

Skills Savvy | *To Board Certify or Not, That is the Question*

Cynthia Barela Graham*

Did you swear never to take another test in your life after the bar exam? Unless you are a great test taker or are masochistic, who would ever want to take another test, particularly one in the legal field? Are you having panic attacks and triggers just thinking about it? Here are some of the best reasons for taking another test, and becoming board certified by the Texas Board of Legal Specialization (“TBLS”).

1. Sets You Apart

Of the 38,936 female attorneys in Texas, only 1,935 are board certified. The math nerds reading this have already figured out that this is only 5% of female lawyers. And, out of the 25 areas of specialization, only the “child welfare” specialization, with 71%, and the “juvenile” specialization, with 61%, have a majority of female lawyers. “Immigration and nationality” is closing the gap with 48%, “family” with 47%, and “labor and employment” with 41% of the lawyers certified being female. Less than 10% of the lawyers in the following areas are women: “personal Injury trial” (8%); “farm and ranch real estate” (8%); and “civil trial” (7%). In this ever-increasing digital world, being able to say that you have received a TBLS certification will certainly set you apart from most other lawyers.

2. You Will Get Bigger, Better Cases from Other Attorneys

A board certification tells your peers that you know what you are doing. Most attorneys recognize that gaining this credential requires (a) experience, (b) an application process, (c) an examination, and (d) more substantial CLE requirements than for the average attorney. So when an attorney seeks to refer a client to a lawyer in another area of practice, he or she is more likely to refer the client to a board-certified attorney. In the end, this means more business and more income may be headed your way.

3. Material for Your Letterhead, Business Card, and Website

As noted above, potential clients increasingly are heading to the internet to find attorneys, and many look for and take note of board certifications. So including this designation on your website, as well as on your letterhead and business cards, likely will result in more people knowing of your specialization, and, ultimately, more business.

4. Higher Perception of Authority or Knowledge

If you have a brain tumor, who do you want to operate -- a general surgeon, or a cranial neurologist specializing in the diagnosis and treatment of that type of tumor? Just as you would want a specialist, so too does the savvy potential client. In the courtroom, if a question arises during trial and the opposing lawyers have differing views, who is the judge more apt to believe on an unfamiliar topic -- the board-certified lawyer or the other one?

5. Networking Opportunities

Because board-certified attorneys are required to earn more CLE credits than non-certified attorneys, they typically attend more CLE programs. By attending more CLE programs, these attorneys have more opportunities to meet other lawyers who are certified in the same specialization. And these board-certified attorneys often become active in specialized bar association sections as well. The sections work with State Bar of Texas (“SBOT”) CLE coordinators to plan CLE programs. Most often, the speakers at these CLE programs are board-certified attorneys.

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6. Streamline your Practice

For those of you who have a general practice, becoming board certified ultimately will result in you getting more cases in your area of specialization. As the demand for your work in the specialized area increases, you likely will focus on fewer cases involving other areas of the law. As your practice becomes more streamlined, as other lawyers recognize the certification, and as more people become aware of it, you increasingly will become a go-to attorney in the specialization.

7. Recognition by your Peers and Clients

While some of you may think it is a hoax, being designated as a “SuperLawyer” or “Best Lawyer” is more likely when you are board certified. You do not pay to receive these peer-review designations. If I do not know an attorney in a particular practice area, I often will go to the TBLS, SuperLawyer, or Best Lawyer website to find an attorney to refer to my client. Often, clients will go to these websites, too.

8. Conclusion

On a personal note, getting certified in family law by TBLS has been one of the highlights of my legal career. Indeed, my practice changed for the better. Larger and more complicated cases began coming in. My referrals from other lawyers increased. Friends began to identify me with the type of law I practice, instead of just knowing that I am an attorney.

Being active in the SBOT Family Law Section has allowed me to meet more friends than I can count. It is great to be able to call a lawyer in a different city and to ask his or her opinion on an issue. (I practice in Amarillo, which can be small at times, and thus an opinion from someone in a different locale can be a breath of fresh air.) Having the opportunity to speak at various CLE programs has been the single most effective method for sharpening my blade. Educating myself when preparing to present a CLE topic has given me the tools to become a better lawyer because I become more knowledgeable about the law. I would not take the time to do this were it not for the fear of looking like an idiot when I present a CLE program to a room full of smart, well-educated, more experienced lawyers.

Don't spend the remainder of your career thinking about it or wishing for it. If you meet the requirements, be like Nike: “Just do it!” You will not regret it.

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Wellness | *Reimagining Resilience*

Gindi Vincent*

On November 11, I was invited to prepare this article. As a writer and blogger, I said “of course” because the offer would force me to write. I started to pen an article on resilience. “Resilience” is a bit of a buzzy term in leadership circles, and it is invoked in a wide swath of core leadership teachings:

- a. Bouncing back after setbacks or failures;
- b. Persisting in the face of significant obstacles to achieve successful results;
- c. Remaining optimistic, despite current negative circumstances (say, for example, a global pandemic); and
- d. Adapting to change.