

COLUMBUS CHAPTER NEWS

February 2026



President's Message



Columbus Chapter President
Julie Bryan

Digging Out and Catching Up

I hope you all made it through Snowpocalypse 2026 without breaking your backs shoveling! This winter has felt so long already, and I don't know about you, but Spring Break in Florida is screaming my name!

I want to thank everyone who attended our recent RoundTable hosted by Jane Weldy with Squire Patton Boggs and Joshua Scott with IT Solutions for sponsoring the lunch. We can never have enough conversations like this because hearing different perspectives and sharing what has worked for each person and their firm, and what has not, is one of the best ways we support each other.

Our year-end survey has also gone out, and I hope you will take a few minutes to complete it. We want to be better for you in 2026, and that only happens if we understand what you need from this chapter. Your feedback helps guide our programming, our conversations, and how we use your time, which we know is always in short supply.

Our next Brew HaHa will take place on February 13, with the focus on Managing Up. A topic we all navigate in one way or another, and it often looks very different depending on firm culture and leadership style. If there is a topic you would like us to explore at a future Brew HaHa, please let me know. These sessions work best when they reflect what people are actually dealing with day to day.

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UPCOMING EVENTS:

February 13— Brew Ha Ha

9:00am

Managing Up

Zoom

17-Tuesday—11:45-1:00pm

Monthly Chapter Meeting

Chris Pagnotto—Health Insurance Benefits—Medicare Transition for Eligible Members of Law Firms, The Marketplace, etc.

Location—Zoom

“There are also ways to support attorneys with more support requirements. You have to figure out how to get that into your model. An admin center can handle many functions, but it may not be able to do everything for everyone.”

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.



AI: The Key to Bridging the Gap Between Legal and Sales Teams

Legal and sales teams frequently live in separate worlds. Salespeople want to close deals quickly to hit targets, while legal departments must protect their companies from risk. But both teams support the organization in achieving the same ultimate goal: securing customers and revenue. Thankfully, technology has come to the point where it can help resolve interdepartmental friction to accelerate contract approval.



Mike Ross
LexCheck
Chief Customer Officer
and Head of Business
Development

Sales cycles dramatically lengthened over the last year — many now stretch more than two weeks longer than in 2022. Extended contract negotiations are costly, resulting in lost customers and revenue. More than half of companies report inefficient contract processes costing them business. Unfortunately, legal departments often still carry the reputation of being a “bottleneck” in the sales process, but delays don’t have to be part of the contract process. To expedite approvals, organizations should transition contract negotiation from a legal task to a shared responsibility.

Technology can help legal and sales departments collaborate to accelerate deals.

SALES AND LEGAL RELATIONSHIP CHALLENGES

The sometimes-discordant nature of the relationship between sales and legal stretches back decades. Sales teams often feel that legal teams are too slow or cautious, while legal teams think sales teams are too willing to take risks. This disconnect creates frustrations on both sides.

Traditionally, most tasks related to contract negotiations fall under legal. Many organizations bundle contract negotiation and execution together when, in actuality, sales and legal teams should share responsibility. Most organizations’ processes happen within functional silos. Sales and procurement people do extensive work before delivering a contract to the legal team, which then redlines and approves the document in isolation. The organization is better served if both departments collaborate from the beginning.

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season of
frosty fun
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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

February 2026

Sun	Mon	Tue	Wed	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

13—Friday— 9:00am

**Brew Ha Ha
Managing Up**
Zoom

17-Tuesday— 11:45-1:00pm

Monthly Chapter Meeting
Chris Pagnotto—Health Insurance
Benefits—Medicare Transition for Eligible
Members of Law Firms, The Marketplace,
etc.
Location—Zoom

24—Tuesday— 12:00pm

Board Meeting
Ogletree Deakins

ALA Events:

10—Tuesday—Trending in Legal 2026

ALA's Virtual Conference

This session helps experienced legal executives prepare for their next chapter while ensuring firm stability and growth. Participants will explore how to let go with intention, empower rising leaders, document institutional knowledge and sustain personal well-being throughout the process. The session balances the emotional side of leadership transition with the structural strategies needed for seamless continuity.

