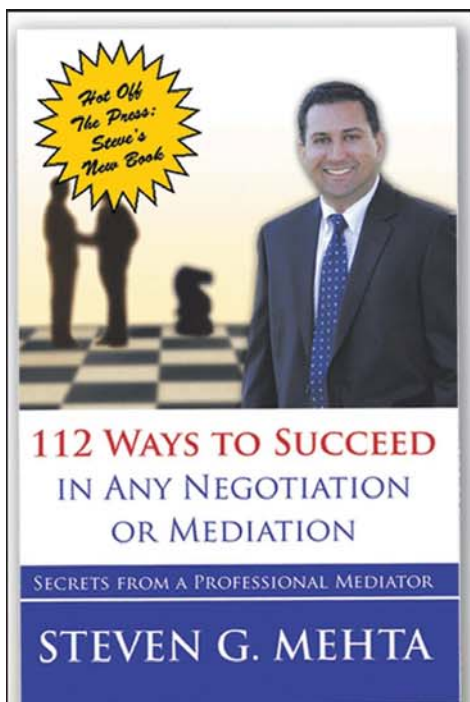


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- Domestic Violence: Not Guilty, Jury Finding of Factual Innocence (San Fernando)
- \$50 Million Mortgage Fraud: Dismissed, Trial Court (Downtown, LA)
- DUI Case, Client Probation: Dismissed Search and Seizure (Long Beach)
- Numerous Sex Offense Accusations: Dismissed before Court (LA County)
- Several Multi-Kilo Drug Cases: Dismissed due to Violation of Rights (LA County)
- Misdemeanor Vehicular Manslaughter, multiple fatality: Not Guilty Verdict (San Fernando)
- Federal RICO prosecution: Not Guilty verdict on RICO and drug conspiracy charges (Downtown, LA)
- Murder case appeal: Conviction reversed based on ineffective assistance of trial counsel (Downtown, LA)
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Have they been in court and argued those motions? We are in the courtroom two, three, four times a week, so we look for someone who has that presence and isn't afraid to be in a courtroom."

With a new hire who's a recent law school grad, "we'd look to see if they have a positive record at an accredited law school," says Williams, a graduate of the University of Texas and Pepperdine's Caruso School of Law.

"Confidence without ego, being ready to learn, and being active in law school are what we look for. I would look to see if, perhaps, they had 'summered' with a firm because they can bring some idea of how a law office functions with, maybe, some experience doing a dock review or basic discovery."

Regarding hiring a recent law school graduate, "If working as a research assistant for a professor shows me a lot because most of our new hires do a lot of the research and writing for us," she says.

Ability to Write Well

Writing, adds Williams, "is the backbone of what we do and we are sticklers about it," expressing a standard shared by both Glenn Kantor and Ronald Brot.

Writing skills among attorneys, particularly those fresh out of law school, says Glen Kantor, "are not what they used to be. When we're considering a new hire, even if they're able to skillfully articulate a position verbally, if they can't put it on paper, it won't do the client or us any good."

In his firm's practice, Kantor has found that very often "we aren't even allowed in the courtroom because the judge wants paper. They just might let us in to argue it, but in most ERISA trials, it is all on paper."

The written word, he says, "is everything," but, he is quick to add, "Writing skills are something we can work on. If they're too wordy or aren't clear in their writing, that's something we can work on. We can have someone

who is a good writer work with someone who needs to improve in that area. It isn't poetry, but, just like with any type of writing, we're trying to tell a story."

And the best way to learn how to write? "Read," says Kantor—an impression developed over the years and underscored by Ronald Brot.

"The most effective way for people to learn how to write is to read and it really doesn't matter much what they read," he says.

"We've all been taught the basics of writing, but we all haven't learned how to put it into practice in terms of actually putting pen to paper. I've found over time that the most prodigious readers often turn out to be the best writers."

In a litigation practice, whether the result is achieved through settlement, mediation or trial, "most of the communication will be done in writing. The ability to write persuasively, while maintaining intellectual integrity, sadly seems to be an increasingly rare commodity."

Many of the cases in which his firm finds itself are determined as much by what the bench officer reads long before they appear in court as what is presented in face-to-face oral arguments.

