

COLUMBUS CHAPTER NEWS

AUGUST 2026



*Columbus Chapter President
Julie Bryan*

President's Message

What If I Pick Wrong?

My daughter is headed into her senior year of high school, which has meant a summer full of college tours. Somewhere between our third and fourth stop, I watched the excitement start to wear off. She was suddenly walking into rooms full

of people she had never met, trying to picture herself in a place that felt completely unfamiliar. She has spent her entire life in the same school district and has had many of the same friends since kindergarten, so watching her hit that wall of uncertainty was hard, mostly because I could not fix it. On the drive to the fourth campus, she looked over at me and asked, "What if I pick wrong?"

I wish I could tell you I knew exactly what to say. I did not. In fact, I am pretty sure I just started talking, hoping something helpful would come out. I told her that sometimes we spend so much energy trying to make the perfect decision that we forget there probably is not one. We talked about trying new things, about not always choosing what feels comfortable, and about how growth rarely starts with confidence. Somewhere in the middle of that conversation, I realized I was not just talking to her anymore...I was talking to myself.

The last couple of years have asked more of me than I ever expected. I took on the presidency of this Chapter, spent 80% of 2025 traveling to help open new offices and build relationships with people I had never met before, and then left the firm I had been with for years to start over somewhere completely new and way out of my comfort zone. Looking back, I would not change any of it, though there were plenty of moments when I questioned myself, days I drove home wondering if I was really cut out for everything I had taken on. In hindsight, it all seems brave. Living it did not feel brave at all.

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UPCOMING EVENTS:

05-August-5:00-6:00pm

New Member Happy Hour

18—August—11:45am

Monthly Chapter Meeting

Topic—Lead, Organize, Thrive: Building Systems for Success

Speaker—Kelly Atkinson

Location—Benesch

19-August—4:00pm

Ronald McDonald House

Volunteer

HR professionals in the legal industry have a delicate balance to strike when dealing with toxic employees. Here are five tips to help with managing toxic employees and related complaints.

EDITORIAL POLICY

The *Columbus Chapter News* is published monthly for the education and benefit of legal administrators. It is not published for the purpose of rendering legal, accounting, or other professional services or advice. Nothing contained in this newsletter should be construed as legal, accounting, or other professional services or advice. Reprint of articles contained in this newsletter requires the written permission of the Editor of the *Columbus Chapter News*.

ALA MISSION STATEMENT

ALA is the premier professional association connecting leaders and managers within the legal industry. We provide extensive professional development, collaborative peer communities, strategic operational solutions, and business partner connections empowering our members to lead the business of law.

COLUMBUS CHAPTER, ALA MISSION STATEMENT

The mission of the Columbus Chapter Association of Legal Administrators is to provide a local forum of professional and educational enrichment to improve the quality of management in law firms and other legal services organizations. Our chapter is committed to fostering a diverse and inclusive professional environment where we value and strive to develop our members of all backgrounds and experiences. We firmly believe that having varied perspectives and collaboration among members generates more incisive and deeper insights that better serve our chapter and our increasingly diverse world. We are also committed to giving our time and talent to the community in order to achieve a prosperous society.



How to Manage Toxic Employees So They Don't Manage You



Kelly F. Zimmerman

*Former Managing Editor
of Legal Management*

HR professionals in the legal industry have a delicate balance to strike when dealing with toxic employees. Here are five tips to help with managing toxic employees and related complaints.

Chances are, you've worked with a toxic employee at some point in your career. You know the type: the colleague who dismisses others' ideas, stirs up gossip or shifts blame to other employees when mistakes are made. Sometimes the toxic behavior is subtle and sometimes it's blatant, but the effect is always the same: declines in morale and productivity, potential liability issues and often, a loss of talent.

If this situation sounds familiar, that's probably because it is.

A [**2025 report by iHire on toxic workplace trends**](#) said three-quarters of employees have experienced a toxic workplace, and most employees aren't afraid to move on from these types of environments. In fact, more than half of surveyed employees reported quitting a job because of a toxic workplace, the report said.

No matter whether you've worked with an employee who demonstrated one or several toxic traits, one thing remains consistent: Toxic employees are bad for business. Left unchecked, they can derail teamwork, drive away talent and erode a company's culture from the inside out.

Keep reading for five tips on how to deal with toxic employees in the workplace.

