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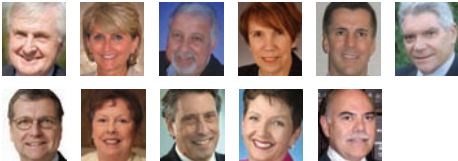
THE *extra*ordinary LAW FIRM CONFERENCE



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Celebrating Certification

BY SUE POWERS

Members of ALA's "Class of '97" Reflect on Being the First to Earn the CLMSM Designation

In the mid-1990s, ALA's certification program for legal administrators was merely an exciting concept discussed by members of the Association's Board of Directors. Now, in the fall of 2007, the Certified Legal Manager (CLM)^{SM*} program is marking its 10th anniversary. And while the program is still relatively young, it has gathered strength during the past 10 years from the value it provides to administrators, employers, and the legal management profession.

As James Cowan, CLM, Executive Director at Ulmer & Berne LLP, says from his unique position of having been both the first Certification Task Force Chair and first Certification Committee Chair, "Those of us who were involved in the creation of the CLM program are gratified and delighted by its success, not only in the number of members who have become CLMs over the past 10 years, an impressive number in and of itself, but most importantly by the influence and impact the program has had on the promotion of professional and career development, training, and education."

Now that 10 years have passed since the first individuals earned their CLMs, *ALA News* asked several members of the "Class of '97" to explain how they have benefited from their CLM designations and to share any advice they have for future CLM seekers.

MEMBERS OF ALA'S CLM CLASS OF 1997



Robert Beyer, CLM

Flice Brown Essa & McLeod, LLP



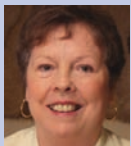
Joan Gleich, CLM

Husch & Eppenberger, LLC



V. Greg Rimes, CLM

Holland & Knight, LLP



Patricia Burns, CLM

Kelley Dye Collier Shannon, PLLC



John Kirk, CLM

Manko Gold Katcher & Fox, LLP



David Rubinstein, CLM

Purcell Flanagan & Hay, PA



James Cowan, CLM

Ulmer & Berne LLP



Patricia Lane, CLM

McKenna Long & Aldridge LLP



Douglas Thompson, CLM

Stone & Hinds, PC

John Cummins, CLM

Dunn Carney Allen Higgins & Tongue, LLP



Carol Phillips, CLM

Sidley Austin, LLP



Donald Williams, CLM

Schwabe Williamson & Wyatt, PC

* Note: CLM is a service mark of the Association of Legal Administrators.

WHAT PROMPTED YOU TO SEEK CERTIFICATION 10 YEARS AGO?



Patricia Burns, CLM: My foray into the Certified Legal Manager program was a very personal one. In 1997 I had worked in D.C. law firms for 17 years, the most recent nine years as Accounting Manager for my current firm, Kelley Drye Collier Shannon. I was definitely at a juncture in my career, loving the firm I worked for, but more than a little over-stressed with the day-to-day responsibility of a growing financial department and a rapidly expanding firm. I felt I needed some recent academic credibility, and so the opportunity to explore the CLM appealed to me. This was a program that would recognize my education and my experience and acknowledge the various components of law firm administration that I had accumulated over the years.



Patricia Lane, CLM: When I took the exam in 1997, it was primarily to assess for myself what I needed to learn and identify my weaknesses. There were no study guides or groups, just an incredibly long list of suggested texts to study, including the Internal Revenue Code. To my delight, I passed the exam, and my score helped to identify areas on which I needed to focus more attention.



V. Greg Rimes, CLM: The primary reason I took the exam was to prove to myself that I could do it and that I had the necessary skills to be a well-rounded administrator. I also wanted to differentiate myself by adding certification to my résumé as I saw the legal industry quickly changing and becoming more competitive.



Douglas Thompson, CLM: I became interested in the CLM program as soon as it was announced. At that time I believed that law firm managers needed some type of education program to demonstrate their competence. Managing partners would then have a set of guidelines they could use in evaluating their managers.



