

Letter to P.I. Plaintiff Firm Administrators

Do your eyes glaze over at the mention of time sheets, budgets, monthly billings and collection problems? Mine too. The good news is that the Association of Legal Administrators does provide something for those in a plaintiff firm. While we have some unique problems, we also share many of the same concerns as those working in a corporate law department or defense firm. At the local level, monthly Chapter meetings offer guest speakers on topics that are of interest to every type of firm – personnel issues, technology, stress & time management, facilities issues, vendor relations, and the list goes on. In addition, there are great networking opportunities which can provide good friends, helpful advice and smooth transactions between opposing firms. There is room for the P.I. firm administrator to become an active voice on the chapter level and it is up to those of us who fall within this arena to get more involved.

In addition to the chapter activities, ALA provides another venue to help us with the "nitty gritty" of what plaintiff firms do on a daily basis — the Personal Injury Plaintiff Idea Exchange. PI administrators meet on the day before the annual conference to discuss such topics as mass torts – why and why not get involved; planning for capital expenditures without a budget; etc. Although there is a preliminary agenda for the Idea Exchange, the group is free to discuss any topic of interest that is presented. This flexibility allows attention to be given to immediate problems and issues that are more timely in nature.

Then, a mid-year Workshop is hosted by PALMS (Plaintiff Administrators' Legal Management Solutions) and offers a concentrated 2-day session for PI managers. The workshop focuses on the dilemmas of managing a contingency-based practice and attendees work together to develop the agenda for each meeting.

I have been fortunate enough to be a part of this subsection of ALA for several years now and always come away thoroughly rejuvenated. Representatives from firms of all sizes located throughout the country discuss how they operate their firms. Managing cash flow (without monthly billings or budgets), marketing techniques (firm brochures, newsletters, handling public relations), insurance, human resources, and computer technology (with an emphasis on P.I. specific software) are all reviewed. Their problems are my problems, and the solutions offered are helpful because they are possible to implement in my environment.

While the networking opportunities available through our local chapter and the benefits derived from these organizations is great, it is an added pleasure to meet with a group whose concerns so closely match your own. I strongly encourage others to make these plaintiff-specific events an integral part of their ongoing professional development.

Contact:

Johnna S. Ferguson
Legal Administrator
Gray, Ritter & Graham, P.C.
314-241-5620
jferguson@grgpc.com
June, 2002