1. Know the Differences Between a Toxic Employee versus a Scapegoat

Before you even start dealing with a toxic employee, it's important to understand the characteristics of one. If you do a quick Google search, you'll find handfuls of different blogs each touting their own definition, but in a nutshell, they all say the same thing: A toxic employee is someone who persistently acts in a way that hurts the company, their peers or even clients without having to take accountability for their actions.

Continued on page 15

Build a Law Firm That Runs Smarter.



Leading a law firm shouldn't feel like constant triage.

If you're buried in manual processes, chasing down details, or relying on outdated systems that slow your team down, it's time to rethink how your firm runs.



**Better systems. Better habits.
Better results.**

Let's talk about what's next.



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The Columbus Chapter, Association of Legal Administrators, appreciates the support of our Business Partners. Business Partners are Vital to Our Success. Visit our Business Partner page on the Columbus Chapter website: <https://alacolumbus.org>.

CALENDAR OF EVENTS

August 2026

Sun	Mo	Tue	We	Thu	Fri	Sat
						1
2	3	4	5	6	7	8
9	10	11	12	13	14	15
16	17	18	19	20	21	22
23	24	25	26	27	28	29
30	31					

05—August—5pm
New Member Happy Hour

18—August—11:45am
Monthly Chapter Meeting
Topic—Lead, Organize, Thrive: Building Systems for Success
Location—Benesch

19-August—4:00pm
Ronald McDonald House
Volunteer

25—Tuesday—12:00pm
Board Meeting
Location—TBD

ALA Events:
04—Tuesday—Law Firm Accounting (every Tuesday until August 11th)

05-Wednesday—ALA's Legal Operations Bootcamp for Administrative Professionals (every Wednesday until August 26th)

09—Thursday—Human Resources (Every Thursday until August 13th)

27—Thursday—HR2: Human Resources: You've Really Got this (every Thursday until Oct 1st)

September 2026

Sun	Mo	Tue	We	Thu	Fri	Sat
		1	2	3	4	5
6	7	8	9	10	11	12
13	14	15	16	17	18	19
20	21	22	23	24	25	26
27	28	29	30			

15—Tuesday—11:45am
Monthly Chapter Meeting
Topic—The Legal Recruiting Landscape: Understanding Gen Z Law Students and What Associates Seek in a Law Firm – Beth Watkins, Assistant Dean of Career Development and Phil Wille, Career Advisor from OSU/Mortiz College of Law
Location—Roetzel & Andress

29—Tuesday—12:00pm
Board Meeting
Location—TBD

ALA Events:
03—Thursday—HR2: Human Resources: You've Really Got this (every Thursday until Oct 1st)

04-Friday—Fall CLM Application Deadline

08-Tuesday—FM2: Law Firm Accounting (every Tuesday until October 13th)

October 2026

Sun	Mo	Tue	We	Thu	Fri	Sat
				1	2	3
4	5	6	7	8	9	10
11	12	13	14	15	16	17
18	19	20	21	22	23	24
25	26	27	28	29	30	31

