

COLUMBUS CHAPTER NEWS

January 2026

President's Message



Columbus Chapter President
Julie Bryan

LET'S GO, 2026!!!

Last year, some great things happened in this chapter because people showed up and participated, and we're grateful to everyone who took the time to help make it stronger!

Brew Ha Ha is the clearest example of that. It worked because members were open about what was happening inside their firms, what they were struggling with, and what they were proud of, and we want to keep that momentum going.

What I care about this year is staying in touch with each other, having real conversations, and continuing to grow this chapter into something that actually helps members do their jobs better and feel supported while doing them.

You will be hearing directly more from board members this year, but not with surveys or standard email check-ins. We want to know what's working in your firm, where things feel heavy, and what kind of support would actually make a difference, and if something we are doing isn't useful, we want to know that too. This is about EVERY size firm, as we want to make everyone feel their needs met.

We also want members helping shape what comes next for our Chapter. If there are topics we haven't addressed, problems you're dealing with right now, or ideas you think are worth trying, say something, because this chapter only improves when it reflects what members are actually living day to day.



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UPCOMING EVENTS:

January 9— Brew Ha Ha 9:00am

Let's Talk About All Things: EVENTS (BIG & SMALL)
Zoom

January 20—Monthly Chapter Meeting

Roundtable/Panel—Best Practices for Law Firm Management, Leadership, and Administration
Location—Squire Patton Boggs

Back(casting) to the Future: How Working Backwards Can Help Your Strategic Planning Process

EDITORIAL POLICY

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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.



Back(casting) to the Future: How Working Backwards Can Help Your Strategic Planning Process

I could start this article with tread-worn arguments about how important it is to develop a solid plan for 2024, especially in an environment that is shifting as rapidly as ours.



David H. Freeman, JD
Founder
Lawyer BookBuilder

But you already know that.

To save time, let's jump right into ways you can engage in a strategic planning process that is fast, effective and most importantly, has a higher chance of being acted upon by your lawyers.

THE PLANNING PROCESS

There are several ways to craft a strategic plan. You (or a small senior team) can go off to your ivory tower, build a truly brilliant plan and then present it to the masses. Or you can hire a consultant to do the same.

While these techniques may deliver an outstanding work product, it often fails the final test, which is implementation. When lawyers don't have a hand in crafting their own future, when they haven't spent time exploring "why" things must be done to achieve their goals, there can be a lack of buy-in and willpower to act on something that is not "theirs."

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CALENDAR OF EVENTS

January 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	29	30	31

09—Friday—9:00am

Brew Ha Ha

Let's Talk About All Things: EVENTS (BIG & SMALL)

Zoom

20—Tuesday—11:45-1:00pm

Monthly Chapter Meeting

Roundtable/Panel—Best Practices for Law Firm Management, Leadership, and Administration

Location—Squire Patton Boggs

27—Tuesday—12:00pm

Board Meeting

Ogletree Deakins

ALA Events:

01—Thursday—New Year's Day

(ALA Office Closed)

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

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, empowering 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.

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DEI CORNER

For January, there are many ways to remember and incorporate diverse celebrations in the month. Of course, there is always Martin Luther King Day, but other days which may not be at the top of your list in which we can recognize diversity are:

- World Braille Day (Jan 4): Honors Louis Braille's birthday and raises awareness for visually impaired communication.
- International Holocaust Remembrance Day (Jan 27): A global day to remember victims of the Holocaust.
- International Day of Education (Jan 24): Focuses on education's role in development.

When inviting people to an event, remember the quote by Verna Myers is, “**Diversity** is being invited to the party; **inclusion** is being asked to dance.” Are we always remembering to ask everyone to dance?

President's message, continued from page 1

We are starting the year with a **Roundtable on January 20 from 11:45–1:00 at Squire Patton Boggs**. It is meant to be a working discussion focused on the real mechanics of running a law firm, including staff reviews, events worth the time, team-building that does not make people uncomfortable, software that earns its cost, and the systems that keep firms running without burning people out. We will also ask for direct feedback on how we can strengthen participation and keep the chapter moving in the right direction.

This year is about showing up, being honest, and continuing to build something that matters. “Coming together is a beginning. Keeping together is progress. Working together is success.”
— Henry Ford

- Julie Bryan

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^{*} UPS is leading the industry in on-time performance, (2021, Dec. 16), (Measured from 2021, Dec. 5-11) <https://about.ups.com/us/en/our-stories/people-led/ups-on-time-performance.html>

ALA National Membership Renewal for 2026—Due Now!