"I cannot overstate the importance of writing skills," Brot says. "My awareness of the importance of writing has become heightened, so the more I focus on it, perhaps, the more critical I've become. I do know that some of the documents that are submitted to courts are embarrassing with poor choices of words, bad grammar and punctuation, and incomplete sentences that fly off the page with no regard for proper structure or persuasion."

Writing, he says, is a direct by-product of self-discipline, something you can see in a resume or in other place "where people may not look. You can bet that those people who have participated in challenging activities from baseball to forensics have a commitment to discipline that is transferable. If you can be disciplined in one area, you can be disciplined in another."

Taylor Williams concurs. "Writing is the backbone of what we do and we are sticklers about it."


Her advice to new attorneys? "Consider your audience. Judges don't want fluff; a judge doesn't want to have to plow through something that isn't well written. When we do motions or handle summary judgments, I'll have everybody do an outline and start with headings because they are what will get the judge's attention, she says, adding, "We build a roadmap that lays out what needs to be done with mile markers that keep the writer from going off on a tangent."

Like in journalism, says Williams, "Don't bury the lead. In a motion, clearly lay out 'this is what I want and this is why I should get it.'"

Common Sense

It's a given that professionals who align with their firm's culture and values—a combination that promotes professional excellence and a commitment to client service—tend to be more productive, foster a positive work environment, and have a sense of pride in their work and the work of their firm.

Like a client appraising a potential advocate, the most critical thing to look for in a new hire attorney is a willingness to learn and a commitment to mesh a firm's culture and core values into their work—values that serve as a benchmark to help prioritize common strategic goals, inform critical business decisions, and set the tone as to how clients will be served and represented.

In the long run, though, it is, says Glenn Kantor, "all about common sense. I want to meet with them and talk with them to see if they are bright, but the reality is that you can't teach intelligence. I look for common sense because we're dealing with individual clients, each of whom has their own individual story and, as brilliant as you might be, you have to take that all in and deal with it in a way that best serves the client who hired us to represent them." 

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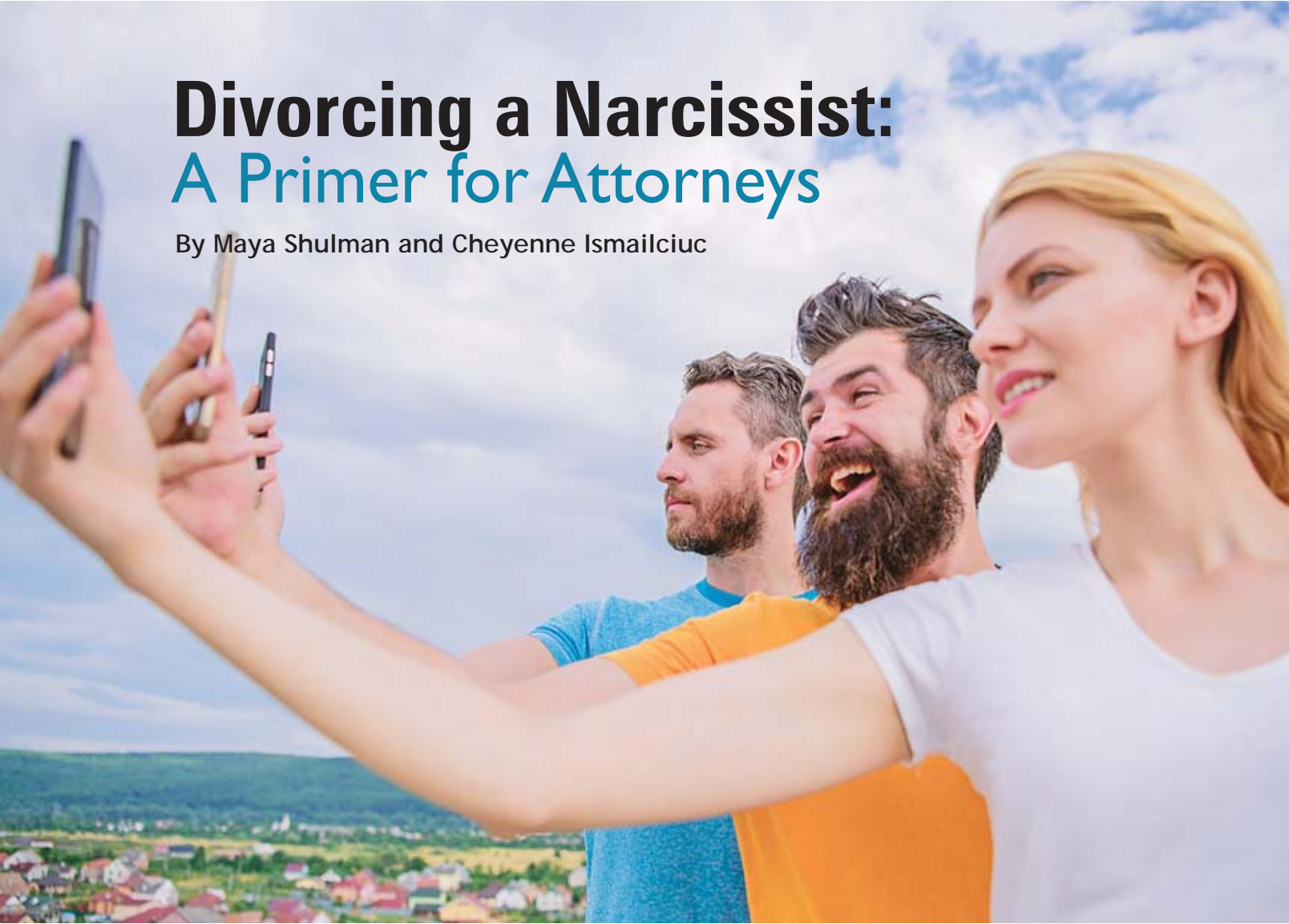
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Divorcing a Narcissist: A Primer for Attorneys