20—Tuesday—12:00pm
Board Meeting
Location—TBD

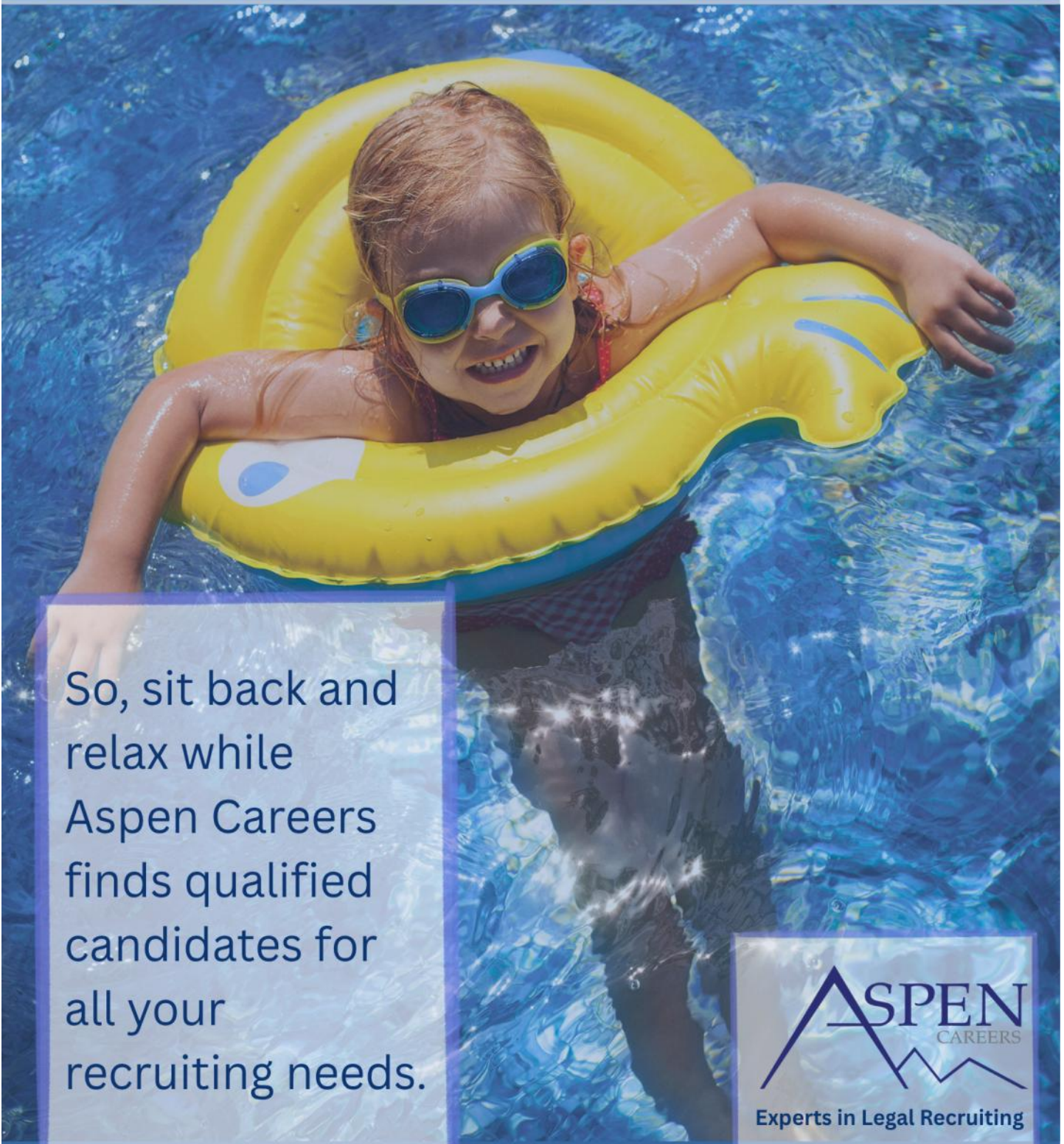
27—Tuesday—02:00pm
Annual Education Seminar
Business Partner Expo
Topic: Practical AI Playbooks for Law Firm Business Professionals
Speaker: Spencer X. Smith
Location: The Athletic Club
136 East Broad Street

ALA Events:
03—Thursday—HR2: Human Resources: You've Really Got this (every Thursday until Oct 1st)

08-Tuesday—FM2: Law Firm Accounting (every Tuesday until October 13th)

23-24 - Fri—Sat—LegalLeaders: ALA's Executive Leadership Summit

National Relaxation Day is August 15th



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relax while
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DEI CORNER

DEIA is not a one-time initiative — it is (or should be) a daily practice.

In August, as schools start again, routines pick back up, and calendars fill, it is a good time to reset with intention: invite the quieter voice into the conversation, question assumptions, and make room for different working styles and perspectives. Small, consistent actions, done with respect and follow-through, are what turn inclusion into belonging.

President's message, continued from page 1

It mostly felt like walking through the door anyway, even when I would rather have stayed where things felt familiar.

I used to think confidence came first and then you did the hard thing. For me, it has been exactly the opposite. You do the hard thing, you survive it, and then one day you realize the confidence showed up somewhere along the way without you even noticing.

That is probably what I hope my daughter remembers most. I am not going to promise her she will make the perfect choice, because life does not work that way. What I can promise her is that some of the best things in my own life started with uncertainty, that they started with saying “yes” before I felt completely ready...and maybe that is true for more of us than we would like to admit. As members of ALA, we have all had those moments, a new job, a promotion, speaking in front of a room, raising your hand to volunteer, walking into an event where you do not know anyone. None of it feels comfortable in the moment, but that is usually where the growth happens!

