

It Takes a Village

By Sharon J. Arkin



Hillary Clinton was severely mocked years ago for publicly acknowledging that “it takes a village” to raise a child. But she was actually correct about that and, more importantly, the concept applies to more than just child rearing. It applies to every human endeavor of any importance. What it means is that it takes people of different talents, abilities, perspectives and resources to make any effort successful. That is a truth that applies to litigating cases as well as operating an organization like CAOC.

The members of our organization run the gamut from solo practitioners to large, multi-city and multi-state firms. Some of our members barely make ends meet, others are generous and open-handed in helping to fund the incredibly-expensive work we do to protect consumers in the Legislature, the courts and the polling booths. The important point to keep in mind is that every member (and even non-member plaintiff trial lawyers) must contribute what they can. Some can write checks. Some can't. But simply because a member cannot write a check does not

mean they cannot contribute. There are a myriad of committees and opportunities for members to contribute “sweat equity” to the organization: Writing for the amicus committee, helping to organize and promote networking opportunities for the Women’s Caucus, the Diversity Committee or the New Lawyers, working on the education committee, contributing articles to the Forum, participating in membership phone banks or political fundraising efforts.

Another critically important contribution comes from running for, and serving on, CAOC’s Board of Directors and Board of Governors. There are some who believe that being a board member imposes a substantial financial obligation; that board members must be able to write large checks to the organization above and beyond the usual membership fees if they want to serve on the board. And for those who can, they should – no question about that. Everyone – every single one of us – must do everything we can financially to help. Our organization cannot function – and cannot protect our members’ interests and the interests of our clients – without

financial contributions. And we have no source for fulfilling those financial needs except through our members.

But that does not mean that board membership should be limited to those who can contribute financially to the level that others are able to. As the governing body of our organization it is critically important – *critically important* – that it represent a cross-section of our membership. Every interest should be represented on our board – including the small and solo practitioners who simply struggle on a daily basis to keep body and soul together and who cannot write large checks. Those members need representation on the board – which means that some of the people serving on our boards, just like the members they represent, can only contribute time and effort and not money. Any other policy will merely alienate the people we are trying to represent. Any other policy will result in CAOC being viewed as an “elitist” organization that has little to offer the vast number of plaintiff trial lawyers who do not have huge financial successes. Any other policy will result in driving down membership numbers.

As trial lawyers, we represent the most vulnerable people in our society. We are devoted to helping them and protecting them. We are not elitists; we are about as egalitarian as they come. We must protect against becoming elitists within the organization and must be as egalitarian in our organizational operations as we are in our legal practices. Any other approach will end up doing more damage to what we stand for than what our enemies do to us.

So, when a call for money goes out – write a check, if you can. If you can’t, get on a phone bank. Make an effort. Do what you can – and do everything you can. This village – this cause – needs you. Every single one of you. ■

KAISER SEMINAR

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