

NALSC® 2026 Annual Conference

THURSDAY FEBRUARY 26

2:00-3:00pm CT **Registration** *Totes sponsored by Chambers and Practus*

3:00-3:15pm CT **Welcome by NALSC President [Melissa Peters, Esq.](#)**, Founder of MP Legal Search
Welcome by Reception Host Adams & Reese, L.L.P.

3:15-4:15pm CT **Opening Session “Brain Care Basics for Legal Recruiters”**

Opening Speakers:

[Ava Diamond Dreyer, LCSW](#), Psychotherapist, Pro Athlete, Coach, Author | Certified in Neuroscience, Nutritional Psychiatry, Brain Health, & Trauma Recovery

[Andrew Blatter, JD/LCSW](#), Veteran Big Law Partner turned seasoned Big Law Therapist

It’s time to discover the “Why” and “How” behind brain care so chronic stress can become a thing of the past. As legal recruiters, both we and our clients and candidates know the pressures of the recruitment process. This session will delve into specific stressful situations recruiters encounter and how to combat these stressors effectively. Resilience is critical and can be boosted much more easily than you might realize!

Best-selling Author, Speaker, Neuroscience Expert, Clinical Social Worker, and Former Pro Athlete, Ava Diamond Dreyer will share her four pillars of Brain Care Basics as well as tried-and-true tips for “healthgeivity” that we can simply incorporate into our daily routine. She will elaborate on Nutritional Psychology, a Specialized Mindset, Unique Movement, and Restoration. Ava says, “Brain Optimization elevates life with science driven, easy-to-implement strategies to enhance mental, physical, professional, and interpersonal experiences.”

Andrew Blatter, JD/LCSW, veteran Big Law Partner turned seasoned Big Law Therapist will join Ava in curating Brain Care Bootcamp content to deeply connect to legal search firm and law firm culture. As a team, they regularly deliver this popular and truly impactful program to law firms nationwide.

In addition, Ava and Andrew are happy to give away more tools for whole health and higher performance via Healthgeivity Hacking in a Roundtable on Friday to help attendees practice what they learn!

Opening Session sponsored by Faegre Drinker Biddle & Reath LLP

4:15-4:45pm CT **Coffee Break and Sponsor Tables** *Coffee Break sponsored by Brown Rudnick LLP and Rimon*

4:45-5:30pm CT **“Did I Catch You at a Bad Time?”: A Fun, Interactive & In-Depth Look at Cold-Calling Techniques and Recruiting Outreach**

Moderator: [Dan Binstock, Esq.](#), Partner at Garrison

Panelists: Legal search firm recruiters as well as law firm recruiting professionals TBD

Role-play along with the audience in real time. How do you and your colleagues successfully reach out to candidates and clients? What strategies work and what doesn’t? Learn from veterans as well as recruiters who are new to the industry. This session will surely be educational and fun, and the take-aways invaluable.

Session sponsored by Baker McKenzie LLP and Bullhorn

5:30-7:30pm CT **Networking Reception** *Sponsored by ALM, lawjobs.com, and ALM Intelligence*

7:30-9:30pm CT **Hospitality Suite with New Orleans Cajun/Zydeco Band and Tarot Cards Entertainment** *Sponsored by Leopard Solutions, a SurePoint Co*

FRIDAY FEBRUARY 27

8:00-9:00am CT **Breakfast / Business Meeting** (all attendees welcome and encouraged to attend)
Breakfast sponsored by Crowell & Moring LLP

9:00-10:00am CT **Friday Opener: “Closing the Generational Communications Gap”**

Speaker: [Chris DeSantis](#), Author, Speaker, Consultant, and Podcast Host

How can we connect and communicate with candidates, clients, and colleagues of various generations? What outreach language and modalities resonate best with each generation?

The workforce has evolved to include four distinct generational groups and now along comes Gen Z. Therein lies the challenge and the opportunity. Each generational cohort comes of age during distinct environmental circumstances; we are all products of our respective times. These circumstances shape our motivations, expectations, priorities, habits, workplace behaviors, and communication styles.