Which brings me to our August New Member Happy Hour! On **Wednesday, August 5, from 5:00 to 6:30 p.m.**, we will be gathering at Buckeye Bourbon House to welcome the newest members of our chapter. If you have been thinking about coming to an event but have not quite made it yet, maybe this is your sign. You never know what one conversation, one introduction, or one new connection might lead to. I hope to see you there!!

“And the day came when the risk to remain tight in a bud was more painful than the risk it took to blossom.”- Anais Nin

-Julie Bryan

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Member Spotlight

Meet Columbus Chapter Member

Debbie Durbin

Manager of Office Administration

Ice Miller LLP

What is your current job title and major responsibilities?

I am the Manager of Office Administration. I work closely with the Office Managing Partner on Firm initiatives such as remodeling, being the liaison with outside vendors as needed, event planning and developing and maintaining the office budgets in addition to staffing and managing my Team of LSAs.

Give us an example of a time when you said, "Is this really in my job description?"

Never. I learned early on in my career that everything is your job if the need arises.

What did you want to be when you grew up?

Originally, I thought nursing, however, during my freshman year of high school I volunteered to work at the school blood drive and almost passed out so realized quickly that wasn't going to be my path. I considered teaching for a bit but then fell into the legal industry while in college and the rest, as they say, is history.

If you could plan the perfect day what would it look like?

I would be outside at the beach or travelling in Europe. Coffee and pastry in hand, exploring a book on the beach or exploring through a city. Nice dinner out and nightcap looking at the stars.



What is the best thing that has ever happened to you?

My family and friends. I am very close with both and enjoy every second I get to spend with them.

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Columbus
Chapter



SAVE THE DATE

BEYOND THE BUZZ

Practical AI Playbooks for Law Firm Business Professionals

TUESDAY, OCTOBER 27, 2026 | 2:00 – 5:30 P.M.

THE ATHLETIC CLUB OF COLUMBUS

136 E. BROAD STREET
COLUMBUS, OH 43215

An interactive afternoon focused on practical AI adoption, implementation strategies, governance readiness, and department-specific workflows for law firm business professionals.

Featuring Spencer X. Smith, Founder of AmpliPhi

REGISTRATION DETAILS TO FOLLOW

Please mark your calendar and plan to join us.

CO-HOSTED BY THE COLUMBUS CHAPTER OF ALA AND OHIO ILTA



For more than two decades, Premier Office Movers has helped organizations throughout Ohio and across the country navigate one of the most challenging aspects of business growth and change: relocating people, furniture, equipment, and operations with minimal disruption.

Headquartered in Columbus, Ohio, Premier Office Movers specializes exclusively in commercial moving, furniture installation, office reconfigurations, warehouse relocations, storage, and asset management. Since its founding in 2002, the company has built a reputation for delivering complex projects on time, on budget, and with a level of professionalism that keeps clients coming back project after project.

Unlike many moving companies that rely heavily on temporary labor or subcontractors, Premier Office Movers utilizes experienced, consistent crews who understand the unique challenges associated with commercial environments. Whether relocating a corporate headquarters, reconfiguring hundreds of workstations, coordinating a hospital move, or supporting a nationwide furniture installation program, the team focuses on detailed planning, clear communication, and exceptional execution.

The company serves a wide range of clients, including healthcare systems, universities, corporate offices, government agencies, furniture dealers, and national organizations. In addition to moving and installation services, Premier Office Movers operates more than 125,000 square feet of warehouse space, allowing clients to securely store furniture, equipment, and assets while maintaining detailed inventory visibility.

What truly sets Premier Office Movers apart is its commitment to service. From the initial walkthrough to the final punch list, the company's leadership team remains actively involved in every project, ensuring clients receive the attention, accountability, and responsiveness they deserve. This hands-on approach has helped Premier Office Movers become one of the most trusted names in commercial relocation throughout Central Ohio and beyond.

As businesses continue to evolve, expand, and adapt to new workplace needs, Premier Office Movers remains committed to helping organizations move forward with confidence.

To learn more about Premier Office Movers and the services they provide, visit www.premierofficemovers.com or call (614) 771-9600.

David B. Walton

President



For immediate needs, please contact our office at 614.771.9600

What was your first job?

I was a waitress at a pizza place in Westerville.

Who or what had the greatest impact on your life?

