

Law Practice Management Board seeks ways to build upon strength of Primerus's international reach

By Brian Cox

Leverage – it's a word that members of Primerus's newest committee use often when articulating its ambitious undertaking.

Behind the creation of the Law Practice Management Board is a visionary idea: leveraging the organization's size and breadth to offer members added value through practical education on running a firm and potential cost-saving opportunities.

"The committee's purpose is to provide some of the tools that we all wish we had when we started our firms," says Frank Szilagyi, the managing partner of Szilagyi & Daly in Hartford, Conn. who has more than 30 years of experience as a trial lawyer and is one of the six inaugural board members.

The board represents a broadening of Primerus's relationship with and service to its over 150-member law firms beyond the networking value it offers. Since its inception, Primerus has been a community of attorneys all over the world who share common values and goals.

What if they could share other resources as well?

"Primerus has always afforded firms the opportunity to offer their clients the resources of a larger firm through referrals," says Roger Brothers, the founding partner of Brothers Smith in Walnut Creek, Calif., who "got his feet wet" years ago on the management committee at a larger firm. "Now we're asking how Primerus can pool those resources to negotiate better deals, for example."

The Law Practice Management Board is comprised of members who represent a cross section of practices and law firm sizes. The board intended to stage its unveiling at the 2024 Primerus Global Conference in Asheville, N.C., where it was scheduled to present a panel on succession planning strategies. The conference, unfortunately, was canceled due to the devastation caused by Hurricane Helene, so the board converted the program to a webinar that can be viewed on the Primerus website. Going forward, the board plans to offer six webinars over the course of the next year.

A primary focus of the board, according to its chair, Brian Gilman, is to identify ways Primerus might act as an umbrella organization to improve the buying power of member firms in such

areas as health insurance, professional liability insurance, legal research, recruiting services, and technology.

"The goal is to create some efficiencies of scale that the Primerus membership as a whole could benefit from," says Gilman, who is chief operating officer at Smith Debnam Narron Drake Saintsing & Myers, LLP in Raleigh, N.C. where he directs the firm's financial and operational aspects, including human resources, information systems, marketing, facilities support, strategic planning and business development.

"I'm a unicorn in Primerus, a professional law firm manager," says Gilman, whose more than 20 years in legal management make him an ideal chair for the Law Practice Management Board. "Most firms in Primerus are not of a size to have the bandwidth for a professional manager."

Which, in a manner, is where the Law Practice Management Board could prove beneficial.

As envisioned, the board would help Primerus law firms take advantage of the organization's size and the scope of its members' knowledge and experience. Law firms facing challenges ranging from how to handle cybersecurity to succession planning and human resource management could find support from the board, which has as one of its aims to act as a clearinghouse for practical guidance and vetted best practices. It hopes to create a forum where law practice management concerns can be discussed and heard.



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What's worked? What hasn't worked? What needs to be tweaked?

"The committee was put together to facilitate the gathering of information so that every firm isn't stuck reinventing the wheel when it comes to a lot of common law firm management issues," says board member Rich Cohn, who, as president of Earp Cohn P.C. with offices in Cherry Hill, N.J. and Philadelphia, Pa., has been involved in dealing with myriad law firm management issues and concerns for decades.

"Where I see the board's real power and leverage is in the exchange of knowledge because there is so much that each board member has to contribute," echoes Muliha Khan, an equity partner at Zupkus & Angell, P.C., a WBENC-certified women and minority owned law firm in Denver. "There are some unique challenges that all businesses are facing. And I felt as though not only could I contribute to the board, but I could learn from it."

At one of its first meetings, the board discussed issues around hiring and retaining attorneys. Khan says the discussion was

productive in hearing members' insights into the hiring resources they used, the challenges they are facing in keeping employees, and what they are doing to prevent them from being poached by larger firms.

"This board is an opportunity to address black-and-white stuff, like health insurance, malpractice insurance, and using technology," says Khan, "but also to have discussions about systemic challenges that are much more difficult to solve, such as why aren't there more women and minority equity partners?"

For now, the board is still in the "brain-storming phase," according to Gilman.

"We want this to be an ongoing, interactive board," Gilman says. "We're only as smart as our own experience."

Brothers adds, "If anybody has any question or thinks of anything that may be appropriate for us to look into to address, we'd love to hear from them because questions lead to answers."



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