11—Wednesday

The Confident Communicator: Elevate Your Brand, Impact and Confidence

March 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				

18-Wednesday—4:00pm

Monthly Chapter Meeting
Judy Bodenhamer, Transformational
Leadership in Law Firms
March Madness Happy Hour after the
meeting
Location—TBD

31—Tuesday— 12:00pm

Board Meeting
Ogletree Deakins

ALA Events:

04—Wednesday—Small Firm Meetup

10—Tuesday—Member Idea Exchange

13 and 20—Friday—Essentials of Chapter Leadership

Join fellow chapter leaders for an engaging and informative two-day virtual training event hosted by the ALA Board of Directors. A must-attend event for those looking for the latest insights, best practices and management tips for ALA Chapters.

April 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		

Date—TBD

Monthly Chapter Meeting
Annual Managing Member Partner
Lunch
Location—TBD

28—Tuesday— 12:00pm

Board Meeting
Ogletree Deakins

ALA Events:

03—Friday—Spring CLM Application Deadline

12-15 Sunday—Wednesday

ALA's 2026 Annual Conference & Expo

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DEI CORNER

WHAT IS THE “I” IN DEI?

The “I” in DEI stands for **inclusion** – and it is more than just being present. True Inclusion means ensuring everyone is heard and every voice matters. When team members feel genuinely valued, they are more likely to share their ideas and perspectives, which fuels innovation and the sense of belonging.

Active listening is the heart of inclusion. By giving your full attention – even when you do not agree – you help create an environment where people are willing to speak up. When leadership and colleagues consistently welcome open feedback, it signals that diverse viewpoints are welcomed and respected.

Making space for every voice not only creates a welcoming culture, it unlocks the team’s full potential. Before your next meeting, consider how you can encourage participation from everyone. Sometimes, the most valuable insights come from the quietest voices.

Inclusion is not just a value, but it is a practice. We should make it part of every conversation.

President’s message, continued from page 1

Given the weather and the ongoing winter grind, our next Chapter Meeting will be via Zoom. Please join us for a timely discussion on rising health insurance costs, led by Chris Pragnotto of Benefits Administrators. This is an issue many of us are managing right now, and it is helpful to hear how others are approaching it.

Thank you for carving out time for ALA in the middle of everything else you are juggling. Your willingness to show up and engage is what turns this from just another organization into an actual community.

“The cure for anything is salt water. Sweat, tears, or the sea.”— Isak Dinesen

- Julie Bryan

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But Your Hiring Challenges Can Be*

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CHAPTER MEETING RECAP

ALA Chapter Meeting
January 20, 2026
Roundtable Discussion

Attendees: Debbie Durbin, John Justus, Debbie Martin, Katie Gregory, Laura Focht, Julie Bryan, Beth Johnson, Brandi Hann, Janet Fowler, Kelli Atchison, Natalie, guest of Kelli's, Janet Fowler, Tracy Hopp, David Morgan, Lindsay Updike, Wendy Karavolis, Deena Gay

Welcome Brandi Hann.

Introduction of Business Partner - Joshua Scott of IT Solutions, a national company who specializes in management services for small to mid-size law firms. They solve tech issues and provide data storage.

Brandi thanks Joshua for sponsoring the luncheon today.

Meeting was kicked off by Julie Bryan with discussion around ALA

What presentation topics are you most interested in to bring more value to your membership in 2026?

People management

Newer to position would like general information on how to manage people

Better ways to give feedback, techniques to use for difficult conversations

How to manage different age groups to meet their needs

Change management, AI, leadership changes, system changes, how do we as leaders get more buy in from employees

Leadership courses

Beth Johnson shared that our speaker for the March 18 chapter meeting will be presenting on this topic. She is dynamic and feels will give great insight

Events – what have we had previously you enjoyed or would like to see us do in 2026?

