THE (CRUCIAL) ROLE OF PROFESSIONAL ASSOCIATIONS
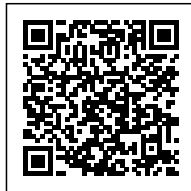
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Category: In Pliny's Shoes

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by Ricardo Cortés-Monroy

The end of the calendar year usually brings a number of very interesting events led by professional associations. This year was no exception, albeit most were by teleconferencing systems of course. We tend to take a bit for granted these associations and the important task they do. That would be a mistake. I would argue that they bring immense value to our profession and ourselves as individuals. And beyond the obvious!

In fact, think for example especially about Europe and its arcane distinction between jurist v avocat; in-house v external. Excluded from the bar, I believe associations are even more important for in-house lawyers. The level of exchange one can have with peers, if properly facilitated by the respective association, can be extremely useful. Let me give you some concrete examples. I had the honor to chair the European General Counsel Association (EGCA) for some years. This association includes the general counsels of the 80 largest Europe headquartered multinationals. We used to meet twice a year in one of the member's headquarters. Imagine how enlightening and stimulating it is to hear from the respective GC about the litigations surrounding, e.g., the British Petroleum spill catastrophe in the Gulf of Mexico; or about the largest antitrust cases in Brussels; or anticorruption probes in the USA, etc. Technically speaking it is worth substantive amounts of USA style CLEs. Management-wise, the level of exchanges are concrete and applicable. I witnessed so many legal departments' transformations just by comparing with peers.

Probably the most important aspect of these associations is the help one gets to try and foresee the future, i.e. what's coming in terms of stakeholders and regulatory agendas. For example, some days ago Iberian Lawyer (from LC Publishing Group) held their annual Legal Day. It was a remarkable exercise of brainstorming about what is coming-up for Legal on Sustainability, Diversity & Inclusion, and Digital (you can find elsewhere in this forum the links to the excerpts and videos). Most lawyers are in the process of setting their 2021 strategies and objectives; these events and discussions at associations levels can only help you. On countless occasions I got ideas for my work sparked by associations and their events.

In addition, as an individual lawyer you will benefit from being an active members of these legal professional associations. Some have quite strict standards in terms of qualifications and experience and operate on a coopting basis. Others are more open. Both approaches have their merits. But I can assure you that you will benefit and grow from both. The level of networking can be relevant; maybe your next career move is lurking around at a professional cocktail!

But ultimately, I would argue, it is about what you can do for and contribute to our profession. Some years ago we tried at the EGCA to advocate for getting legal privilege to be extended to in-house counsel in many jurisdictions in Europe. That's a concrete example of quite relevant matters!

The first century Roman jurists knew well the benefits of this "**collegiality**". Once again it is Pliny who -in two of his letters- elaborates on the need to have the profession to propose upgrades/updates for some procedural law aspects at proceedings in the senate (as a court of justice). It is remarkable how modern these letters read today, with Pliny transpiring a sense of identity linked to his legal profession.

So, I hope 2021 will see all of us with renewed interest in our professional associations. Let me take this opportunity to thank LC Publishing for their endeavors and efforts to help us to connect and improve as lawyers. I hope that the ***octo (VIII) ante diem kalendas Ianuarias*** brings you and your loved ones peace and health. My nerdy Classical Latin way to wish you a Merry Christmas!

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