By Maya Shulman and Cheyenne Ismailciuc



THE WORD NARCISSIST IS OFTEN THROWN around to describe a person who can drive another, often a spouse, over the edge.

A narcissist is self-absorbed and tends to be arrogant and cunning for their own benefit, exploiting and manipulating others and situations for their own personal gain.

It is a word that is heavy-weighted and deeply evocative, but sometimes it can't be helped.

Perhaps, a client has shared, "I married a narcissist"—a statement in itself that displays an emotional impact that can be both infuriating and emotionally taxing.

So, from an attorney's perspective, what happens when a client sees divorce as the only option?

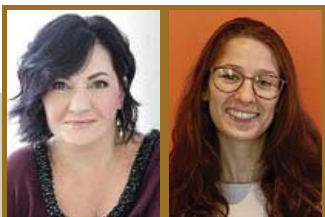
Divorcing a Narcissist

A true narcissist believes that they are above and immune to any and all law—a condition that makes a narcissist spouse a challenge to cooperate with since they may be convinced that they are correct in every case 100 percent of the time.

Because of their self-centeredness, during the divorce case they may refuse to provide financial information and documents or negotiate; defy court orders; use children as pawns; and disregard the advice of legal counsel.

The narcissist's goal is to manipulate. Given the possibilities that one may encounter when divorcing a narcissist spouse, it is of the utmost importance to have all the right tools ready for when things fail to proceed as planned, as they often do not with a narcissist involved.

This is especially true for situations regarding alimony, as recently-enacted California laws have overhauled the tax



Family law attorney **Maya Shulman** is the founder of the Calabasas-based Shulman Family Law Group. **Cheyenne Ismailciuc** serves as the firm's Social Media Coordinator. They can both be reached at info@sflg.us.

requirements obligating recipients of alimony to pay tax on that income. However, currently, new laws have moved the tax burden from the payee to the payer.

In a divorce, this means the 'breadwinner' is incentivized to pay less alimony to avoid being taxed, while the dependent has the inducement to receive increased alimony because they do not have to pay any taxes on the alimony they receive.

It does not matter if the narcissist is the breadwinner or the dependent in the divorce, either situation can still be contentious.

How Should an Attorney Prepare?

First and foremost, it's critical to inform the client about preparing their personal funds.

This may, at first, seem like a cynical first suggestion, but conflict in a divorce can result in considerable attorney's fees. While that is never desired by either party, attorneys would also like to see an amicable divorce, but it's better to be clear and up-front than not with a client.

Second, have your client's financial paperwork prepared and ready to move forward.

