

## Supporting and Enriching the Lives of All Members

**DRI for Life**

By John Parker Sweeney, Brett A. Ross, and Susan E. Gunter



**R**ecently Tim Kolly, DRI's Director of Public Policy, sat down for a conversation with John Parker Sweeney, Brett A. Ross, and Susan E. Gunter about DRI's extraordinary "DRI for Life" initiative. Sweeney is a past president of DRI (2014–2015); Ross is chair and Gunter vice chair of the DRI for Life Committee.

**The Vision**

**Kolly:** Every professional organization establishes for itself a set of defining traits and core values that drive its mission. And, while not immutable, they cannot be changed without altering the character of the organization. If you had to explain the essence of DRI, John, what would you tell people?

**Sweeney:** DRI is increasingly becoming the primary enduring professional relationship of the defense lawyer by broadly catering to all of his or her critical needs over the course of the lawyer's career. DRI is an abiding resource throughout a defense lawyer's career to provide necessary support in good times and in bad; to provide a helping hand to every member defense lawyer, as well as an opportunity for them to give back to DRI and the community at large.

**Kolly:** So, it's beyond the professional and collegial. It's personal.

**Sweeney:** It's personal. Three years ago, in 2013, DRI launched its DRI for Life initiative to ensure that "I am a DRI Lawyer" would evoke a sense of belonging to an organization of like-minded individuals who care about you and your wellbeing and provide numerous programs to support, nurture, and develop the defense lawyer, where defense law firms and corporate employers, large and small, often do not.

**Kolly:** And how do you determine what those needs are?

**Sweeney:** In 2014, our most comprehensive survey of our members' needs and wants both confirmed the desire for a broader offering of programs to support the lives of DRI members, but also gave us very specific guidance on the members' priorities. Today, the concept of DRI for Life is evolving rapidly, just as the legal environment for its members is evolving rapidly. To flourish in these challenging times, DRI is innovating, building new lines of value for its members upon the solid foundation of DRI's successful traditional programming. DRI for Life now provides a variety of offerings to enrich the lives of all DRI members. The DRI for Life Committee, under chair Brett Ross and vice chair Susan Gunter, has been working diligently on making these programs a reality for our members.

**Current Initiatives of the DRI for Life Committee  
DRI for Life Online Resource Centers**

**Kolly:** Okay, Brett, that's the vision. How does your committee determine what sort of actions will help you realize that vision?

**Ross:** DRI for Life has developed two pages for its upcoming webpage at [www.dri.org](http://www.dri.org), specifically to respond to members' request for more resources and information on work-life balance and wellness issues. We felt they could benefit from a curated and current list of online articles. Our **DRI Work Life Balance Resource Center** gives members access to expert, authoritative, and vetted articles online on topics for lawyers, such as how to balance work and home life as a professional, how lawyers can effectively manage their time, how lawyers can develop healthy work habits.

The WLBRC is basically an online bibliography with links to articles of interest to DRI members dealing with health and wellness issues. Our **Substance Abuse and Mental Health Resource Center** is already featured on DRI's main webpage. It provides online and telephone contact information to services that help lawyers, friends, and family with problems related to their mental health, substance abuse, or addiction.

**SOLACE Program in DRI**

**Kolly:** Susan, I know that some professions have developed national programs that have proved successful and have been widely adopted within the profession. Have you found any "off-the-rack" programs, as it were, for the legal community that are attractive to the DRI for Life Committee?

**Gunter:** Yes, there is a program called SOLACE, which stands for "Support of Lawyers/Legal Personnel All Concern Encouraged." This is a program started by lawyers to help lawyers and legal personnel and their families in times of crisis. Many DRI members will be familiar with SOLACE, which is already operational in almost half of America's state bar associations. We wanted to make this service formally available to DRI members as well. We know from past experience that DRI members want to help their colleagues through difficult times, with help ranging from offering office space, secretarial help, and air miles, to drives to medical appointments. SOLACE is an informal email system that allows us to get the word out about the needs of lawyers suffering from a

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personal tragedy, natural disaster, or similar problem to our members who can provide short-term, non-monetary help. This program will enable the DRI community to reach out in a small but meaningful and compassionate way to our members who experience catastrophic illness, injury, or other troubling personal circumstances. Information and access to DRI's SOLACE chapter soon will be available with a link on [dri.org](http://dri.org).