The Game Show

Would you like to see more variety in day/times of monthly meetings? So instead of a set time would you attend a 9:00 am breakfast meeting or 4pm meeting with happy hour to follow?

Set times are helpful (Kelli Atkinson) so can book other meetings around it

Challenge with after work everyone has personal commitments and can't stay

Breakfast – some like this idea since it happens before the day gets started

What can we do to make members feel more value from membership?

Janet Fowler – appreciates the reach out from board members via telephone checking in on how she is doing. It reignites members interest to want to show up at meetings

Would anyone be interested in “how to” type meetings? Example, if you are involved in negotiating a lease, would it be helpful if we brought a speaker in regarding leases? (John Justus)

Beth Johnson asked if John had specific topics? He mentioned he is in accounting so more focus in that area would be helpful, others may be in facilities, records or IT so perhaps focus in those areas may be helpful. We want our ALA Chapter to have members from all backgrounds, not just HR so should we offer topics in specific areas

CHAPTER MEETING RECAP—Continued

Beth Johnson stated her firm is going contemplating moving or staying and decreasing footprint and renovate. Is anybody getting ready to do a renovation or has completed and has tips?

Laura Focht completed renovation consisted of replacing carpet throughout and updated kitchen. She did this in section

Brandi suggested adding restrooms as part of lease negotiations so they get upgraded when renovation is happening

Where do you purchase office snacks?

Giant Eagle delivers. Suggested that if you introduce a new snack another snack is taken off the list to avoid too many snacks and varieties which is costly

Some have Beve machine, and they love it. Doesn't save money but it is fun

Who do you use for printing needs, i.e., business cards, copying?

All State legal handles business cards.

PX Ohio

Monk printing for little projects

Minute Man Press

John Justus – short-term disability – in house or is it outsourced?

Many use Unum – the way signed up the employer taxes are not being withheld for the Firm only the employee taxes. Make sure get everything taken care of through payroll company

TAH benefits is a Business Partners – Laura Focht encouraged members to use BP when possible or at very lease reach out to them first

Where do you purchase coffee from?

First Choice Coffee – changed name to Diosa. Laura Focht indicated trying to bring them on for BP will let us know if succeeds.

Does anyone have a swag vendor?

BP Emblem Promo

Minute Man

The Promo Girl, good turn around

Outside Recruiters – do you use?

Two said yes – most popular are:

Aspen

Dawson

Who catered lunch today?

Stephens Catering

Julie reminded everyone to please fill out end of year survey when receive.

Meeting adjourned

Business Partner Spotlight

MilliCare[®] by Carpet Concepts The Floor & Surface Care Experts

A Clean You Can See

MilliCare[®] by Carpet Concepts has the proof. Our services provide results that clients, employees, and guests can see. Our patented technology and diligent process removes the tough spots and restores businesses like yours to their most spotless state. See the MilliCare difference.

Carpet



Before



After



Before



After



Before



After

Hard Surface



Before



After



Before



After



Before



After

Upholstery



Before



After



Before



After



Before



After

Legal professionals should support salespeople during the sales process to understand each contract's goals and identify potential risks, such as increased liability or problematic payment structures. This approach gets everyone on the same page, reduces back-and-forth discussions between departments and accelerates deal approval.

HOW CAN LEGAL AND SALES TEAMS BRIDGE THE GAP?

Businesses can leverage technology to enhance communication and reduce friction in the contracting process. The right solutions streamline many functions.

Collaboration

The sales department typically completes its work within customer relationship management (CRM) software and then kicks documents to the legal department, which uses contract lifecycle management solutions in its processes.

This workflow creates inefficiencies, such as the extra steps to transition documents between programs. Version control becomes difficult as emails fly back and forth between departments. Separate tools also impede visibility, preventing staff from seeing a document's status and leading to overlapping efforts.

