

## Collateral Blessings

# DRI for Life: It's Not Just Professional, It's Personal

By Laura E. Proctor, DRI President



I am a quote person. When I write or speak I like to find a famous quote by someone on the topic I am discussing to help me make a point. So, true to form, when I began to write this column, I started looking for a quote to inspire me. I came across this one. “Your network is your networth.” The quote is attributed to an article written by a marketing expert, Porter Gale. While I typically don’t quote from these kinds of articles, this one intrigued me so I looked up the article and found this sentence. “I believe your social capital, or your ability to build a network of authentic personal and professional relationships, not your financial capital, is the most important asset in your portfolio.” This sentence aptly describes one of the important values of DRI and what we mean by DRI for Life.

DRI for Life was born out of a vision from Immediate Past President John Parker Sweeney, who embraced the belief that DRI should be the primary professional relationship of the defense lawyer. The original concept was called Cradle to Grave, and its purpose was to provide resources and support to our members over the course of their entire careers, from young lawyers all the way through to senior status. DRI would be there to help educate, train, and support its members in both good times and bad.

DRI for Life is successful because it relies on DRI’s core values and strengths. First is its dedication to DRI’s mission—to educate and train. By providing world class educational programming, scholarly and practical written material, and leadership opportunities through its committees and SLDO programs, DRI is supporting its members in their career development.

But this technical training is only one portion of the “networth” that DRI and DRI for Life bring to its members. The increased networth comes from the key relationships, both personal and professional, that you build with other DRI members. These relationships manifest themselves in many ways. It can be in the form of a mentor who takes you under his or her wing and helps you navigate the difficult turns in your career. The relationship might be the respect and trust you build working side by side with a fellow committee member on a project that gives you the confidence to recommend that person to a client as local counsel—and vice versa. Maybe you need a conference room or information about a judge in

another state, and you turn to the representative from that state who you met at the DRI Leadership Conference for help. These are all important professional relationships fostered through DRI to help its members be successful in building and sustaining their practices.

But DRI is not just professional, it is also personal. The relationship bonds developed through membership in DRI are deep and wide. How many of your DRI friends and colleagues have been there to help you and your family celebrate birthdays, weddings, or the births of your children and grandchildren? How many have reached out to help during a natural disaster, personal conflict, or loss of a loved one? These personal bonds are essential to our wellbeing, happiness, and success, both as lawyers and as human beings. People talk about collateral damage of a decision; I refer to these relationships as collateral blessings of the decision to be an active member of DRI.

The importance of these relationships to our practice and our success cannot be ignored. It’s what makes practicing law truly a profession and not just a job. It’s no wonder that our recent membership survey listed “networking” as one of the top benefits they look for DRI to provide. Personally, I don’t care for the term “networking.” I prefer to refer to it as relationship building. But whatever you call it, DRI provides the tools and the place where these relationships can begin and develop over time, establishing the foundation and the support you need for a healthy and successful career. I know this has been the case for me. Without the support of the many peers, mentors, and friends whom I have met through my involvement in DRI, my life and my career would be very different today.

To capture the importance of these relationships, one of my goals for this year was to create a place where these key relationships could be acknowledged, celebrated, and shared with your fellow DRI members. A place where people can pay tribute to the DRI members who have helped them, inspired them, and guided them along the way. I am happy to report that the place now exists within the DRI Foundation.

Any individual or entity can establish an online memorial or tribute honoring a current or past DRI member, or a relative of a current or past DRI member.

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Each memorial and tribute will have its own dedicated webpage located on the DRI website at [dri.org](http://dri.org). A DRI Tribute allows individuals or entities to recognize a living DRI member. The member can be recognized for accomplishments, an anniversary, or any other celebratory event. A DRI Memorial enables individuals or entities to honor and remember a deceased DRI member.

Making a contribution to the DRI Foundation, creating a tribute or memorial to a DRI member, or making a contribution to an already existing memorial or tribute is easy. Just click “Donate” beside your log in on the DRI website and follow the instructions, or contact DRI Customer Service at (312) 795-1101.

To launch this initiative, I have set up memorials in memory of two of my mentors and former presidents of DRI who left us too soon: Donald Pierce, from Mobile, Alabama, and Steve Morrison from Columbia, South Carolina. In addition, I have established a tribute in honor of a truly great mentor to me and to many, this year’s DRI Louis B. Potter Lifetime Professional Service Award winner and former DRI president, John H. Martin of Dallas, Texas.

DRI for Life—the legacy lives on. 