

# DRI Membership: It's Personal

By Lana A. Olson

I admit it: DRI didn't start out as "personal" for me. I attended my first DRI seminar when I was 26 years old. I'd been practicing law for three months, and I went to that first seminar because I needed to learn toxic tort law fast. I was young, I was clueless, and I certainly wasn't thinking about developing relationships, friendships, or anything long-term. I was just trying not to get fired. So when that DRI brochure came across my desk, my main concern was self-preservation.

But then a funny and surprising thing happened when I got to the seminar. At the very first reception, the evening before the seminar started (to which I arrived early because—I was 26 and there were free drinks), I met some folks who ended up becoming my friends, mentors, and idols. Several of those people still recall (and like to remind me, *e.g.*, John Parker Sweeney) how I "be-bopped" into the seminar and before it was over had volunteered to help with whatever they would let me do for the next one. I jumped in head-first, not because of experience, a grand plan to become a director on the DRI Board, or for any reason other than I really, really liked the people. It quickly became personal for me. And even though it wasn't the personal part of DRI that initially drew me in, it most certainly was the personal part that made me want to stay.

Seventeen years later, it's the personal side of DRI that has given me such great reward. The relationships that I've built through this organization have made me a better lawyer and a happier person. My best friends are DRI members. Many of my clients are DRI members. Some of my most significant life events are directly linked to DRI. I've been able to contribute to the organization in a way that, I hope, will make it a little bit bet-

ter than when I found it. Without DRI in my life, I am certain that I would not have had the level of career or personal satisfaction that I have enjoyed since that first seminar so many years ago.

My experience is not unique, for sure. In fact, personal well-being has always been a benefit of involvement in DRI, but there is an even greater focus on it now within the organization. The desire to ensure every member's personal and professional success has fueled the creation of new projects designed to focus on the health, well-being, and personal satisfaction of DRI members. For example, DRI For Life, which was recently launched, seeks to go beyond the "work" of being a lawyer and focus on the needs of DRI members in all areas of their lives. Similarly, the DRI Foundation provides opportunities for members to make a difference in the lives of others, whether through public service events, donations, or other avenues.

Now that I'm on the other end of the spectrum and have been involved in DRI for a long time, when people ask me why I love it so much, it's not hard for me to explain. For me, DRI provides the antidote to the high-pressure, stressful world we live in as lawyers. It's how I know I've always got the most up-to-date legal knowledge and education at my fingertips. It's where I can look for help in any state in the country, any time of the day, any day of the week. It's the source of many of my referrals and it is where I refer my clients. Being a lawyer is hard. Having DRI in your corner makes the "hard" part a whole lot easier, more enjoyable, and more personally rewarding.

So I encourage you to make DRI personal for you as well. Go to a seminar. Get involved in a committee. Make the contacts. Build the relationships. Become a happier lawyer. After all, life is too short to just bill by the hour. **FD**



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