Under the law, spouses have a fiduciary duty which exists between them, to make full disclosure of income, assets and debts. This duty continues during the course of a dissolution proceeding.¹

In the recently published case, *In re Marriage of Guitierrez*, the Court reiterated the duty of spouses to disclose information during a dissolution and upheld the trial court's institution of sanctions.²

The Court stated that, "To improve the efficiency of discovery and to lower the cost of dissolution proceedings, the side with superior information should disclose it fully and promptly."³

Couples dissolving their bonds thus must grasp the importance of candor. They, and their attorneys, must understand concealment will be costly and counter-productive."⁴

Further, when responding to a Request for Order regarding support and attorney's fees and costs "A completed Income and Expense Declaration must be filed with the Responsive Declaration to Request for Order following the same requirements specified... in Rule 5.92(b)(2)..."⁵

The California Rules of Court state, "The Income and Expense Declaration (Form FL-150) must be current, as described in Rule 5.260 and include the documents specified in Form FL-150 that demonstrate the party's income."⁶

Even if the narcissistic spouse may possibly refuse to present requested documents, opposing counsel should collect and present all financial paperwork and documents

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to the court. Doing so will not only show that the petitioning client is correctly following the divorce process, but it will assist greatly in moving the divorce proceedings forward.

Those mandatory documents include:

- Schedule of Assets and Debts.
- Income and Expense Declaration.
- Preliminary Declaration of Disclosure.
- Duties of Disclosure.

What happens should the opposing spouse refuse to provide the requested documentation or if they falsify or delay their response to the request? There are several legal sanctions that are available:

- Monetary Sanctions: This could include payment of the full asset that has been concealed or payment of the opposing party's attorney fees.
- Case Sanctions: These prevent the offending spouse from presenting their case to the court or a court order or judgment could be set-aside and voided.

Those are serious ramifications if one does not follow through within the guidelines laid out in the law. It is strongly advised that both attorney and client have a straightforward and open conversation in such a case, and that the court be informed so the petitioning client not face any consequences.

It is best to be prepared as it is very likely that the narcissist spouse will throw up any accusation, lie, or even concoct a false narrative to advance their own agenda.

Since they will attempt to play the hapless victim, it is best that both attorney and client be ready for that strategy. It is strongly advised, difficult as it may be, to pay no heed to their attack. Ignore their jabs, and work together to present an effective case to the court.

Divorcing a Narcissist During a Pandemic

Obviously, divorce can only complicate an already emotionally-charged and volatile marital relationship with a narcissistic spouse.

That situation is further muddled because of the ongoing pressures and demands brought about by the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic.

This added layer of complexity brings up even more unwanted problems, depending, among other factors, on where the narcissist spouse resides and even what kind of job they have.

These times are confusing and difficult to navigate, and for attorneys, it is even more critical to make a client aware that a lot of what needs to be done in finalizing a divorce is a time-consuming work in progress.

Even though it may be difficult, it is important for both parties to try to work with each other. Advise them to work like adults with reason, compromise and patience, and understand that the process will take more time than usual due to current social restrictions and court hearing delays.


While the narcissist spouse may still make things difficult, and if an appeal to reason, compromise, and patience does not work, always communicate to both parties what legal steps can help ensure the legal proceedings move forward as expeditiously as possible.

Navigating the Bumps in the Road

There will be bumps in the road due to the so-called New Normal, but it is critical to practice Old Normal consideration and professionalism, no matter how aggravating the opposing party may be.

At this unique time, the courts expect that both parties will have reached a compromise and a settlement, so it is important to remember where the obligation rests to exhaust all resources before demanding to see the judge in person.

If and when complications arise, advise clients to:

- Lay out a best case scenario by promoting negotiation as a way in which both parties win.
But if children are in the equation, both should agree that the welfare of the children should be cemented as a priority in every situation.
- Maybe it has been hard for your client to convince their narcissist spouse to do anything they have refused to do in the past. In such a case, instruct the client to play to their spouse's emotional needs.
- Advise taking some time to depressurize. In the best of circumstances, divorce takes an emotional toll. If a client cannot come to a compromise with their narcissist spouse, have them try to give themselves some breathing room.
Free time is readily available now, and taking a few days or even a week or two to regroup may help put both parties' circumstances into perspective. 

¹ Family Code §§ 721; 1100).

² <https://www.courts.ca.gov/opinions/documents/B291507.PDF>.

³ *In re Marriage of Brewer & Federici* (2001), 93 Cal.App.4th 1334.

⁴ *In re Marriage of Guitierrez* (2020), 20 Cal.Daily Op. Serv. 4238 2020.

⁵ California Rule of Court 5.92(g) and 5.427(c).

