

Giving Voice to Corporate Members

DRI Enhances Partnership between In-House Counsel and Defense Bar

By Lise T. Spacapan, Chair, Toxic Torts and Environmental Law Committee



Companies are increasingly sophisticated about demanding value in the delivery of legal services. “Preferred Counsel” programs, alternative billing arrangements and partnerships between companies and firms are driven by the “value” concept, which has renewed vigor, as demonstrated by the Association of Corporate Counsel’s recent launch of its “Value Challenge.” DRI is in a unique position to bridge the gap between in-house counsel and law firms, by facilitating partnerships between companies and their legal service providers.

DRI embraces its role as the leading defense bar association. But to give the fullest voice possible to the corporations whose interests are served by DRI, we need their active participation. Here, I discuss four concrete benefits corporate counsel will achieve if they not only join, but become actively involved in, DRI.

Benefit One: Focus Hundreds of Defense Lawyers on Issues of Critical Importance

Corporate counsel who choose to become involved in DRI committees have the opportunity to shape not only seminar presentations, but importantly, to be thought leaders defining the focus of the defense bar. In DRI’s Toxic Torts and Environmental Law Committee (TTEL), which I chair, we are privileged to have not only the membership, but also the deep involvement, of in-house counsel on our Planning Committee. For example, Marty Zucker from Monsanto has served as program chair in the past and currently is our committee corporate vice chair. With his help several years ago, TTEL started an alliance with a major industry association, the American Chemistry Council. We regularly seek the input of ACC when planning seminars, and ACC holds meetings in conjunction with DRI. This arrangement enhances participation of in-house counsel and provides a vehicle for them to conduct business with other ACC members, benefiting both DRI and ACC companies.

Other leaders in our committee include Peter Drucker, the General Counsel of Akzo Nobel, who currently serves as a vice chair on the 2010 Planning Committee and provides guidance and advice on an ongoing basis. Many corporate counsel offer input to our Planning Committee each year to ensure that we address issues of importance. In recent years, at the TTEL seminar, we have been

pleased to have input and presentations by lawyers from DuPont, Exxon, Dow Chemical, PPG Industries, Ashland and many others.

Benefit Two: Experience the Best Defense-Oriented CLE Available, and Potentially at No Cost to the Company

Continuing Legal Education (CLE) is a primary objective of DRI, and committee leaders and DRI staff fully understand the ingredients of a good seminar. We offer two days of real learning jam-packed with timely and relevant information—not just a few hours of panel presentations. Speakers are true experts in the field, and they submit serious papers in advance of the meetings, which are provided to attendees on CD. Of course, our meetings are in great locations and some members extend their trips to make time for fun. But the education component is paramount, and planning committees spend hundreds of hours to create the best possible CLE.

This learning can come at no cost to companies, because DRI has launched a new program involving “credits” for those holding counsel meetings in conjunction with DRI seminars. The program provides reimbursement for airfare, hotel and registration fees, based on credits earned for seminar registrants who attend seminars at the invitation of the company. The program is a “win-win” for DRI and corporate counsel. For more information contact Beth DeMars at DRI headquarters at bdemars@dri.org.

Benefit Three: Informally Vet Experts, Consultants and Trial Lawyers at No Cost to the Company

Great insight can be gained by observing an expert’s seminar presentation—relating to both the substance of the presentation and the teaching skills of the expert. Because seminars are attended by many trial lawyers, experts and consultants in the field, in-house counsel also have an opportunity to talk informally in advance of retention, and discuss latest developments.

Benefit Four: Network with the Lawyers Who Serve You Already, as Well as Many Others You Will Meet

Lawyers involved in DRI know that our seminars pro-

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vide for the rich exchange of ideas and networking among law firms, consultants and company counsel. In addition to counsel meetings, there are events for all attendees held during the evenings of our TTEL seminars. In this era of email, it is important to recognize that trust is built, and progress best made, by face-to-face discussions of

strategy and legal issues. As Marty Zucker has commented, our seminars provide “a great chance for inside lawyers to convey expectations to their lawyers, not to mention the obvious networking all lawyers (including inside) should do.”

The inside counsel today works smarter and demands more “value for fees.” DRI offers a skilled and efficient platform for

building partnerships with defense lawyers and experts who have corporate interests at heart. If you are interested in joining us, we welcome and encourage your participation at any level. If you are in private practice, we encourage you to offer value to your clients by facilitating their participation in DRI. 