

Finding Your Next Step



Trial spoke with AAJ Leadership Academy graduates **N. John Bey** and **Miranda Soucie** about how the program helped them up their game as attorneys and leaders in the legal community.

What inspired you to participate in the Leadership Academy?

Miranda Soucie: I had reached the point in my career where I was transitioning into being a business owner and a leader in my office, the community, and the profession. There was a lot on my shoulders. What attracted me to the program was the chance to get a better sense of who I am as a leader—and how best to interact with my colleagues, staff, and clients. It allowed me to up my game for the next part of my career.

When I applied, some people thought

that the Leadership Academy was for young or new attorneys. I wasn't a new attorney when I participated in the program. If you're 10, 15, or even 20 years into practice, the Leadership Academy can still make a difference—and, in fact, I would argue it will make a bigger difference in how you run your business and how you interact with others in the profession.

N. John Bey: I was in the first Leadership Academy class, so it was brand new. At the time, I was becoming more active in AAJ, and it sounded like a great

opportunity to network with others in the organization, to learn more about it, and to learn ways that I could help advance AAJ's mission.

How has the Leadership Academy impacted you?

MS: It gave me insight into who I am as a leader in my office and how I need to be present for the people who work alongside me and recognize who they are, how they need to be led, and how we need to work together. It also gave me a better idea of where my skill set and passions can be applied more effectively as an AAJ member. But ultimately, one of the best parts for me is the friendships that I developed—we communicate about running our businesses and how to practice as a lawyer, but also we are just there for one another.

JB: Some of my best friends came out of my Leadership Academy class. And as an AAJ member, it gave me an opportunity to figure out how I wanted to fit within the organization. It was a great way to learn how AAJ works, what the different communities are, and how to best serve. And it ultimately led me to serving as an AAJ officer.

What's been the most useful takeaway from your Leadership Academy experience?

JB: There were some really good takeaways from the personality testing—what that means for you in terms of how you manage folks and how you run a firm. It helped me become an active listener and to try to diagnose what's going on and why someone in my office is telling me something.

In terms of management style, a lot of times people want to jump in and do what they think will fix the issue. But the Leadership Academy helped me understand that sometimes that's not the

best thing to do—sometimes it's about hearing the person and then helping them in the way they want to be helped, not necessarily in the way that you think will fix the situation.

MS: The biggest takeaway for me has been an increase in the satisfaction of my colleagues around me and my ability to interact, communicate, support, and engage with each of them. We all want a place where we are developing our career surrounded by people we love to work with and in a place where we find joy in what we are doing. The ability to open up, see myself in a different light, and see how I can improve those relationships allowed my office and practice to grow to another level.

How did your experience in the Leadership Academy prepare you for leadership roles within AAJ?


JB: The road from being in the Leadership Academy to becoming an AAJ officer involved me continuing to engage in AAJ. I knew the Leadership Academy was a springboard for being a leader in the organization, but my officer role came about more organically through my work on various committees. It allowed me to learn how I could plug in and help in those different communities. That was an asset in becoming an officer and helps me to lead as AAJ Treasurer today. *(John will be declared Secretary of the association on July 16 at AAJ's 2023 Annual Convention in Philadelphia.)*

MS: I'm the type of person who loves to say yes to everything. After the Leadership Academy, I had a better understanding of what I should say yes to and how I could be better prepared to dive in and really be more involved and effective in my leadership within AAJ. I love education, and I have the honor of now serving on the Board of Trustees of the National College of

Advocacy, the education arm of AAJ. I also love mentorship and elevating other women. Those two areas have really been the core of my passions—but without the Leadership Academy I don't know that I would have had the focus or understanding of where my place in AAJ should have been.

What advice do you have for trial lawyers who want to become more engaged or take on leadership roles at their firms or in the legal community?

MS: First, understand that we have an obligation to the profession as a whole and that if we focus on ourselves, we're leaving out such a big portion of this profession. We need to be focused on the integrity of our profession, bringing up young and diverse lawyers, and continuing to engage them in why we do what we do. Second, if you want to get more involved, take the time to figure out what you're passionate about and then dial in—there is a role for everyone. And know that if you just ask, there are multiple people willing to talk through where your place may be.

JB: I would say just do it. It's about showing up. If you roll up your sleeves and start doing the work, folks will be excited that you're there working and they will want to embrace you. 



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