

New practice group targets those in ‘middle’ of careers

By Brian Cox

When attorneys Ryan Billings and Iker Dieguez describe the newly formed Primerus™ section they helped create, they often employ the analogy of a bridge.

They envision the group acting as a bridge of generations and a bridge of experience.

“Bridging the Gap” was actually the title of the Coffee & Conversation they organized in late April to explore interest in a group that would primarily focus on the needs and development of attorneys in the “middle” years of their careers.

The high attendance and enthusiastic response to the event confirmed that the two attorneys were onto something. The gap they had sensed between younger attorneys just starting out in the profession and senior attorneys established in firm leadership clearly existed.



The Primerus™ Young Lawyers Section nourishes attorneys at the outset of their legal career, and the Managing Partner Section serves and connects lawyers in the later years of their careers, but Billings and Dieguez recognized that attorneys who are senior associates through junior partners had no similar support network.

“If you’re a managing partner, if you’re a senior rainmaking attorney, your needs and what your day-to-day life is like is different from someone who is a senior associate or junior partner,” says Billings, who is a partner at the Milwaukee-based law firm of Kohner, Mann & Kailas.

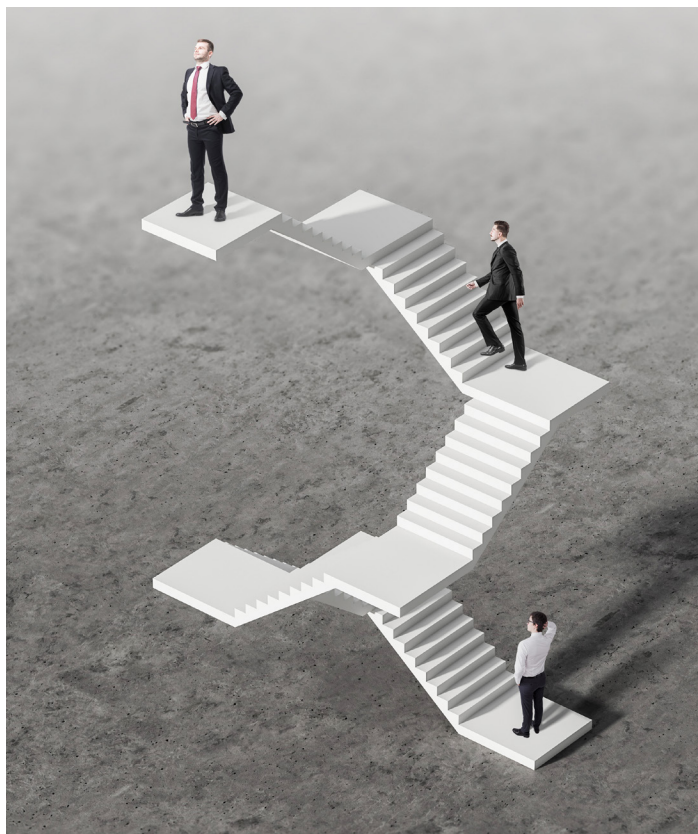
Billings poses the question: Where is a lawyer at 40, the age when attorneys graduate out of the Young Lawyers Section?

“You’re either a senior associate or you’re a young partner,” he says. “You know a lot about the substantive practice of law, but you don’t know as much about the business end of it. You don’t know as much about developing leadership roles in the firm, managing a team of attorneys, or the administrative aspects of running a law firm.”

Billings and Dieguez began discussing the concept of a new group at the Primerus™ Business Law Institute’s International Summit in Washington, D.C., last year. After hearing from other attorneys who also felt the “gap,” they approached Primerus™ leadership about the concept. Primerus™ was open to the idea and talk began about how the new section might look and what resources would be required.

“The idea is to create this group to develop content and networking opportunities for people in the middle band,” says Billings. “The second purpose is to encourage cross-generational and cross-position collaboration and networking within Primerus™.”