David Rubinstein, CLM: I was an early supporter of the concept of a certification process and was one of the many who advocated the creation of a Certified Legal Manager. I think pursuing lifelong learning is an essential obligation for anyone who wants to be considered a professional.

WHAT HAS HAPPENED TO YOU SINCE YOUR EARNED CLM DESIGNATION?



Patricia Lane, CLM: I'm proud to have earned the designation and, for me, it has made a difference in my career by providing prospective employers with a certain degree of assurance that I have the knowledge base to perform the essential duties of a legal administrator.



Patricia Burns, CLM: I've been able to expand my learning over the past 10 years through the ongoing educational requirements of the three-year recertification program. My primary job is still financial, but I've worked on several administrative committees and led the department through two financial software conversions and a company merger.



Joan Gleich, CLM: I am still with the same firm, but my title is now Chief Operating Officer. Did my CLM designation help with this title change? I like to think that it did.



V. Greg Rimes, CLM: I changed firms five years ago. I think having the CLM designation gave me an advantage over other applicants. I think the lawyers were impressed with the broad range of topics covered by the exam and the experience needed to qualify to take it.

WHAT HAS BEEN THE BIGGEST BENEFIT OF OBTAINING CERTIFICATION?



Patricia Burns, CLM: I believe I'm a more intelligent team member who understands and appreciates the issues raised by Human Resources and Systems and Facilities and has a broader picture of the day's problems than I might have had without the certification. It was definitely a win-win for me and the firm.



Robert Beyer, CLM: Positions are being advertised with the notation "CLM Preferred." More importantly, some professional liability insurance carriers question whether or not the firm has a certified legal administrator on staff, which means underwriters of law firm malpractice exposures view the presence of a CLM as significant to their underwriting processes.



Douglas Thompson, CLM: Studying for and passing the CLM exam gave me an outline to guide me through the areas that I needed to successfully manage a law firm.



John Kirk, CLM: I know that, in least a few instances, having the CLM designation was a deciding factor in a firm's hiring decision. That sends a strong message that at least some firms are placing more emphasis on professional management. Also, having a bank of knowledge that allows one to quickly assess and act upon our daily challenges, plus having to keep up with recertification, means that we will continue to hone our skills.



Joan Gleich, CLM: The CLM designation is all about education and the mastery of a body of knowledge, and if you have that designation, you know that you can walk into any law firm and have something specific to offer that firm.



David Rubinstein, CLM: The CLM brings with it increased self-esteem, professional credibility, and respect and recognition within the industry.



Donald Williams, CLM: It adds credibility to the profession and provides a goal and a benchmark for those who are motivated to enhance their careers.



Carol Phillips, CLM: The program is an outstanding opportunity for every member to further his or her education. I also see it as an opportunity for members who have the skills, knowledge, and expertise to be top-level managers, but may not have an undergraduate degree, as well as others who have the credentials but want to learn more and validate that knowledge.



V. Greg Rimes, CLM: By earning my CLM designation, I proved to myself and others that I had the set of skills and knowledge needed to be an effective legal administrator.



Patricia Lane, CLM: The CLM is quite specific to our industry, and it has provided me personal satisfaction and a sense of accomplishment in a profession that has a wide range of educational credentials and experience.

HOW HAS THE CLM DESIGNATION IMPACTED YOUR CAREER?



Douglas Thompson, CLM: Without the training needed to pass the CLM, I would not have been able to handle some very tough situations that have come up during the last 10 years. I have also enjoyed trading ideas on how to handle various situations with other CLMs, and I continue to learn from them.



David Rubinstein, CLM: I know from my previous managing shareholder that having the CLM designation was a decisive factor in his decision to hire me. It also may have been the tie breaker between me and other well-qualified professionals in getting my current position.

John Cummins, CLM: It has made me pay more attention to getting my credits for recertification, which is a good thing. So the best benefit, perhaps, has been the emphasis on a well-rounded continuing education.