Chris DeSantis has scoured the literature on parenting, generational research, implications of a hybrid workplace and the ever-evolving American worker. He has developed a framework for understanding generational perspectives, clarifying the distinctions between actual and perceptual differences, when it makes sense to talk about these differences and when it doesn't. During this exciting and educational plenary, you will learn what organizations need to do to embrace and communicate with a new generation of workers, Gen Z, and how they can best be engaged, recruited, and retained in a hybrid workplace.

Audience participation will allow us to explore the communication gap in legal recruiting as well as strategies for accommodating the needs of all parties to build relationships and various ways to mentor up, down, and across the cohorts. During the interactive portion of the presentation, Chris will lead an activity drawing from the audience best practices for HOW to effectively communicate between generations and interject as to WHY there may be different preferences and expectations. Also, audience Q&A can include sample emails, cold calls, voice mails, and messages from recruiters to candidates and clients for Chris to address from the perspective of various generations.

For almost 30 years Chris has been an independent organizational behavior consultant. He is a trusted partner to some of the world's largest companies in the professional services, tech, and pharma industries hired to solve some of their most chronic business problems by offering user-friendly solutions aligned with the company's strategic initiatives. Before striking out on his own he was the Director of Training and Development for the American Medical Association and was part of the Human Resource Development group for Brunswick Corporation.

Session sponsored by Pirical and Potomac Law Group PLLC

10:00-10:20am CT **Coffee Break and Sponsor Tables** *Coffee Break sponsored by Fennemore as well as Robinson & Cole LLP*

10:20-12:40pm CT **Concurrent Breakout/Roundtable Sessions** *(three rotations so attendees can attend three topics)*

Concurrent Breakouts taking place concurrently with Roundtables currently include:

1. Top Mistakes to Avoid in Legal Resumes & Best Practices for Presenting Candidates

Moderator: [Wendi Weiner, Esq.](#) of The Writing Guru®

The job market landscape for lawyers has changed dramatically in recent years, making the process of identifying talent and effectively presenting candidates even more challenging. The new digital age reader demands legal resumes and candidate presentations that market relevant competency areas and front-load achievements quickly.

Whether you're looking to bring in new talent, elevate existing talent, or contemplating how to best position top candidates to firms and companies in engaging correspondence, this session will leave you with new strategies for powering through the Q1 hiring season and beyond.

Wendi Weiner is an attorney, legal career expert, and top authority on personal branding, LinkedIn storytelling, and the job search process. Under her namesake company, The Writing Guru®, Wendi creates powerful career and personal brands for executive corporate counsels, C-suite leaders, and board members at some of the largest Fortune 500 and private equity firms. Her well-known column in *Above the Law* provides candid advice to lawyers at all stages on how to find their career happiness, pursue career changes in a changing digital world, and market themselves strategically. Wendi's career background includes serving as a college-level writing professor for 7 years, while simultaneously practicing law for over a decade in big law, boutique firms, and in-house environments.

Breakout session sponsored by Cozen O'Connor P.C. and Quarles & Brady LLP

2. AI in Recruiting: How Bots Help You Do More with Less

Co-Moderators: [Byron Hsu](#), Founder Forward Lateral and [Patrick Moya](#), CEO of Quaero Group

Learn how to maximize the use of AI to help identify and match candidates and opportunities faster, more efficiently, and economically for more and better placements.

Breakout session sponsored by Davis Wright Tremaine LLP and Kelley Drye & Warren LLP

3. Tricky Labor & Employment Situations in Legal Recruiting

Moderator: [Randall Scott Hetrick, Esq.](#), Partner and Labor & Employment Team Leader at Adams & Reese, L.L.P.

Bring your labor and employment questions to the experts for guidance to help you successfully navigate those tricky situations!