My parents. They stressed the importance of family, Sunday dinners and not waiting until you retire to travel and explore. Some of my greatest memories were camping and exploring across the United States and along the coast.



What is your favorite activity (besides work, of course!).

Travel – seems to be a common theme with me. ☺ I also like reading, cooking and gardening.

What would you do if you had more free time?

would volunteer on a more regular basis than I can do now. It is important to give back.

If you weren't working in law firm administration, what career would you have chosen?

Teaching.

Is there anything else you would like us to know about you?

I am grateful for the wonderful life I have, the friendships I've made through ALA and beyond and looking forward to more travel and experiences with my family and friends.



CHAPTER MEETING RECAP

Meeting Date: Tuesday, July 21st, 2026 **Meeting Time:** 12:00pm-1:00pm **Meeting Location:** Microsoft Teams

Title: Defining Boundaries and Beating Burnout: The 2-Year Old's Guide to Work-Life Balance with Paul Artale, PhD

Paul Artale, PhD, Accredited Speaker is a motivational speaker, author, and Leadership Strengths trainer who works with companies who want to supercharge employee performance by understanding employee needs and leveraging their strengths. Paul's research focuses on the positive impact workplace flexibility has on employee engagement, retention, and performance.

Born with a physical disability, most thought Paul was unrealistic for dreaming of playing college football – even after he was cut from his high school team. Paul never gave up hope and six years later found himself playing defensive end for the University of Toronto. From that moment forward Paul promised himself he would always relentlessly pursue his ambitions.

Paul blends his experiences regarding his “disability,” twenty years of leadership and management training, student-athlete development, and fatherhood with his research and expertise in organizational performance to create inspiring messages that challenge participants to break through their barriers and achieve peak performance.

Paul is the epitome of resilience, drive, continuous self-development and success. Paul is committed to helping people living their best lives and which is detailed in his book, “The 2-Year Old's Guide to Work-Life Balance” which can be purchased at Amazon.

Virtual Attendees: Kayci Zamarelli, Beth Johnson, Andrew Gross, Kelly Atkinson, Brad Bragg (New Member), Julie Bryan, Dina Gay, Angie Geist, John Justus, Laura Albert, Laura Focht, Paul Artale, Ryan Daniels, Lindsay Updike, Tracey Hopp, Terri Jones, Wendy Martin, Dave Walton

Date/Time of Next Meeting:

Member Happy Hour – Wednesday, August 6th at Buckeye Bourbon House

RMH Volunteer Night – Wednesday, August 19th from 4:00pm-6:30pm

Meeting Notes:

Welcome and Announcements

We have our Member Happy Hour on Wednesday, August 5th at Buckeye Bourbon House from 5:00pm-6:30pm

Our Educational Seminar and Business Partner Expo will be on Tuesday, October 27th from 2:00pm-6:00pm, with happy hour included

Antitrust reminder: avoid discussing billing rates, salaries, or wages

Full ALA guidelines to be shared in August newsletter

Business Partner Spotlight: Premier Office Movers

Dave Walton from Premier Office Movers sponsored our July Chapter meeting.

Services include: office moves, furniture reconfiguration, asset storage, project management, etc.

Estimates are always free!

What Work-Life Balance Actually Is

It's not a destination or achievement: it's a constant state of being, a muscle to keep working

Involves ups and downs; periods of intense work and periods of recovery are normal

Key question: What do you want your life to look like?

Reframed as a transformation statement: “I want to go from ___ to ___ so that I can ___”

“Life-giving” Test: Are the activities you do life-giving? If not, reconsider your relationship with them.

Boundaries and Burnout

Burnout is primarily a boundary problem

Locus of control is largely internal: individuals create, enforce (or don't enforce) their own boundaries

Flexibility ranks as the top non-traditional benefit, trending upward since before the pandemic

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CHAPTER MEETING RECAP—Continued

Benefits of strong boundary management:

- Reduced exhaustion and absenteeism

- Better communication, collaboration, and team goal attainment

- More time for life-giving choices

Spillover effect: Good personal life spills into work, and vice versa

Schedule control (Belief that you control your schedule) is linked to lower turnover and better performance

Three Boundary Style Types

Separators: keep work and personal life strictly compartmentalized

- Boundaries triggered by space, time, and mental cues

- Communicating needs: set explicit non-working hours; reassure others boundaries don't mean lack of commitment