Technology integration overcomes these challenges by creating a centralized database where both parties can collaborate. Integrated tools enable everyone to work on the same document, leave notes and track progress as the contract moves through a clearly defined approval process. Sales and legal leaders can use this visibility to spot and resolve holdups.

Review Processes

Artificial intelligence (AI) streamlines review processes to shorten the sales cycle. Manual contract reviews require significant time and effort, extending approval times. Even the most basic contracts go through multiple rounds of evaluations, tying up lawyers who could be working on more complex and high-value documents.

AI reinvents the workflow. The technology conducts the first review, identifying problem clauses and flagging potential risks faster and more accurately than humans. AI solutions can automatically redline contracts with preferred language and perform an exhaustive risk evaluation previously achievable only through an experienced lawyer's review. Meanwhile, lawyers can focus on resolving the risks rather than identifying them.

Generative AI can further enhance the process by composing initial contract drafts and situation-specific, nonstandard clauses that align with business goals. Such algorithms must be designed specifically for legal use and implemented with thoughtful evaluation.

“Traditionally, most tasks related to contract negotiations fall under legal. Many organizations bundle contract negotiation and execution together when, in actuality, sales and legal teams should share responsibility.”

Sales Team Autonomy

Many contracts required to secure a deal are standard — such as nondisclosure agreements (NDAs) — yet still require legal review. Rather than immediately shifting responsibility for these low-risk documents to the legal department, organizations can empower their sales teams to draft them.

AI trained on the company's legal playbook makes best practices accessible to everyone in the organization. Sales teams can use the algorithm to redline low-risk, high-volume contracts, allowing them to resolve many issues on their own and handle more deals directly. The resulting documents require less work from legal and fast-track negotiations.

Involving sales teams in handling contracts also helps them understand a contract's legal implications, potentially avoiding misunderstandings and delays later in the

Continued on page 13

Technology as a Bridge

The human element is the most critical component of a successful partnership between sales and legal. Technology supports the relationship by removing friction and creating opportunities for renewed collaboration. AI does not replace either job function. Rather, teams can leverage these integrative tools for sharing responsibilities and communicating goals, needs and expectations. The resulting dialogue builds trust and understanding between teams and allows them to work together to efficiently build optimal contracts.

A few items to bear in mind when implementing a solution:

- Consider and acknowledge both teams' needs. Solutions catering to only one department will not receive universal buy-in, ultimately limiting their effectiveness.
- Clearly define workflows and expectations to maximize the solution's benefits and value.

Monitor and evaluate the new processes' results to ensure utility and identify improvement opportunities.

The functions of sales and legal may seem to place them in separate worlds, but ultimately, these departments are working toward the same goals. Building a bridge to connect them is key to streamlining and strengthening business outcomes. Communication aligns priorities, while AI facilitates collaboration and accelerates review and negotiation. Combining these elements unites efforts, turning sales and legal teams into a powerful, harmonious force.

About the Author

Mike Ross is the Chief Customer Officer at LexCheck. Prior to joining LexCheck, Ross spent five years practicing as a corporate associate for law firms, the last three of which were in the New York office of Ropes & Gray.

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E-Letters to the Editor

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!



FEBRUARY

MEMBER ANNIVERSARIES

Kelly Breckner—1 year

Paola Villarreal—1 year

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

If any of your information changes, please e-mail the following information to:
Laura Focht, Newsletter Editor, Zaino Hall & Farrin LLC, lfocht@zhftaxlaw.com

Name: _____

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PROXY

FOR THE ELECTION OF OFFICERS 2026-27

The nominating committee of the Columbus Chapter, Association of Legal Administrators, has proposed the following slate of officers for the term April 1, 2026 through March 31, 2027:

President—Julie Bryan, Ogletree Deakins

Vice President— Beth Johnson, Isaac Wiles

Treasurer—John Justus, Carlile Patchen & Murphy

Secretary—Open Position

Being unable to attend the March chapter meeting, I hereby submit my vote by proxy:

_____ **FOR** the proposed slate

_____ **AGAINST** the proposed slate

Signature

Date