Breakout session sponsored by Eversheds-Sutherland as well as Troutman Pepper Locke LLP

4. Navigating Candidate Roadblocks

Moderator: [Stephanie Chen Banjo](#), Founder and Principal of Have Your All Career

Career transitions for lawyers are rarely simple. Midlevel associates and partners each carry their own set of fears – mid-levels often wonder if they're choosing the "wrong" path, while partners weigh the risk of losing what they've already built. The result is often greater hesitation and second-guessing - and recruiters sit right in the middle of that tension, juggling expectations from the candidate, the firm, and their own teams.

This session highlights the often-hidden drivers of hesitation and risk-aversion, and offers recruiters practical strategies to navigate those dynamics. Attendees will leave with:

- A clearer view of the key drivers of hesitation and second-guessing that lawyers bring into career decisions.
- Insight into how those hesitations show up in conversations and impact placements.
- Practical ways to respond so recruiters can build trust, move people forward & support stronger long-term fits.

Stephanie Chen Banjo is the founder of Have Your All Career, an executive coaching and leadership development consultancy partnering with AmLaw 100 firms and other professional services firms. She supports mid-levels in navigating the uncertainty of career transitions, and partners in deepening their influence, driving business growth, and creating teams that perform at a high level.

Breakout session sponsored by Federate Legal Inc. (Recruiter Partnerships Division) and Seyfarth Shaw

Interactive Roundtable Discussions taking place concurrently with Breakouts currently include:

1. **"Building a Team Culture to Increase Your Bottom Line"** - [Kelli Dunaway, JD, ACC](#)
2. **"Brain Care for Recruiters Follow-up: Additional Tips for Whole Health & Higher Performance"** - [Ava Diamond Dreyer, LCSW](#) and [Andrew Blatter, JD/LCSW](#)
3. **"Partner Recruiting for Beginners"** - [Chuck Curtis](#)
4. **"Think Outside the Box: How Recruiters + Firms/Companies Partner to Get Deals Over the Line Via Less Traditional Methods"** - [Andrea Fisher, Esq.](#) and [Karen Kupetz, Esq.](#)
5. **"The Business of Law in 2026: What Recruiters Need to Understand to Stay Ahead"** – [T.J. Henry, Esq.](#)
6. **"By the Numbers: Formula-Based and Other Partner Compensation Models"** – [Chris Wilson, Esq.](#)
7. **"Make it Stick: Candidate Integration"** - [Kerry Jean Moore, JD](#)
8. **"In-house Recruiting: Working Around Obstacles"** - [Mary Clare Garber](#)

Roundtables Honorary Sponsors: Akerman LLP; Allen Matkins Leck Gamble Mallory & Natsis LLP; Arnall Golden Gregory LLP; Baker & Hostetler LLP; Bass, Berry & Sims PLC; Benesch Friedlander Coplan & Aronoff LLP; Bilzin Sumberg Baena Price & Axelrod LLP; Buchanan Ingersoll & Rooney PC; Cadwalader, Wickersham & Taft LLP; Cox, Castle & Nicholson LLP; Duane Morris LLP; Fried, Frank, Harris, Shriver & Jacobson LLP; Gibson Dunn & Crutcher LLP; gunnercooke LLP; Hanson Bridgett LLP; Hogan Lovells US LLP; Jones Day; Latham & Watkins, LLP; Lowenstein Sandler LLP; McGuireWoods LLP; Michelman & Robinson, LLP; Moore & Van Allen PLLC; Pillsbury Winthrop Shaw Pittman LLP; Polsinelli; Reed Smith LLP; Stradley Ronon Stevens & Young, LLP; VedderPrice P.C.; Wilson Sonsini Goodrich & Rosati; Womble Bond Dickinson

12:45-1:45pm CT Luncheon with Door Prize Drawings

Luncheon sponsored by Kilpatrick Townsend & Stockton LLP

Door Prize Drawings sponsored by The Cluen Corporation

1:45-2:40pm CT **Keynote Session: [David Lat, Esq.](#)'s Inside Scoop on the Legal Market, Current Events, and the Future of Legal Recruiting; Interview by NALSC President [Melissa Peters, Esq.](#)**

David will share his unique industry insider intel and perspectives gained from more than 25 years of working in and then writing about lawyers and the legal profession. Topics will include key trends shaping the legal industry and lawyer recruiting today and into the future and, based in part on the two years he spent in the world of legal search, he will reveal what he was surprised legal recruiters didn't know about the practice of law and why it matters for their success.