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Member Benefits

Columbus ALA Chapter is an Approved CLM Provider

Thanks to Beth Johnson, we are now a CLM (Certified Legal Manager) provider. Thank you Beth for taking the time to set this up for our chapter!

The CLM Approved Provider Program is designed to provide access to high-quality legal management educational opportunities that are eligible for CLM credit through ALA chapters and other organizations.



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continued from page 2

Having run dozens of strategic planning sessions in firms of all sizes, I've found that including the lawyers up front is an important starting point so they feel a sense of ownership over the process and the outcome. To that end, rather than handing them a plan and *telling* them they must do it, have them create it themselves through a facilitated brainstorming and action planning process so they tell themselves they *want* to do it. One approach I've found particularly effective is a methodology known as "backcasting."

Backcasting is a strategic planning process that starts with defining a highly desirable future and then reverse-engineering actions that must be taken in the present to achieve that future. It takes what feels like far-away goals and breaks them down into manageable, sequential steps that are logical and doable.

Let's look at how you can conduct such a session in your firm.

1. Choose the Right People

First, determine which members of the firm must be brought into the process. Include all who would have a part in its implementation and success, meaning lawyers, management and staff, all of whom might bring valuable insights and perspectives.

Depending on your firm size and makeup, you might run specific sessions for different groups (practice, industry, geographic, key clients) so that everyone is fully engaged in areas they truly care about.

2. Facilitation

Schedule about a half day and have someone run the session who does not have a vested interest. I've seen situations where dominant partners lead meetings and others don't feel empowered to speak up or disagree with their opinions. This structure can kill the kind of knowledge-sharing and team building required to build a thorough plan and set the stage for implementation.

3. Envision a Desired Future

Encourage participants to envision the firm two, three or more years in the future (but not too far out). Ask what success looks like. Consider factors such as types of clients, practice mix, new practices, market position, geographies, firm culture, internal processes, and technology. This vision should be ambitious yet achievable, stretching the firm's capabilities without straying into fantasy.

"Clarity begets momentum, and momentum is a must for bringing plans to completion."

4. Reverse-Engineer

Now comes the fun part. Prioritize the future goals and assign topics to breakout groups who are tasked with coming up with sequential steps that must be in place to go from their present reality to that desired future. Have them acknowledge the potential challenges and discuss ways to overcome them. This is a good pressure testing moment, because if there are issues that can't be solved, it means the goal should not be pursued (at least for now).

5. Drill Down to Who Does What by When

While we usually call this overall process strategic planning, practically speaking, it should be renamed "strategic *action* planning." If you're in one of the many firms that have crafted plans only to see them poorly implemented, you know why an emphasis on action is so vitally important.

To ignite action, have your breakout groups go one level deeper by recommending timelines and accountability so there is no doubt about the next steps, who is responsible for managing those steps and by when those steps should be completed. Clarity begets momentum, and momentum is a must for bringing plans to completion.

Continued on page 12



6. Group Debrief

With first drafts in hand, you can now apply another level of polish. Each breakout group presents their conclusions to the full group so everyone can understand their thinking and provide their input. In this way, it shifts the process from smaller group thinking to becoming everyone's plan.

7. Management, Management, Management

Initiatives like these often die a natural death unless your leaders consistently fan the flames. They should meet shortly after this planning session to further refine the plan. They should hold initiative leaders responsible for implementing their steps. They should make achieving the steps a priority in your important meetings and celebrate progress along the path. And perhaps, there can be some consequences for not getting things done.

In effect, each leader must take on the role of Chief Implementation Officer. While the backcasting process can set up the pins, your leaders must make sure firm members consistently knock them down. It's this kind of one-two punch that can turn your long-desired dreams into reality.

About the Author

David H. Freeman, JD, is a member of the *National Law Journal* Hall of Fame for being voted the top law firm business development coach and consultant in the United States for several consecutive years. For 30 years he has worked with over 10,000 lawyers in hundreds of firms worldwide, and he has created an online training and group accountability program, Lawyer BookBuilder[®], that guides lawyers on how to become rainmakers. He has also developed a [Return on Potential Calculator](#), which is a free tool that shows firm leaders, group leaders, and individual lawyers how much revenue they could generate if they (or their groups) became better rainmakers.

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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!



JANUARY

MEMBER ANNIVERSARIES

Sonja Fuqua—20 Years

Lindsey Updike—2 years

Wendy Karavoloa—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

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