“We want to integrate,” says Dieguez, a Mexico City business attorney working out of Cacheaux Cavazos & Newton’s office in Austin, Texas. “We want to be the cement, the glue. The starting point where young lawyers can graduate to and become integrated and where developing partners can prepare for seasoned leadership.”



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A major goal behind the new group – christened the Developing Partner Section -- is what Billings and Dieguez have termed “comprehensive representation.” They contend that law firms will reap higher returns on their investment in Primerus™ if attorneys from the full spectrum of a legal career are involved and connected.

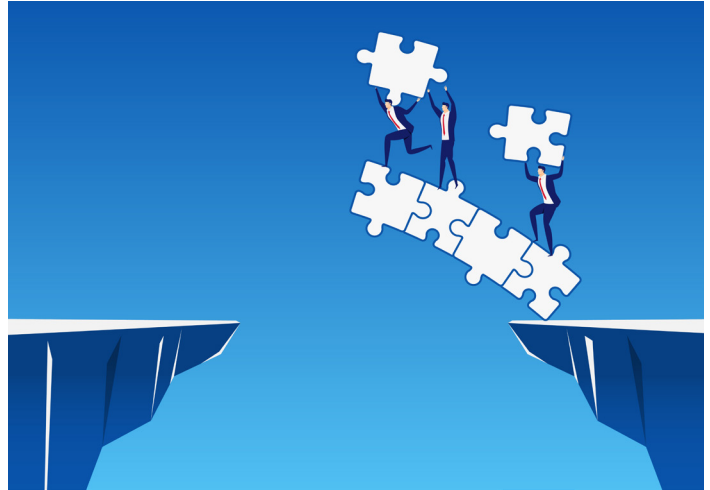
“It’s good for ensuring the continuity of Primerus™ and it’s good for developing content and networking for people who are hungry for it within Primerus™,” says Billings. “I’m in this for the long haul. I’m looking to build lasting relationships for the next 30 years.”

“It benefits everyone,” says Dieguez. “To get and make referrals, you need connections. To make connections, you need to participate, you need to integrate, you need to make meaningful friendships with one another across all career levels in your firm.”

Shortly after the Coffee & Conversation event, a seven-member Executive Committee was formed consisting of Dieguez; Melissa Demorest LeDuc of the Demorest Law Firm in Michigan; John Pearce of Gordon Arata Montgomery Barnett in New Orleans; Jerry Weitzel of the Chicago firm Kozacky Weitzel McGrath; Dan Pierron of Wideman Malek in Florida; and John Hemenway of the Florida firm Bivins & Hemenway. Billings was named chairman.

At its first meeting, the Committee discussed developing a short set of attainable goals in order to gain recognition and gather momentum. Online happy hours and networking events are in the works.

The Committee’s leadership hopes to develop programming that provides members content about issues such as how to develop a book of business; how to market yourself; the nuts and bolts of managing staff and running a law firm and how to mentor and manage younger attorneys. In addition, they plan to sponsor events such as a panel at the Primerus™ Global Conference in Versailles in October, where members from the Young Lawyers Section, the Managing Partners Section, and the new Developing



Partner Section are all invited to present.

There is some early talk of eventually organizing a Developing Partner Section Conference, but for now the plan is to leverage technology in the form of conference calls and Zoom meetings.

Both Billings and Dieguez see the group as something unique.

“I think we’re pioneers in some sense,” says Billings. “There are a lot of groups that focus on young lawyers and a lot of groups that focus on managing partners, but I’m not aware of a developing partner focused group of any bar association or legal group.”

Adds Dieguez: “This is about planning for the future and doing something for the present. We know this is important. And we are excited to see the shape and the form that it takes.”

They encourage interested Primerus™ attorneys to reach out and become involved in the new Developing Partners Section.

“People have a unique opportunity to be part of forming this group in its infancy,” says Billings. “We welcome all ideas, all energy, all participation. Our ears are wide open and we’re very excited about what we can do with this network.”