

Step by step

Inaugural Trial Skills Academy begins virtually March 21



By Tom Kirvan

In life, there are the Ten Commandments, the religious and ethical directives that serve as the foundation of morality.

In legal circles, there are the so-called “Ten Commandments of Trial Advocacy,” a handy list of courtroom principles that can spell the difference between winning and losing in litigation.

Those principles will form the legal linchpin for those enrolled in the inaugural Primerus Trial Skills Academy, a 10-part virtual program beginning March 21 that will reach its climactic stage September 11-13 with a series of in-person mock trials in Philadelphia.

New Jersey attorney Tom Paschos – born in Greece and fluent in his native tongue – is spearheading the betterment program, which is designed to help sharpen the courtroom skills of attorneys across the age and experience spectrums.

“It’s a very exciting and worthwhile program, and I want to thank Jack Buchanan and everyone at Primerus for putting it together,” said Paschos, founder and head of the Haddonfield law firm Thomas Paschos & Associates, P.C.

“This is all about developing the talent we have in Primerus and helping lawyers become better versions of themselves,” Paschos indicated. “If someone is a good lawyer, they’re going to become an even better trial lawyer once they complete the Trial Skills Academy. In short, they’re going to be better for themselves, better for their firms, and better for their clients. The bottom line is that they’re going to add value to themselves and their firms, offering tremendous growth opportunities in both respects.”

Paschos, who earned his law degree from Temple University School of Law in 1985, is a prime example of a value-added attorney.

“I made a decision early in my legal career to obtain a Master of Laws in Trial Advocacy from Temple School of Law,” Paschos related. “There I sharpened my trial skills by learning from some of the finest practitioners in the Philadelphia legal community. Obtaining my master’s degree gave me the confidence to open my own practice. I learned from some of the best trial lawyers around, enhancing my ability to successfully navigate my way around a courtroom.

“I went into that program with the thought that I knew how to try a case, and I left with the belief that ‘I now really know how to try a case,’” he noted. “The difference was amazing.”

Paschos expects that enrollees in the Academy will experience the same sort of transformation, due in large part to the knowledge they will gain from the instructors teaching the programs.

“We are fortunate to have a blue-ribbon list of trial attorneys who are donating their time and talents to the Trial Skills Academy,” said Paschos. “They bring years of experience across the state and federal court systems and are among the most successful practitioners of their craft in the world of Primerus.”

In addition to Paschos, who is nearing the 40-year mark in his legal career, the faculty of the Trial Skills Academy includes:

- John Brydon, the managing partner in the San Francisco law firm of Demler, Armstrong & Rowland, LLP
- Bob Brown, a named partner in the Houston law firm of Donato, Brown, Pool & Moehlmann PLLC
- Nicole Quintana, a partner in the Denver law firm of Ogborn Mihm LLP
- Tom Winner, a named partner in the Las Vegas law firm of Winner & Booze
- Gary Shockey, a named partner in the Wyoming law firm of Gary L. Shockey, PC
- Jay Downs, a named partner in the Dallas law firm of Downs & Stanford, P.C.

The Academy will feature bi-monthly Zoom sessions of 60 to 90 minutes in length, slated for the first and third Fridays of each month starting on March 21 at 1 p.m. (EDT). The target audience will be between 24 to 30 lawyers with varying levels of experience, according to organizers. Each webinar will include a presentation followed by discussion.

The opening program will serve as an introduction to the Trial Skills Academy followed by a presentation on “Nuclear Verdicts,” referring to jury awards that exceed \$10 million. The discussion will focus on “understanding the impact of nuclear verdicts on trials” and “the role of the trial partner in mitigating risks and preparing for nuclear verdicts.”

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The April 4 program will cover “Trial Basics,” highlighting “the 12 essential rules of trial advocacy” and “what every Primerus lawyer should know by the end of the Academy.”

The topics of the eight other programs include:

- The Art of Persuasion: Opening and Closing Statements (April 18);
- The Federal Rules of Evidence (May 2);
- Direct and Cross Examination Skills (May 16);
- Jury Selection and Analysis (June 6);
- Examining Expert Witnesses (June 20);
- How to Hit Home Runs, Singles, and Doubles in Trial (July 11);
- Using Latest Technology in Trial (July 18);
- Mock Trials: Rules and Regulations (August 1).

As a culmination of the online component, four mock trials will take place in person on Friday, Sept. 12 and Saturday, Sept. 13 at the Kline Institute of Trial Advocacy at Drexel University. The Drexel setting is billed as the “only facility of its kind in the U.S., allowing students to hone their skills in a venue that combines the grandeur of a historic courthouse with contemporary courtroom technology, in the very heart of a big-city legal community.”

For Paschos, the Philadelphia venue will add a certain luster to the Academy, noting that the city is where the Constitution of the United States was created.

“It’s such a thrill to have this Academy because it’s one of the ways we can unify all the institutes of Primerus,” Paschos said. “So, whether you’re in the Business Institute or the Defense Institute or the Plaintiffs’ Institute, the Trial Skills Academy will be meaningful and constructive.”

For example, in virtually every trial, the documents tell a compelling story, according to Paschos.

“So, it’s vitally important to go carefully through the documents, laying them out like a long mosaic and then weaving them back together as you tell your story,” Paschos indicated. “These are some of the techniques you will learn in the program on direct and cross examination skills.”

And then, of course, participants will be taught the “Ten Commandments of Trial Advocacy,” learning the guidelines of being an effective, successful trial attorney.

“These are the fundamentals that must be mastered if you’re going to become an exceptional trial lawyer,” said Paschos, rattling off the importance of speaking clearly, commanding attention, and fully understanding the subject matter. “The Trial Skills Academy will help instill the confidence you need to be at the top of your game each time you step into court.”

