

PUBLICATION

Preparing for the Fight: How Baker Donelson Trains Young Litigators

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A key to trial success is preparation. At Baker Donelson, we start early, prepare well and work smarter. We want our young associates to grow into the attorneys you need when facing your biggest challenges in the courtroom.

On a rotating basis over a period of two to three years, Professional Development offers three in-house learning-by-doing Trial Skills workshops for litigation associates: (1) Deposition Skills, which is focused more on fact witnesses; (2) Advanced Deposition Skills, which focuses on expert depositions; and (3) Trial Advocacy, which provides associates the opportunity to learn from experienced shareholders as the associates work "Opening Argument to Closing Argument" through simulated trial preparation and trial with live witnesses and juries comprised of college or law school students. For these workshops, associates work in small teams. Instructors, who are some of Baker Donelson's most experienced trial attorneys, provide tips, demonstrations and feedback. We also offer short lunch programs for litigation attorneys, which address such topics as selecting, engaging and examining expert witnesses; evaluating the merits of a case; jury selection; trial technology; and electronic discovery.

The Firm assigns all incoming associates who want to be trial lawyers to the New Litigator Group (NLG) for the first three fiscal years of their practice. NLG provides standardized training on essential litigation and trial skills to develop baseline competencies. These associates also have allowances of "Shadowing Time" to ensure opportunities to participate in client meetings, negotiations, depositions, court proceedings and other litigation and trial skills opportunities.

Annually, the Firm also considers sending one to two promising mid- to senior-level associates to trial academies hosted by the International Association of Defense Counsel and the American Bar Association's Tort Trial & Insurance Practice Section. These academies are not meant to supplant our in-house litigation workshops. However, compared to the in-house workshops, they are more advanced, more expensive and require a greater time commitment. Associates who attend these academies have participated in the Firm's in-house programs, have had at least four years of litigation experience, have had at least second-chair jury trial experience or two first-chair bench trials, and have been recommended by the Firm's Litigation Group leaders.

By the time a litigation associate has practiced at Baker Donelson for seven years, they have experienced the nuts and bolts of trial preparation and trial. They have prepared for the fight and been in it alongside some of the most experienced litigators in the Firm.