Integrators: blend work and personal life freely

- Give flexibility but need to receive it in return; burnout when reciprocity breaks down

- Communicating needs: signal availability windows; ask for outcome-based (not time-based) expectations

Volleyers: hybrid style, shifting between separation and integration based on circumstances

- Flexibility is planned and logical, not random

- Communicating needs: signal which "mode" they're in; build in recovery periods after high-intensity phases

ALA Group Poll: Mostly integrators and volleyers; very few separators

- Likely driven by technology blurring traditional separation (ex. Two phones, app boundaries)

- Separator prevalence has declined since 2018 research baseline (~1/3 of room then vs. near zero now)

Research Findings and Q&A

Study sent to 6,500+ college administrators (55% turnover rate in 5 years was the starting point)

- Better boundary control correlated with higher job satisfaction and lower turnover intention

- No major burnout different between boundary styles; life circumstances mattered more

- Higher burnout in conduct and housing roles vs. student activities and counseling

- Women rated higher than men on burnout; individuals with disabilities also rated higher

- Internal locus of control strongly linked to lower burnout and lower turnover intention

Is it possible to change styles?

- It is possible, but we are largely hardwired

- Technology and life circumstances can shift behavior within a style

- Easier to move toward volleyer than to flip from separator to integrator entirely

Industry Stats from "Higher or Lower" game:

- 83% of employee prioritize work-life balance over salary

- 57% of legal administrators at small firms report burnout

- 74% of legal administrators worked at least half of their days off

If you know what types of characteristics make up a toxic employee, you may also be able to identify the traits that don't. It's possible you may just have an employee who has been targeted as a scapegoat. Investigate whether you have a toxic employee on your hands, or instead, someone who is struggling in the workplace or with shortcomings in their training, says Lauren Howard, Chief Executive Officer of [LBee Health](#), a mental health practice providing support services for those coping with or recovering from toxic work environments and burnout.

"A toxic employee is someone who persistently acts in a way that hurts the company, their peers or even clients without having to take accountability for their actions."

It's important, she says, to start by giving everyone the benefit of the doubt.

"We could walk away with two totally different perceptions of that conversation we just had, and both of us are right," Howard says. "Everybody shows up with a different brain and perception, and sometimes that means the information you're given does not align with somebody else's perception, but it doesn't mean the other person is lying."

2. Document, Document, Document

If you're responsible for investigating a complaint about a potentially toxic employee, documenting every interaction with all parties is imperative. Kim Williams, spokesperson for [End Workplace Abuse](#), an organization lobbying for workplace protection against bullying and abuse, recommends keeping two separate files: one for the employee under investigation and one for yourself. This is especially crucial if you are dealing with a protected employee who may be in a position of power or influence.

"If you're on the wrong side of a power imbalance, you still need to treat it with the same care of investigation," Williams says. If this makes you nervous, know you aren't alone. In fact, Williams says, it's not uncommon to see HR employees being strongarmed into turning a blind eye. But there is a way to help protect yourself.

Williams recommends using one file to document the investigation as it pertains to the employee and the other for yourself as the investigator. Documenting your own interactions with involved parties can help protect your credibility in case you ever face retaliation for doing your job.

You will also want to make sure you document any remedies or training for the alleged toxic employee. Not only does this show an attempt to address the issue, but also it can help with identifying patterns if complaints are made again later.

"Documenting your own interactions with involved parties can help protect your credibility in case you ever face retaliation for doing your job."

3. Enlist an Attorney

Both Howard and Williams recommend bringing in counsel as early as possible. While legal counsel may be looking for ways to reduce potential liability to your firm or organization, they can also coach you on how to properly document and address certain situations that may be beyond your area of knowledge or expertise.

4. Prioritize a Safe Environment

It's important to have proper [reporting procedures and policies in place](#) so employees can feel safe and protected if they have to report a bullying incident. There are also training and legal requirements that may come into play, depending on in which jurisdictions your firm operates, that can help employees identify problematic behavior. These are all important ways to help mitigate toxic workplace behaviors.

At the same time, Howard says, companies still need to make sure these initiatives aren't performative and that individual toxic employees are still dealt with appropriately. "If one person is making the workplace toxic, then you deal with that one person," she says.

Continued on page 20



VOLUNTEERS NEEDED!