⁶ Id. 5.92(b)(2)(B).



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New Rules for Los Angeles Landlords

By Kurt R. Mattson

The Los Angeles City Council recently voted to give residential tenants the authority to sue their landlords if they violate the coronavirus emergency orders by trying to evict them or garnish their federal stimulus checks for missed rent.

Under the Safer at Home orders, Los Angeles does not allow for “no-fault” evictions to take place, including missing rent payments. Tenants have one year after the orders are lifted to pay back the rent they owe.

The following article detailing the new mandate appeared in the May 2020 issue of *Attorney at Law* magazine. It is reprinted with permission and full attribution.

TENANTS IN THE CITY OF LOS Angeles are to be given the right to sue their landlords if they violate restrictions that the city has imposed on evicting renters during the coronavirus crisis, under a law passed by the Los Angeles City Council.

Plaintiff renters are able to recover up to \$10,000 per violation and up to \$15,000 per violation if the tenant is disabled or a senior. The effort was designed to give renters “a big stick,” Councilman Bob Blumenfield remarked.

Now, landlords are prohibited from evicting tenants who’ve been affected by the coronavirus, but the city council has decided to wait to enact a blanket ban on evictions sought by tenant activists.

New Ordinance to Deter “Bad Conduct” by Landlords

The City Attorney’s Office noted in a report that the new measure would help deter “bad conduct” by landlords. This includes posting eviction notices that can’t be legally enforced during the pandemic, which is an action that might still make renters vacate if they don’t know their rights.

After the vote, Council President Nury Martinez commented in a statement that although good landlords were working to help tenants stay in their units, “I want the bad operators to know, today, the City of Los Angeles is putting you on notice.”

Research from UCLA found that many economically vulnerable



Attorney **Kurt R. Mattson** is president of Arizona-based Union Legal Research. He can be reached at kurt.mattson@gmail.com.

households also face obstacles to education about their housing rights, including lack of internet access and language barriers.

The law also prohibits landlords from threatening renters to give their federal stimulus or other government relief program funds to their landlords. Tenant rights groups have complained about landlords coercing those who can't pay their rents during the pandemic to agree to unusual terms for repayment plans, including giving up money from their economic stimulus checks.

The council approved the measure unanimously 13-0 after accepting an amendment from Councilman John Lee to give landlords 15 days to cure any violations before tenants can sue.

Landlords Argued Against the Measure

A number of landlords phoned in to the meeting before the vote to oppose the measure. They argued that the measure would result in expensive and frivolous litigation.

One landlord said, "I feel our plight has been largely overlooked by this council. We are not faceless corporations. We are individuals and small businesses," the woman said.

In addition, the Apartment Association of Greater Los Angeles contended that the measure would impose excessive penalties and create greater financial hardships for building

owners, even if violations were minor or unintentional.

Council Also Votes to Stop Rent Increases

The Los Angeles City Council also voted to prevent any rent increases in units covered by the Rent Stabilization Ordinance. That law restricts yearly rent increases for older apartments until a year after the end of the emergency period.

Los Angeles Mayor Eric Garcetti had already ordered a halt to rent hikes in such units. However, that measure only lasted 60 days after the end of the emergency.

Some council members had also tried to pass an order a halt to rent increases in other apartments not covered by the Rent Stabilization Ordinance, but this effort was unsuccessful. In fact, the City Attorney's Office cautioned that unless a California law known as Costa-Hawkins was suspended, the city would be on shaky legal ground in doing this in court.

The Los Angeles City Council voted 14 to 1 to support any state efforts to suspend or lift Costa-Hawkins, with Councilman Lee casting the only vote against the move.

Business and landlord groups argued against the effort, claiming that the state's voters said no to an earlier push to repeal the law in the elections. 🗳️

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Report of the San Fernando Valley Bar Association's Nominating Committee Meeting

Initial Meeting Date: May 29, 2020

Time: 12:00 p.m.

Location: Via Zoom videoconference due to the COVID-19 pandemic

Present: Yi Sun Kim, Rosie Soto Cohen, Barry P. Goldberg, David G. Jones, Joy Kraft Miles, Alice A. Salvo, Gary J. Goodstein, Robert A. Kahn, Joanna Sanchez

Past President, Yi Sun Kim, called the meeting to order at approximately 5:03 p.m. Joanna Sanchez was elected to serve as Secretary of the Nominating Committee. The Committee discussed the procedures for the nomination process, relevant Bylaws and the upcoming deadline for applications and voting.