David Lat is a lawyer-turned writer. He publishes Original Jurisdiction, a newsletter on Substack about law and legal affairs, and he writes a column for Bloomberg Law. His work has also appeared in The New York Times, The Washington Post, and the Wall Street Journal, among other publications. Prior to launching Original Jurisdiction, David founded Above the Law, one of the nation's most widely read legal news websites, and Underneath Their Robes, a popular blog about federal judges that he wrote under a pseudonym. He is also the author of a novel set in the world of the federal courts, *Supreme Ambitions*. Before entering the media world, David worked as a federal prosecutor in Newark, New Jersey; a litigation associate at Wachtell, Lipton, Rosen & Katz, in New York; and a law clerk to Judge Diarmuid F. O'Scannlain of the U.S. Court of Appeals for the Ninth Circuit. David graduated from Harvard College and Yale Law School, where he served as an editor of the Yale Law Journal.

Keynote sponsored by Sterlington

2:40-3:00pm CT **Coffee Break and Sponsor Tables** *Coffee Break sponsored by Goodwin Procter LLP*

3:00-3:45pm CT **Concurrent "Section" Sessions**

Search Firm Attendees Only – "Tech Tools Brainstorming Session"

Co-Moderators:

[Ethel Hong Badawi, Esq.](#), Co-Founder & Principal at Pollack Badawi Group (PBG)

[Robert Nutinsky](#), Managing Director at Alevistar Legal Search

Section Session sponsored by Firm Prospects and Goulston & Storrs PC

Law Firm Attendees Only – "Selling Your Firm to Recruiters and Candidates"

Moderator: [Ross Weil](#), Partner at Walker Associates

Panelists:

[Kathren Davis](#), Director of Firmwide Partner Recruiting at Pillsbury Winthrop Shaw Pittman LLP

[Kenneth Falcon Esq.](#), Managing Partner at Falcon, Rappaport & Berkman LLP

[Carryn Sheen](#), Senior Director of Talent Management at Crowell & Moring LLP

Section Session sponsored by Greenberg Traurig, LLP and Nixon Peabody LLP

3:45-4:15pm CT **Champagne Toast, Coffee Break and Sponsor Tables**
Coffee Break sponsored by Loeb & Loeb LLP and Morrison & Foerster LLP

4:15-5:15pm CT **Where Do We Go from Here? How Technology is Taking Over the Legal Profession and Other Predictions**

Panelists:

[Valerie Spengler](#), VP of Marketing at Practus

[Gif Thornton, Esq.](#), Managing Partner of Adams & Reese, L.L.P.

[Brent Turner](#), Senior Vice President, Client Engagement at Harbor (previously with Thomson Reuters)

Speakers will analyze how technological, regulatory, industry, and political changes are affecting recruiting priorities and offer predictions moving forward.

Session sponsored by Mintz, Levin, Cohn, Ferris, Glovsky and Popeo, P.C. and Practus

6:00-9:00pm CT **Networking Reception & Dinner Co-hosted by NALSC and Adams & Reese at [The Jaxson on The River](#)**

We greatly appreciate our esteemed co-host Adams & Reese, L.L.P. Also, a special thank you to Platinum sponsor ALM as well as Gold sponsors Chambers and Practus.

SATURDAY FEBRUARY 28

8:30-11:00am CT **Breakfast Town Hall Meeting**

Conference highlights including a recap of Breakouts, Roundtables, and Section Sessions as well as industry questions and comments.

Breakfast sponsored by Falcon Rappaport & Berkman LLP

Town Hall Meeting sponsored by Offit Kurman, P.A. and Perkins Coie LLP

----- **FAREWELL** -----