



Tennessee Bar Association

President's Perspective: The Challenges of Change

By [Lucian Pera](#) on Sat, 07/01/2017

It's a time of real change here at the Tennessee Bar Association.

By now, you probably know that our long-time executive director has taken emeritus status, and his successor will be joining us in a matter of days. The lawyer who guided us, seemingly effortlessly, through this change was my predecessor, Jason Long. Of course, he did this on top of the "usual" duties.

Jason has been an articulate ambassador for Tennessee lawyers. He also led our Board of Governors in addressing a number of challenging issues. Thanks to Jason, we reached most decisions by consensus; where we needed debate, there was real respect when we got done — for the process, result and fellow members. And we had some fun. Jason's judgment, his gentle grip on the reins, and his sense of humor kept us on a productive path. The TBA is in his debt.

Of course, the biggest change around the TBA is at its helm.

I've worked with a number of bar executive directors, some truly great. In my opinion, especially as a TBA volunteer through his long tenure, there has been no finer executive director of any bar anywhere in this country than Allan Ramsaur.

There are lots of reasons that our association is in fine shape as his tenure ends. Lots of reasons that our membership grew through the Great Recession; that our revenues, including dues, have also grown; that our CLE is the gold standard for Tennessee lawyer learning and beyond; that we swapped out a decrepit old West End mansion for a historic and functional headquarters downtown; that, for decades, TBA law reform proposals have met so often with approval on Capitol Hill and at the Supreme Court; and that our staff is simply marvelous. They say, "Victory has a hundred fathers." There's one very strong reason, one common factor that contributed mightily to all those successes for almost two decades: Allan Ramsaur.

In the coming months, you're all going to enjoy meeting our new executive director, Joycelyn Stevenson. I can attest that she's completely energized by the new opportunities and challenges ahead of her and the TBA. All our staff, and all your TBA leadership, are doing everything possible to make this transition and her tenure successful.

Change will also guide our most important substantive work this year. Consider just two items.

Indigent Representation

Perhaps the most important issues we will face this year were highlighted by the April 2017 final report and recommendations of the Indigent Representation Task Force chaired by former justice and now dean, Bill Koch. They point the way to groundbreaking improvements in indigent defense for Tennessee's least-privileged citizens, especially concerning its structure and funding.

For decades, the TBA has vigorously supported structural improvements like those outlined in the Task Force report. Further, like the Task Force, the TBA has been a strong supporter of robust funding for

indigent defense, calling for significant increases in both the rates and caps for defenders of the indigent. Stay tuned, but expect a call to action on these issues. Important progress may be within our reach.

Legal Markets Are Changing

During the coming year, the TBA will also continue its strong focus on changes in our work as lawyers.

Our Evolving Legal Markets Committee, launched by former Presidents Bill Harbison and Jason Long, and chaired by former President Gail Ashworth, will continue its two years of work studying the many changes facing not just the profession or the business of lawyers, but the whole market for the delivery of legal services.

Virtually every Journal reader knows that this market — our market — is rapidly changing, in ways that even the most insightful observers cannot reliably predict. For example, the market is growing. Lawyers are experimenting with new business models, and new market entrants are effectively competing with law firms and lawyers. The amount of capital that's pouring into these ventures is staggering. The premise of our Evolving Legal Markets Committee's work is that our market for legal services is in the midst of the most significant and sweeping changes in more than a hundred years.

In my view, the biggest challenge for us as lawyers practicing in these times of great change is how little we know. Our market is really opaque. If you're with a big law firm, maybe you know a little about your market from *The American Lawyer* and *National Law Journal* statistics, but those just scrape the surface of the economics of the law business. For solos and small firms, information about how your market is doing, and how it's changing, is far harder to come by. We think the TBA can help.

Our committee will continue its focus on two tasks: first, investigating exactly what's happening that directly and indirectly affects Tennessee lawyers and, second, educating and spreading the word to Tennessee lawyers about what they find. With better information, we think Tennessee lawyers can react to these changes in a way that honors what we do both as professionals and as businesspeople.

I'm looking forward to the challenges of change, and I hope you are, too.

And do let me hear from you along the way.



LUCIAN T. PERA is a partner in the Memphis office of Adams and Reese LLP. A Memphis native, he is a graduate of Princeton University and Vanderbilt University School of Law. He is a former TBA YLD president and a past ABA treasurer. His wife Jane reports that he refuses to get rid of his 15-year-old Honda Accord. You can reach him at Lucian.Pera@arlaw.com.

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