Second Meeting Date: June 8, 2020

Time: 5:00 p.m.

Location: Via Zoom videoconference due to the COVID-19 pandemic

Present: Yi Sun Kim, Rosie Soto Cohen, Barry P. Goldberg, David G. Jones, Joy Kraft Miles, Alice A. Salvo, Gary J. Goodstein, Robert A. Kahn, Joanna Sanchez

Past President, Yi Sun Kim, called the meeting to order at approximately 5:05 p.m. After discussion, the Committee nominated the following as officers:

Heather Glick-Atalla, Treasurer
Matthew A. Breddan, Secretary
Christopher P. Warne, President-Elect
David G. Jones, President (automatic)

The following incumbent Trustees who desired to be nominated to run again (and all of whom either re-submitted applications or submitted addendums to their prior applications) were approved by unanimous vote:

Michael L. Cohen	Samuel R.W. Price
Kyle M. Ellis	Steven M. Sepassi
Amanda Marie Moghaddam	Benjamin E. Soffer

The Committee considered nine new applicants. The Committee discussed that the Bylaws require active membership in the Bar for at least one year before serving as Trustee, which disqualified some applicants. The Committee also considered various matters, among them, the content of the applications, the past participation and involvement in the Bar and its activities, good standing with the Bar, law firm membership, experience as attorneys, experience with other bar associations, likelihood of active participation as a Trustee, area of practice, geographic location, and possibilities of attracting sponsorships. The Committee nominated the following six members for Trustee by unanimous vote:

Anthony Ellis	Erin Prutow
Alex J. Hemmelgarn	Jessica Rosen
Erin Joyce	Pravin Singh

The members that were not nominated will be notified and asked to become more involved with the Bar.

The Committee also discussed the two associate member applicants, but did not cast a vote, as pursuant to the Bylaws, the associate member Trustee shall be appointed by the President.

The meeting adjourned at 6:15 p.m.

Joanna Sanchez
Nominating Committee Secretary

Yi Sun Kim
Nominating Committee Chair

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THE YEAR 2020 HAS BEEN anything but uneventful—a year that has brought sickness and loss, but has also brought unity and an unparalleled new perspective on a new way of life.

It is almost surreal to live through an event that will more than likely be taught in history classes years from now—an event that can only be compared to past-told stories and tales.

But, undeterred by all of the challenges, it is fascinating to witness how individuals of many different backgrounds and professions have adapted to a new and modified work style.

Like virtually every undertaking, the operations at the SFVBA Attorney Referral Service (ARS) was impacted by COVID-19 and forced to restructure its operations to function remotely.

That directive was accomplished quickly and efficiently and with a commitment to continue seamless service to both our panel members and the public.

This could not have been accomplished without the leadership of the San Fernando Valley Bar Association and the cooperation of each and every one of the attorneys on the ARS panel who work closely with our staff to provide excellent legal assistance to the public as we maneuvered through this new norm.

Despite our successes, challenges such as a downturn in the economy, countless business closures, and precautionary social health measures with mandatory compliance continue to impact how we coordinate in-

person consultations with attorneys. Consultations successfully transformed into Zoom video events or telephone conference calls. But, COVID-19 has impacted the courts leaving a sense of uncertainty for attorneys, self-representing clients, and sometimes even ourselves.

Social distancing 'six-feet' mandates continue to create challenges for business, but also opportunities to model contingencies. ARS, before COVID-19, successfully accommodated several employees in a collaborative workspace. Post COVID-19, the ARS continues to serve the public, each staff member working remotely using technology to collaborate and maintain confidentiality.

With the closure of the courts and restrictions, many clients seeking help with legal forms, online filing of court documents, and other questions are being directed to ARS.

One of the most critical requests from the public is information about when it would be most efficient to file a claim or lawsuit with the court.

But, through it all, over the past several months, the ARS has maintained open communication with and provided support to its select panel of attorneys, each of whom has not only provided professional legal assistance to our clients, but weathered the storm with us from the start.

With the guidance of our board members, we have been able to successfully continue to render services to those seeking legal assistance throughout Los Angeles and Ventura counties, and to redirect callers to the appropriate resources assembled by our Associate Director of Public Services, Miguel Villatoro.