### **DRI for Life and DRI Seminars**

**Kolly:** And how do you get people to the program?

**Ross:** Well, in a very real sense, the program comes to them. DRI for Life has developed a few tools for the substantive committees of our organization to use to help incorporate wellness topics and activities into their seminars and events. Many of us will remember the Blue Zone topic from DRI's Annual Meeting in San Francisco when Dan Buettner introduced the few regions in the world where the people live measurably longer lives. Several of DRI's seminars already feature these kinds of presentations and they are well-received by attendees.

DRI for Life has specific initiatives to bring this kind of content to our programming. The **Work Life Balance Speakers Resource Group** works to identify topics and speakers for work life balance and wellness presentations. This list of speakers, being compiled with the help of the Liaisons to our committee, can be used in program development. Similarly, the **Blue Zone Activities** database plans to list a variety of activities that can be officially incorporated into DRI social events. For example, DRI's Women in the Law Committee held an organized hike up Camelback Mountain in Arizona (which Susan participated in) as a part of their 2016 seminar. Many committees have indicated a desire to incorporate a similar activity to get attendees out of the banquet hall to engage in networking on a more physically active basis.

**Gunter:** DRI for Life has also been working on a proposal, which if adopted, would provide an informal **Activities Exchange** that can connect DRI seminar attendees with others who might like to meet up for a run, a museum tour, a yoga class, a golf trip, or

other such activity during uncommitted time during, before, or after DRI Seminars.

### **DRI for Life Career Path**

**Kolly:** Other than the shared commonality of being attorneys, this really isn't just one big, homogeneous group, is it? Among 22,000 members, the challenges, interests, and needs have to be very different among senior partners, managing partners, new associates, and so on. That eliminates "one size fits all" programming.

**Ross:** Exactly. The mandate of DRI for Life is to provide resources to DRI members on wellness and professional development. The information a lawyer needs on these topics at one career point isn't the same as it is ten years later. Over the last two years, we have developed a white paper entitled *Career Path* that will serve as a resource document for topics of interest tailored to lawyers' seniority, which can be used by all of DRI to help inform programming, publications, and initiatives.

Initially under the leadership of Chris Kenney, this group set out to provide a framework for educational offerings tailored to where a lawyer is in his or her own career. For young lawyers, emerging partners, and senior partners, the *Career Path* hopes to focus on DRI member's education needs and interests—not for substantive law education—but rather for professional and personal development. We recognize that at each stage of our careers, these needs and interests are different. DRI members have asked for more information on work-life balance and managing the demands of a busy practice with a fulfilling personal life. The *Career Path* white paper starts the DRI discussion about targeting professional development and wellness resources to the "age and stage" of DRI members. It contains ideas for new programming and connects existing DRI resources to the right time period in a litigator's career.

### **DRI's Barristers Task Force**

**Kolly:** Susan, tell me about the Barristers Task Force. The term sounds more than a little Canadian.

**Gunter:** Through the evolution of the *Career Path* white paper, DRI for Life learned that the education and professional training needs of senior lawyers deserved a clearer

focus. Senior lawyers make up a substantial percentage of DRI's membership. The DRI Executive Committee has established a task force to look at how these members can get more out of DRI. The Barristers Task Force will be working in the coming months to make recommendations on what offerings senior attorneys might like to see.

### **DRI for Life Podcast Series, Tool Kit**

**Kolly:** And I am betting that there are more initiatives in the works.

**Gunter:** Much more. Using the foundation of the *Career Path*, DRI for Life hopes to develop on-demand podcast educational programming on issues of wellness, work-life balance, and substance abuse prevention, as well as professional development programming, suited to the age and stage of our members. This member benefit will be delivered in the easiest way possible—the podcast—to be sure they can be viewed in the most convenient way for members.

One of the most interesting projects our committee is working on is to create a Tool Kit for health and wellness and work-life balance issues for DRI members. Spearheaded by Frank Ramos, we hope this publication will be the joint effort of our DRI for Life committee in consultation with DRI's substantive law and affinity committees, along with outside professionals and experts. It will follow the outline of the *Career Path* in terms of suitability of its articles for the appropriate "age and stage" of our DRI members.

### **DRI Substantive Law Committee Input to DRI for Life**

**Sweeney:** Let me emphasize one other point. Over the last year, DRI for Life has grown in size and the scope of its endeavors. We are ready to seek input from DRI's well-established substantive law committees. Each of DRI's 29 substantive law committees will appoint a liaison to DRI for Life. We believe this will help us to communicate with the SLCs and weave the DRIFL values into the larger DRI culture. We are excited about growing our committee and about getting more people involved. We want to nurture careers, but we also want to improve lives.

**Gunter:** It's personal.

**Sweeney:** It's personal.

