

BY TIFFANY E. WOELFEL

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## Developing as a Lawyer and a Leader: State Bar Opportunities for Young Lawyers

Serving on the Young Lawyers Division (YLD) board has given me a wealth of leadership opportunities that make me a better lawyer. Here are a few of the unexpected ways the YLD has made me a better leader and lawyer.

The transition from being a law school student to a lawyer is hard. While they try, law schools can't fully prepare a student for the transition. Yet, after an hour-long swearing-in ceremony, we all transform from students to lawyers. While we may not feel any different, we are certainly viewed differently – both in the eyes of the law and in the eyes of the public.

Being a lawyer carries an implicit expectation of leadership, which can manifest in a variety of ways. We serve as leaders when we enter courtrooms and represent our clients or the state. We serve as leaders when we interact with clients, whether as a solo practitioner, a young associate, or even doing pro bono work, as clients look to us for guidance.

Yet, young lawyers don't always feel prepared to step into leadership roles.

Fortunately, my mentor at Amundsen Davis encouraged me to get involved with the State Bar of Wisconsin's Young Lawyers Division (YLD) and its board of directors as a great way to meet other attorneys (which is undoubtedly true). I saw it as a low-risk opportunity to get involved. After all, the board consists of young lawyers in a similar position to me.

What I didn't expect was the wealth of leadership opportunities that serving on the YLD board has granted me and how they make me a better lawyer. Here are a few of the unexpected ways the YLD has made me a better leader and lawyer:

**Project Management:** By planning events for our members, like our Young Lawyers Conference (YLC), I learned project management, which is a skill I use when managing a case.

**Adaptability:** I worked on my adaptability when the COVID-19 pandemic forced the YLC to shift. The law is rapidly changing, and adaptability is key.

**Advocacy:** On the board, I was able to discuss and debate topics with my peers. I garnered opportunities to develop my advocacy skills in presenting and defending my ideas.

**Consensus-Building:** As part of a board, I learned the importance of building a consensus and working with other people for a solution agreeable to all, which is like finding settlement grounds with opposing counsel.

**Promotion:** I've learned to promote the YLD and the State Bar, especially while networking. This has made me more comfortable promoting myself and my practice.

**Leadership Style:** Lastly, I've had the opportunity to observe different leaders and leadership styles. This helped me figure out styles I liked and responded well to and those I disliked.

These lessons have helped develop and shape my time as the YLD president and helped me become a better lawyer and leader in my firm and community. And, while I've become an older young lawyer, and I'll eventually age out of the YLD, I know that the State Bar of Wisconsin will continue to provide opportunities for me to grow and develop as a lawyer and a leader. **WL**