While we do not know exactly what the future holds—besides face masks turning into a required fashion accessory and workstations separated by six feet—we are certain that with continued strong leadership and an outstanding panel of dedicated panel members, the SFVBA Attorney Referral Service can come out on top of any situation! 🏠

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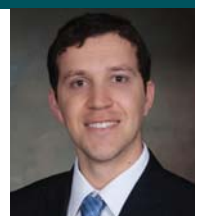
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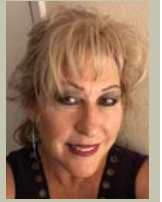
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Why Participate in the VCLF?

TERRI PECKINPAUGH-AGNEW
Co-President



tpeckinpaugh1@hotmail.com

MANY OF MY FRIENDS AND COLLEAGUES have asked me: “Why would a non-lawyer join the Valley Community Legal Foundation?”

I have lived in the San Fernando Valley my entire teenage and adult life. Since the community has offered me so many opportunities for personal and business growth, I wanted to find a way to be a more active member of the community. I wanted to find a way to give back, as one of my passions is trying to make life a better place for all. I wanted to create better opportunities for the less fortunate.

My dream was to set forth a legacy in the Valley community.

After my husband’s passing, my desire and aspirations were to give back through our business, Muddy’s BBQ & Catering, and build on his legacy by making our barbeque restaurant an even bigger success.

Although my passion is cooking and Muddy’s BBQ was giving back to our community, I still wanted to contribute more and wanted to be part of a gateway in which to grow my dream of helping our Valley neighbors by helping others who shared the same vision.

Seven years ago, I was approached by the Valley Community Legal Foundation and asked if I would like to join the organization. I was thus presented with the perfect platform on which I could build that dream.

VCLF is made up of successful and committed business people and strong professionals contributing their time and efforts to bettering our community through worthy charitable programs and events.

As a successful businesswoman myself working endless hours over 40 continued years as an insurance broker, then taking over my husband’s food business, and raising two sons on my own, I knew that if I took that focused commitment and energy and focused it

somewhere that could make a difference in our community, I could grow my platform of helping others to surmount their own challenges and achieve their own goals.

I found by joining VCLF, I did not have to be an attorney or judge—as are most members of the board—only that I would commit to actively participate in some of the wonderful charitable programs that the organization has to offer.

Not only have I been able to give back by my participation and strengthen my own dream platform, I have been able to make some wonderful connections with others who also care about having our Valley community grow and flourish.

I am fortunately able to donate my time and efforts and invest in the causes that make sense for the Valley community that has given me so much!

Educational programs have been created for our local high schools and colleges in which judges and attorneys give generously and freely of their time and energy to teach our youth about the law and its application.

The Blanket the Homeless program continues to serve struggling Valley families and individuals during the holiday season, while scholarships are offered to further the educational goals of selected Valley youths and grants are presented to those organizations that give funds directly to alleviate the often desperate needs of both individuals and families.

I have never had to overcome the feeling of being an outsider within VCLF. I was welcomed with open arms from the beginning and given all the support I have needed to give back to our community.

VCLF gladly welcomes individuals and professionals in any line of work. If you want to volunteer your time to a worthy organization that is genuinely community-minded, the VCLF is it! If you can’t donate time, please consider donating to VCLF to support our worthy charity causes. 🏠

ABOUT THE VCLF OF THE SFVBA

The Valley Community Legal Foundation is the charitable arm of the San Fernando Valley Bar Association, with the mission to support the legal needs of the Valley’s youth, victims of domestic violence, and veterans. The Foundation also provides scholarships to qualified students pursuing legal careers and relies on donations to fund its work. To donate to the Valley Community Legal Foundation or learn more about its work, visit www.thevclf.org.

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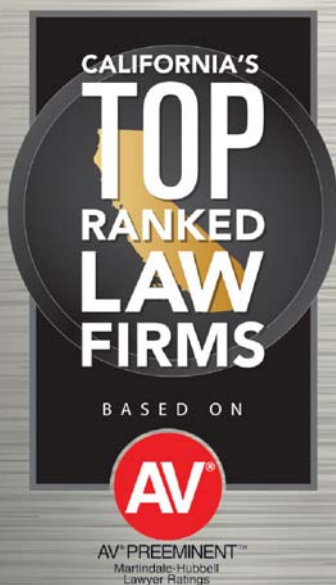
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