John Kirk, CLM: It has certainly made my career more rewarding and personally fulfilling, as I feel that I am better able to spot issues and present more and better solutions.



Joan Gleich, CLM: I believe that preparing to take the exam is almost as rewarding as passing the exam, although it's nice to be able to use the CLM designation after your name!

THE ESSENTIALS OF THE CLM PROGRAM



The Certified Legal Manager (CLM)SM program has three basic components: fulfilling the educational and experience prerequisites, passing a written examination, and later completing the recertification requirements.

Those who have earned the CLM designation have gone through a rigorous application and studying process and passed a comprehensive examination that tests the administrator's mastery of the core areas of knowledge identified as essential to the effective performance of a principal legal administrator. These areas include General Accounting, Financial Management and Analysis, Performance Management & Organizational Development, Compensation, Legal Industry, Technology/Automation Management & Planning, and Operations.

For more information on the CLM program, and to download the CLM Information and Application Packet, visit www.alanet.org/education/cert.html. The next CLM exam will take place at ALA's Annual Education Conference and Exposition on May 4, 2008, in Seattle, Washington. The application deadline is March 14, 2008.

TOP 10 REASONS TO SEEK CERTIFICATION

Certification immediately identifies you as a practitioner possessing high standards of practice, proven skills, and the knowledge to manage all business aspects of the legal industry. Other benefits:

- 1 Comprehensive knowledge of all areas of legal administration.
- 2 Enhanced self-confidence and self-esteem.
- 3 Enhanced marketability and ability to compete in the job market.
- 4 Increased personal and professional recognition and respect.
- 5 Validation of expertise in all aspects of legal administration.
- 6 Increased opportunities for upward mobility.
- 7 Increased level of competency to manage a law office.
- 8 Increased recognition of legal managers as professionals in the field.
- 9 A sense of empowerment, accomplishment, and pride.
- 10 New opportunities, new friendships, and new resources.



John Kirk, CLM: It is not an easy process, but our jobs, if done well, are also not easy. Taking the certification journey is educationally and professionally rewarding, and obtaining the CLM designation shows that you have “the right stuff.” It shows an added commitment to one’s professional growth, with both the individual and his/her firm being the beneficiaries.



James Cowan, CLM: The changes in legal administration continue to challenge and test us. That’s why the future of the CLM program is strong, as it provides the venue and opportunities for legal administrators to successfully address these challenges.

WHAT ADVICE WOULD YOU GIVE TO INDIVIDUALS TAKING THE EXAM?



V. Greg Rimes, CLM: I recommend talking to others who have taken the exam to learn from their experiences and to participate in local ALA study groups. There were no study groups when I sat for the exam, so I made flash cards with sample questions and read them repeatedly.



Patricia Burns, CLM: I tended to focus my study on the areas that I found more unfamiliar (like personnel law) and took for granted the area (finance) I worked with every day. But I would still say, “Don’t assume ...”



David Rubinstein, CLM: The first task is to overcome the fear of failure. As with most fears, this one, too, has little basis in reality, other than some risk to our egos. The best way to minimize risk to

your ego is to prepare for the exam. Set up a system that will provide structure and the discipline to allow you to prepare. Also, the entire process is confidential. If the individual taking the exam doesn’t share the information locally, no one will ever know that he or she sat for the exam.



Douglas Thompson, CLM: Join a study group, online or in person, and actively participate. Ask questions especially in areas that you are not familiar with.

WHAT OTHER ADVICE WOULD YOU GIVE TO MEMBERS REGARDING CERTIFICATION?



Don Williams, CLM: Regardless of whether an administrator is going to take the test, he or she should get involved in a study group and obtain the bibliographies. The materials developed for the CLM certification are a gold mine for anyone who is serious about becoming a first-class legal manager or administrator.



V. Greg Rimes, CLM: I would recommend others wanting to take the exam not to get frustrated if it takes more than one attempt to pass. Many CPAs and JDs often make more than one attempt to pass exams; CLMs will be no different.



Joan Gleich, CLM: Just get it – you will be glad you did!

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

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