

The Continuation of Service

Sails Are Adjusted!

By Thomas F. Segalla



Tom Segalla was honored with the 2017 DRI Louis B. Potter Lifetime Professional Service Award during the DRI Annual Meeting last October. Here, Tom shares some reflections on his professional life and development, including what DRI has meant to him during his 37 years of membership.

Receiving a “Lifetime Award” can have different meaning to different people. To me, it is recognition that there is still a lot more to be accomplished.

Early in my legal career, I developed a motto that has pervaded the development of my career, my ability to develop loyal clients, make friends, and encourage colleagues; and which facilitated my desire to become the best professional possible—not just a lawyer. My goal was to make a difference. My motto became: “Creativity – Visibility – Persistence.”

In the late 1970s and early 1980s, while I believed that I had the “creativity” to achieve my goal, I recognized that I needed a platform to achieve that goal. I marched DRI, which provided the “visibility” to achieve my professional goal realistically. The following quote epitomized both my initial and continued involvement in DRI:

“The pessimist complains about the wind The optimist expects it to change The realist adjusts the sails.”

– William A. Ward

I recognized that being a realist was important to my professional growth. Throughout my 37 years as a member of DRI, its leadership and staff have helped me adjust the sails of my legal career and the ability to develop friends and clients. As a realist, and as I moved through various leadership positions in the DRI organization, I recognized that I would encounter people who could be considered pessimists or optimists, as well as realists. Being able to surround myself with other realists, I was able to lead and participate in many educational projects. This assisted

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my development in a way that I would not have been able to without DRI. Not only have I benefited, but my clients and friends have benefited from my involvement in DRI.

My achievements were not accomplished in a vacuum. Over the years, in addition to my DRI colleagues, I have had the fortune to work with a tremendous group of Goldberg Segalla partners, associates, and staff, who have provided me the solid foundation that was necessary to achieve my professional goal.

While DRI’s format provided me with the opportunity to continue my creativity and increase my visibility, it also allowed me to be persistent in my endeavors. From simply raising my hand to be the Insurance Law Committee’s publication chair in the early 1980s, to raising my hand in 2017 to be the leader of a task force analyzing the proposed amendments to the Restatement of Contracts, DRI has continuously allowed me to put forth my desire to be the best professional possible and to make a difference.

For those who are interested in supplementing their experiences with DRI, there are several “self-help books” that have complemented my DRI involvement and were instrumental in my receiving the “Louis B. Potter Lifetime Professional Service Award.” *True Professionalism* authored by David H. Maister, for example, provided me with the perspective to

necessary to find “[t]he Courage to Care About Your People, Your Clients, and Your Career.” Simon Sinek’s *Leaders Eat Last* helped me answer the question of “Why Some Teams Pull Together and Others Don’t.” You soon realize that not all members of a law firm or a professional organization have the courage to care, or the willingness to pull together, but instead are only interested in developing their own self-interests.

Simply stated, one size does not fit all, and DRI allows many sizes and many avenues to achieve one’s collective goals. DRI and these two authors facilitated my becoming a “we” person, and not an “I” person, and made me recognize:

“It is amazing what you can accomplish if you do not care who gets the credit.”

– Harry S. Truman

The recognition that I received from the DRI Louis B. Potter Lifetime Professional Service Award is a collective achievement that should be shared with all the realists that I have met throughout my DRI tenure, the loyal clients that I have been able to develop, and the loyal members of Goldberg Segalla LLP—all of whom have been instrumental in the achievement of my goals and in setting my sails in the right direction to make a change and a difference.