



SHANNON QUIGLEY has been in the legal field for 15 years and is a legal assistant for The Law Office of Janet L. Brewer (Estate Planning, Trust Administration, and Probate) in Palo Alto, California. Shannon joined SCCoLPA in 2011 and is currently serving on the board as VP of Membership & Marketing from 2014-2016 and was the former Executive Secretary from 2012-2014. In her spare time, she is currently pursuing her paralegal certificate at West Valley College, an approved ABA educational facility.



ELENA K. SCHNEIDER, CCLS is a Legal Assistant at the law offices of McManis Faulkner in San Jose, California. The firm's practice areas include Civil Litigation, Family Law, Employment Law, and Appellate Law. Elena has been in the legal field since 1993. She joined SCCoLPA in 1997, and earned the designation of California Certified Legal Secretary in March 2002. Since becoming a member of the association, she has served as Treasurer and held several committee chair positions. She currently serves as Parliamentarian for the 2014-2016 term.

Membership 911... Taking the Pulse of Your Members

BY SHANNON QUIGLEY AND ELENA K. SCHNEIDER, CCLS, SANTA CLARA COUNTY LPA

How are we doing? What can we do for you? These are age-old questions that professional associations have been asking their members for countless years to help find ways to improve quality of service they provide members and to increase membership. Yet time and time again, feedback is sadly limited or even non-existent. Why is it so hard to get answers? Many have speculated as to why, but no one knows for sure.

The main reasons to conduct surveys or poll membership is to find ways to make improvements that will keep current members interested and participating - to give them a sense of value in their membership and a positive experience. Organizations also want to attract new members and continue to grow. So how do you do that?

In our case, we decided to put together an on-line survey, using Survey Monkey, to see if we could find out why attendance at our monthly membership meetings were not as robust as we would like. In the hopes that our experience might help other associations, here are some ideas and tips that we found helpful.

KEEP IT SHORT!

Traditionally surveys can be a turn-off to some people, especially if they are too long. When we got together to discuss our own thoughts and ideas, we knew we wanted to keep the survey very short and ask very specific ques-



tions. After much discussion, we narrowed our focus down to just two main areas, and also decided to ask no more than 10 questions.

KEEP IT SPECIFIC!

The first area of focus was the date, time and location of our monthly general meeting. Perhaps the majority of our members were not able to attend a meeting on a Tuesday night, or if Tuesday night was fine, maybe the time commitment was more than they were able to give. Possibly the location was not convenient and that was the reason they could not attend. The second area dealt with the content and subject matter of our continuing legal education programs. Did we need to shift our focus or the types of presentations? We wanted to know what subjects or skills-based programs our members needed and wanted to see in terms of maintaining their CLE credits.

ALWAYS ALLOW FOR COMMENTS!

In addition to only 10 very specific questions, we allowed for comments under each one. This way responders could include their thoughts or suggestions for every question. This proved to be a very valuable tool, since not every question applied to every respondent. Almost every respondent included a comment and elaborated on their answers. This was exactly what we were hoping to see.

ANALYZE!

At the time of this writing, we have received responses from approximately 30 percent of our members. While this may not seem like a large number, it is actually much better than we have received in the past, so we are hopeful. The data we have gleaned from this limited response has given us a clear idea of what that group of our members would like to see. For example, of the responses we've received, almost 70 percent want see a change in the format of our meetings. This is valuable information which we will undoubtedly be discussing at the next meeting of the executive board.

PERSONAL TOUCH!

We also understand that not everyone was able to or interested in taking an electronic survey, so our next step will be to follow up with a good old-fashioned telephone call to those members who have not yet responded. We

hope that this personal touch will allow us to find out what changes they would like to see. We will also reach out to those who have already responded to let them know how much we value their opinion and appreciate the time they took to complete the survey. In going through this process, from the initial idea to the point where we are now, we have realized that we need to foster personal connections within our organization. It really is up to each of us to do more, to inspire others and to get to know each of our members

NEXT STEPS!

In the coming weeks, we will meet and analyze the results from our survey and telephone conversations. We are excited about the opportunity to consider and implement changes that will help us meet our goals in the coming year.

We hope you find these tips helpful. If you would like to know more about our survey or how to get started, feel free to contact us by email. Elena K. Schneider, CCLS (eschneider@mcmanislaw.com), Shannon Quigley ([shannon quigley@comcast.net](mailto:shannon.quigley@comcast.net)).

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