

Diversity – Law Firms

Replenishing The Pipeline: Preparing The Next Generation Of Lawyers By Reaching Out To And Mentoring High School Students With An Interest In The Law

Monté T. Squire

YOUNG CONAWAY STARGATT &
TAYLOR, LLP

If you are resolutely determined to make a lawyer of yourself, the thing is more than half done already.

– Abraham Lincoln,
November 5, 1855

The sage advice offered by then private practitioner Abraham Lincoln to an aspiring lawyer back in 1855 still very much so rings true for young, aspiring lawyers today. Indeed, believing that one can and being resolutely determined to become a lawyer is truly “half the battle.” The other half of this proverbial battle, however, requires commitment, hard work, and the willingness of practicing lawyers to: reach out, give back, mentor, train, encourage and inspire the next generation of lawyers.

Reaching out and mentoring to high school students of diverse backgrounds (and, in particular, those students who have expressed interest in becoming lawyers) is an important step that lawyers can take to replenish the pipeline and to prepare the next generation of lawyers. Serving as an attorney coach for a local high school mock trial team or as a mentor for high school students are rewarding experiences and difference-making opportunities for lawyers to give back. There is a need for lawyers to mentor and to serve as role models for high school students.

For the past two years, I have had the privilege and invaluable opportunity to serve as one of the coaches of the Howard High School Mock Trial Team and as a mentor for Howard High School students in connection with the DuPont/StreetLaw Diversity Pipeline program. These experiences have been extremely rewarding and gratifying for me, both professionally and personally. They have also allowed me to directly make a positive impact and assist high school students, and to help replenish the diversity pipeline.

The Howard High School Mock Trial Team

The Howard High School of Technology is a public high school located in Wilmington, Delaware. Its student body is made up, predominantly, of stu-

Monté T. Squire is an Associate in the Delaware law firm of Young Conaway Stargatt & Taylor, LLP, where he writes and practices in the areas of commercial and intellectual property litigation. Mr. Squire is a member of the firm's Diversity and Hiring committees and serves on the board of the Delaware State Bar Association Multicultural Judges & Lawyers Section.



Monté T. Squire

dents of color. The Howard High School Mock Trial Team is an extra-curricular activity that consists of thirteen students in grades 9 through 12. The mock trial team's members are mostly students who either aspire to be attorneys or that have expressed interest in pursuing careers within the legal profession.

The Delaware High School Mock Trial Competition

Each year, the Delaware Law Related Education Center, Inc., a non-profit organization whose mission is to provide resources to enhance the presence of law-related education initiatives in Delaware, sponsors a statewide mock trial competition for high school students from Delaware's public and private schools.

Working with their teachers and attorney coaches, the mock trial teams research, study and prepare for the competition, by preparing both sides of a fictional case for trial. The students act as both lawyers and witnesses. The students formulate direct and cross-examinations and opening and closing arguments. The case is then tried before a panel of judges and attorneys, where the teams are evaluated on their demonstrated knowledge and trial presentation skills. The attorney coaches assist the students with their trial presentation, learning the underlying law of the case, and the rules of evidence. The attorney coaches also assist the students with learning to: frame legal issues, prepare witnesses, and develop a theme for trial.

Serving As Howard High School's Mock Trial Coach Has Been Rewarding

For the past two years, I have had the opportunity to serve as one of the coaches of the Howard High School Mock Trial Team. Volunteering as a coach for Howard High School has been tremendously rewarding for me, both professionally and personally.

Coaching has been professionally

rewarding for me. As a result of coaching, I have had the opportunity to meet and work closely with in-house attorneys and other members of the Delaware bench and bar, including attorneys of the law firms of Young Conaway Stargatt & Taylor, LLP, Oberly, Jennings & Rhodunda, P.A., and DuPont Legal. In addition, I have also been able to sharpen my own analytical, advocacy, and trial presentation skills, and enhance my understanding and knowledge of the rules of evidence.

Coaching has also been personally rewarding for me. It has afforded me the opportunity to work directly with, and to assist some of the very best and brightest high school students (and lawyers-to-be), and to, not only prepare them for the current year's competition, but to assist them to better understand and appreciate the law in general, including court procedures and the framework of the American judicial system. It has also allowed me to better foster the students' critical thinking, communication, advocacy, and analytical skills, and to share with them the principles of teamwork, collaboration, and cooperation. Serving as one of Howard High School's mock trial coaches has been a great deal of fun, and has allowed me to be in position to encourage and to directly help to prepare the students for college, law school, and to, ultimately, become the next generation of lawyers.

The Howard High School Mock Trial Students Have Benefitted

Most important, our participation in and involvement with the Howard High School Mock Trial Team has had a positive impact on and been beneficial to the legal training, and professional and life skills development of the students.

“I want to be an attorney because I have always been fascinated with the law. Mock trial has helped me to think about a problem and analyze it in a different way,” said Sham Salaam, a 10th Grader at Howard High School of Technology.

According to 12th Grader, Terrance Potter, “I want to be an attorney because I have an interest in the political and legal process. Mock trial has helped me by giving me a preview of real life cases. It has helped me to be a step ahead of many people who are interested in becoming an attorney.”

“[Mock trial] challenges me academically and hones my group interaction skills, which are skills that I may need in college,” said Gursimrat “Simmy” Kaur, a 12th Grader at Howard High School of Technology.

According to Ms. Shaub, the faculty advisor and teacher coach of the Howard High School Mock Trial Team, “The impact of having an attorney coach for mock trial has improved the team's ability to understand complex

courtroom dynamics. They are able to connect the actual strategy of the case to the development of questions for both direct examination and cross examination. The vote of confidence of having an actual attorney help the team has caused the students to feel confident in their own abilities.”

Mentoring High School Students With An Interest In The Law Replenishes The Pipeline

On December 11, 2007, I, along with attorneys and staff of Young Conaway Stargatt & Taylor, LLP, DuPont Legal, and other members of the Delaware legal community had the opportunity to participate in the 2007 DuPont/Street-Law Diversity Pipeline Conference (the “Conference”) as a mentor and workshop facilitator for Howard High School students interested in pursuing careers in the legal profession. The Conference featured interactive workshops on legal topics, including defamation, trademarks, copyrights, assault and battery and eminent domain.

The energy and enthusiasm of the Howard High School students who attended the conference were evident, as demonstrated by the students' full engagement and lively participation in the workshops. According to Jeanine Mowbray, a 10th Grader at Howard High School who attended the conference, “Participating in the [Conference] made me realize just how much I really want to have a job in the legal field. It's one thing to read out of the textbook, but it's a different ball game when you actually get a chance to practice what you have learned. I also liked networking with legal professionals and ask[ing] tons of questions. It made me want to strive even harder to get to my ultimate goal of being an attorney.”

Ms. Shaub noted that “[t]he students who participated in the [Conference] have showed a high level of understanding of the issues involved in the various scenarios presented to them ... and ... the attorneys coming into the classroom prior to the conference ... certainly enhanced the students' ability to apply the law to the facts presented.”

Conclusion

In order to replenish the pipeline and to better prepare the next generation of lawyers of color, it is important that practicing lawyers reach out and mentor to those high school students who are interested, and in many instances, “resolutely determined” to become lawyers. Serving as an attorney coach for a local high school mock trial team and/or volunteering as a mentor for high school students are both tremendously rewarding and gratifying experiences, for both coaches and students alike, and represent excellent opportunities for lawyers to give back and to help train the next generation of lawyers.

Please email the author at msquire@ycst.com with questions about this article.