PLEASE JOIN THE COLUMBUS CHAPTER OF ALA FOR A FUN NIGHT MAKING AND SERVING DINNER AT THE RONALD MCDONALD HOUSE OF CENTRAL OHIO.

AUGUST 19TH – 3:30PM – 7:00PM

711 E. LIVINGSTON AVE, COLUMBUS, OH 43205

RSVP: ANGIE VECCHIO

AVECCIO@TAFTLAW.COM

The Ronald McDonald House charities (RMHC) support families with children facing serious illnesses by offering free or low-cost housing near hospitals. This allows families to stay close to their child while they receive medical care, providing a supportive environment during difficult times. RMHC also offers various programs and services to ease the challenges families face. This is a great opportunity to get involved and help.





ANTITRUST GUIDE

For members of the Association of Legal Administrators

Professional associations such as the Association of Legal Administrators (ALA), although well recognized as valuable tools of American business, are subject to severe scrutiny by both federal and state governments.

The single most significant law affecting professional associations is the Sherman Antitrust Act, which makes unlawful "every contract, combination in the form of trust or otherwise, or conspiracy, in restraint of trade or commerce..."

A professional association by the very nature of the fact that it is made up of competitors is a combination, thus satisfying one of the elements in proving an antitrust violation. Section 5 of the Federal Trade Commission Act is also applicable to professional associations; it makes unlawful the same types of conduct that are prohibited by the Sherman Act. Furthermore, almost all states have enacted antitrust laws similar to the Sherman Act.

There is no organization too small or too localized to escape the possibility of a civil or criminal antitrust suit. The federal government has brought civil or criminal actions against such small organizations as Maine Lobstermen, a Virginia audio-visual association, Bakersfield Plumbing Contractors, the Utah Pharmaceuticals Association, and local barbers associations.

The government has brought approximately five civil and ten criminal cases a year against professional associations. It is thus imperative that every professional association member, regardless of the size of the association or the size of those comprising the membership, refrain from indulging in any activity which may be the basis of a federal or state antitrust action.

There are four main areas of antitrust concern for professional associations: price fixing, membership, standardization and certification, and industry self-regulation. The area of greatest concern, for it is the area where individual members are most likely to violate the law and the area where the government appears most concerned, is price fixing. The government may infer a violation of the Sherman Act by the mere fact that all or most of the members of the professional association are doing the same thing with respect to prices. It is not required that there be an actual agreement, written or unwritten, to increase prices. Rather, price fixing is a very broad term which includes any concerted effort or action which has an effect on prices or on competition.

Accordingly, professional association members should refrain from any discussion which may provide the basis for an inference that the members agreed to take action relating to prices, production, allocation of markets, or any other matter having a market effect. The following topics, while not the only ones, are some of the main ones which should not be discussed at regular meetings or member gatherings:

1. Do not discuss current or future billing rates, fees, disbursement charges or other items that could be construed as "price." Further, be very careful of discussions of past billing rates, fees or prices.
2. Do not discuss what is a fair profit, billing rate or wage level.
3. Do not discuss an increase or decrease in price, fees or wages, or disbursement charges. In this regard, remember that interest charges are considered an item of price.
4. Do not discuss standardizing or stabilizing prices, fees or wages, or disbursement charges.
5. Do not discuss current billing or fee procedures.
6. Do not discuss the imposition of credit terms or the amount thereof.
7. Do not complain to a competitor that his billing rates, fees or wages constitute unfair trade practices. In this context, another law firm (or even a corporate legal department) may be considered a competitor.
8. Do not discuss refusing to deal with anyone because of his pricing or fees.

Do not conduct surveys (under the auspices of ALA or informally) relating to fees, wages or other economic matters without prior review by antitrust legal counsel. Any survey should have the following characteristics: a) participation is voluntary and open to non-members, b) data should be of past transactions, c) data should be collected by an independent third party, such as an accounting firm, d) confidentiality of each participant's data should be preserved, and e) data should be presented only in a

Continued on page 19

composite form to conceal data of any single participant. If these criteria are met, an association can collect and disseminate data on a wide range of matters, including such things as past salaries, vacation policies, types of office equipment used, etc.

However, care must be taken to ensure that the purpose of any survey is to permit each firm to assess its own performance. If a survey is used for the purpose of or has the effect of raising or stabilizing fees, wages, disbursements, credit policies and the like, it will create serious antitrust problems.

