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From **INTEREST** to **ACTION**

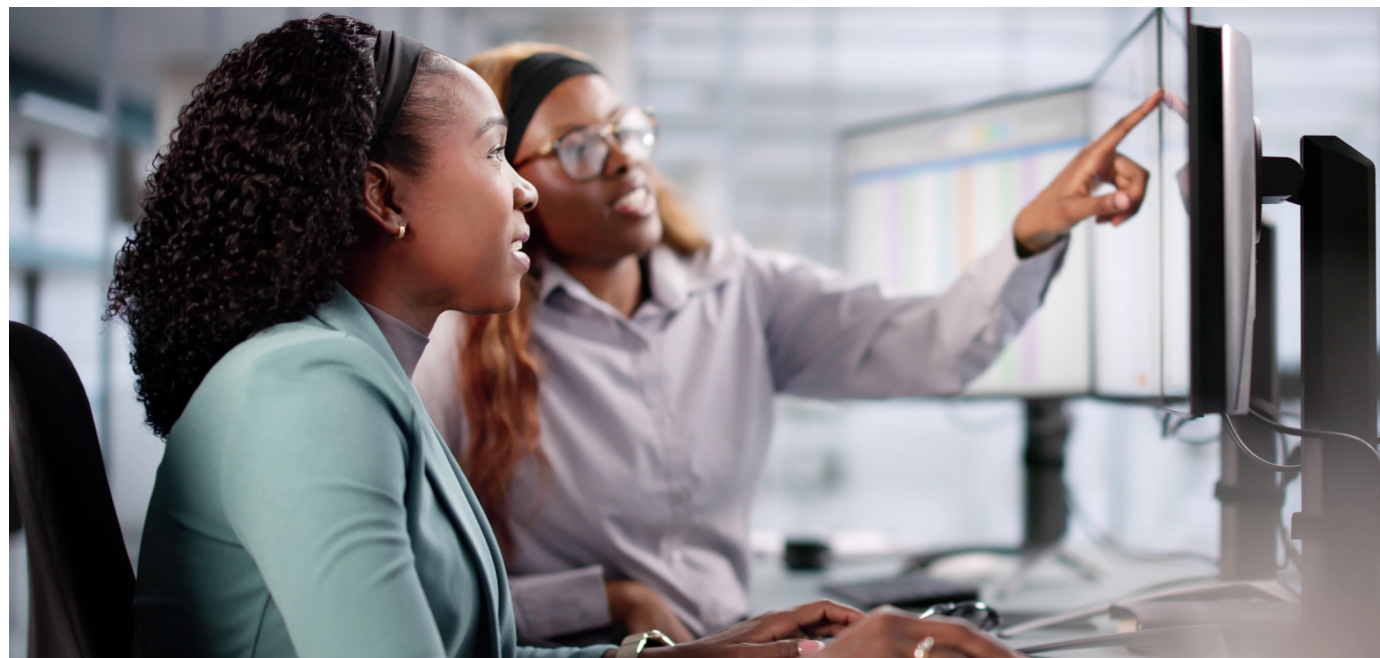
The Role of Law Firms in Legal Career Pathways

By Petronilla Sylvester



From as early as elementary school, students are exposed to basic legal and civic concepts such as rules, fairness, justice, and authority. As students' progress through middle and high school, many become interested in debate and advocacy, public service, business, problem-solving, or the role law plays in their communities. However, interest in law often develops before students have a clear understanding of what the legal profession entails, what legal professionals actually do, and what steps are required to pursue a future in the field. That's why the question for the profession is not only how to spark and sustain interest in law, but how to help students understand what comes next.

While Street Law's Legal Career Pipeline Program introduces students to law and legal concepts, it is also specifically designed to meet them at this important "what comes next?" moment. Through partnerships with schools, teachers, law firms, and corporate legal departments, the program gives students the opportunity to learn legal concepts, practice legal skills, interact with legal professionals, and visit legal workplaces and law schools. Street Law provides the curriculum, volunteer training, and program support, allowing participating law firms and corporations to focus



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on what they are uniquely positioned to offer: people, perspective, professional experience, and guidance. For participating organizations, the program offers a meaningful way to help students understand the legal profession while also giving volunteers a structured and rewarding experience.

Bilzin Sumberg: Helping Students

For organizations like Bilzin Sumberg LLP, a Miami-based law firm that has participated in Street Law's Legal Career Pipeline Program for nearly two decades, helping students understand what comes next is a central part of the firm's involvement. By connecting its lawyers

and professionals with students who may not otherwise have personal access to legal role models, the firm is able to make an impact locally while investing in the future of the profession. This commitment also reflects Bilzin Sumberg's cultural cornerstones of community, interconnectedness, investment, and integrity. Jessica Buchsbaum, the firm's Chief Legal Talent Officer, describes the firm's participation as "an investment in the future of our profession," and a way to help students see that a legal career is attainable, varied, and connected to the community around them.

This investment matters because students need more than general encouragement. As Buchsbaum explains, "Students need access to practical, actionable information." Many students may find "the law" interesting, but they may not necessarily know what lawyers and other legal professionals do every day, what skills matter, what educational steps are involved, or how varied legal careers can be.

Participating firms can help make the path feel more concrete. Buchsbaum notes that the firm tries "to make the path feel realistic and feasible" by introducing students to different practice areas, connecting them with legal professionals who can share their own career

paths, and helping students understand the skills and preparation that support a legal career. In Bilzin Sumberg's program, that guidance has also included visits to a local law school, where students learn about the admissions process and have an opportunity to interact with law students.

One of the most meaningful student takeaways has been the realization that a law firm is not made up only of lawyers. Through the program, students learn about marketing, recruiting, professional development, IT, knowledge management, administrative teams, and other roles that support the work of lawyers and clients. They begin to see a law firm not as an abstract place where lawyers work, but as a complex professional organization with many possible entry points and career paths.

The program also offers value to participating volunteers. Buchsbaum shared that the firm's volunteers often say, "they leave with as much as they give." Lawyers and legal professionals have the opportunity to teach, mentor, collaborate across practice groups and departments, and reconnect with the reasons they entered

the profession. The firm has also found that younger lawyers often connect especially well with students, giving first-year associates and other early-career lawyers meaningful opportunities to lead, relate, and shine in ways that surprise even more senior colleagues.

The NALP Connection

For NALP members, this connection between student support, lawyer engagement, and long-term talent development is especially important. As Buchsbaum observes, "talent

acquisition and development shouldn't begin at law school recruiting." If the profession wants future legal talent to reflect the communities it serves, law firms and corporate legal departments have an important role to play before students reach the formal recruiting process.

Street Law's Legal Career Pipeline Program gives firms a supported way to make that investment earlier. Because Street Law provides the framework, curriculum, training, and ongoing support, firms do not have to build a career pathway program from scratch. Instead,

they can focus on what students need most: information, personal stories, practical guidance, and meaningful contact with people who can help demystify the path forward.

Early exposure may help students imagine law as a possibility. Sustained guidance helps them understand how to pursue it. Through Street Law's Legal Career Pipeline Program, law firms can help students move from interest to action while giving their own professionals a meaningful opportunity to teach, mentor, and invest in the future of the profession.✚



Petronilla Sylvester
(psylvester@streetlaw.org) is the Director of Legal Career Pathways Programs at Street Law, Inc. An experienced attorney and educator, she designs and leads initiatives that

connect legal professionals with communities, expanding access to legal careers while supporting professional development across the legal field.

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