Within this same legal framework applicable to surveys, an association can make presentations or circulate articles regarding such educational matters as establishing sound office procedures, etc., provided it is clear that the matters are educational, and not a basis for law firm uniformity or agreement.

Inasmuch as association antitrust violations can subject all association members to criminal and civil liability, members should be aware of the legal risks in regard to membership policy and industry self-regulation. Fair and objective membership requirement policies should be established. Membership policies should avoid:

1. Restrictions on dealing with non-members.
2. Exclusions from membership, especially if there is a business advantage in being a member.
3. Limitations on access to association information, unless the limitation is based upon protection of trade secrets.

The Association of Legal Administrators has a code of ethics, which sets forth parameters of ethical conduct. However, to ensure that the Code of Ethics does not create any antitrust problems, ALA must continue to ensure that its Code does not have arbitrary enforcement procedures or penalties.

The penalties for violating federal or state antitrust laws are severe. The maximum criminal penalty for violating the Sherman Act was increased in 2004 from \$350,000 to \$1,000,000 for an individual and from \$10,000,000 to \$100,000,000 for a corporation. Pursuant to the Sentencing Reform Act, alternative maximum fines could be increased to twice the pecuniary gain of an offender or twice the loss to another person.

Individuals and corporate officers who are found guilty of bid rigging, price fixing or market allocation will virtually always be sentenced to jail pursuant to the Sentencing Guidelines; community service cannot be used to avoid imprisonment. The minimum recommended sentence is four months; the maximum is three years.

Additionally, there are civil penalties such as injunctions or cease and desist orders which could result in government supervision of association members, restricting the association's activities or disbanding the association.

Civil suits may be brought by consumers or competitors. Civil antitrust actions result in treble damage awards and attorneys' fees. Thus, if association members are held liable to a competitor for antitrust violations which resulted in \$500,000 worth of lost business, the verdict may exceed \$1,500,000.

The government's attitude toward professional associations requires professional association members, as well as professional associations themselves, to at all times conduct their business openly and avoid any semblance of activity which might lead to the belief that the association members had agreed, even informally, to something that could have an effect on prices, fees or competition. Thus, it is important that members contact the association headquarters or legal counsel for guidance if they have even the slightest qualms about the propriety of a proposed activity or discussion.

5. Recognize the Signs

If you have an employee on staff who others typically repel from professionally — maybe others are hesitant to work with this employee, or they feel they need backup during meetings with this person — then you may have a toxic employee on your hands.

Consider asking yourself the following questions:

- Do you spend more time talking about the employee than their work?
- Is this employee preventing others from doing their own work?
- Is there fear of retaliation for reporting toxic behavior pertaining to the employee?
- Do other employees feel uncomfortable dealing with this person in one-on-one situations?
- Is the employee held accountable for inappropriate behavior?

Is there consistency in the employee's account of the issue under investigation?

If you've answered yes to some of these questions, you may have to decide whether retaining this employee is what's best for your firm.

The Bottom Line

A toxic employee can't exist without protection, Williams says. If an organization isn't holding their employees accountable for their behavior and professionalism, then essentially, the organization is responsible for that behavior.

"The top has to be where the accountability lives," Williams says.

Kelly F. Zimmerman is a former Managing Editor of *Legal Management* and has extensive experience covering the legal industry for organizations such as Northwestern's Pritzker School of Law and Axiom Law. She earned a Master of Science in Journalism from Northwestern University. [Email](#) [Website](#) Copyright ©2025 Association of Legal Administrators. All Rights Reserved. alanet.org." September 2025

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We value your comments/suggestions and even your submissions. After all, this is your Newsletter! If you would like to write a Letter to the Editor, make a suggestion that would enhance the newsletter, or would be willing to write an article for the newsletter (either about a committee event or an educational topic that would be of interest to our members), please e-mail Laura Focht, Newsletter Editor at: lfocht@zhftaxlaw.com . Your input would be greatly appreciated!



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Committee Members Needed

We are always looking for great people who would like to serve on a committee. If you are interested in learning more about any of these positions, please reach out to any current board member. Joining a committee is often a great first step toward learning more about the chapter and someday joining the board.

Business partners are also eligible to serve on committees. If you are a business partner and would like more information about joining a committee, please contact Laura Focht.

COLUMBUS CHAPTER MEMBER CHANGE FORM

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