



John Michalik: CEO and Executive Director of the Association of Legal Administrators

[By Robin Salisian]

Ever since junior high school, John Michalik wanted to become a lawyer.

"The idea or goal was to be a litigator," said the executive director and CEO of the Association of Legal Administrators (ALA).

However, those plans were short lived, and instead of litigation, Michalik became involved in professional association management, a field in which he has thrived for 32 years.

"Opportunities came along to use that law degree in many ways I had never imagined," said Michalik, "and [I] progressively acquired skills and experiences [that] eventually led me to a 'home' and now a...career in professional association management."

While attending the University of Minnesota, where he received both his undergraduate and law degrees, Michalik became involved with a fraternity and the university branch of the YMCA. There, he immersed himself in leadership positions, which, he said, gave him an initial feel and appreciation for the workings and values of voluntary associations.

"Very quickly after law school, and after a short stint at a large firm, I went to work for the Lawyers Co-operative Publishing Company (later acquired by and now a part of Thomson+West)," Michalik continued. "At LCP, I wrote annotations and articles for publications like *ALR* and *the American Jurisprudence 2d* legal encyclopedia. That writing experience translated into some ambition to move into legal education, and after five years at LCP, I accepted the

position of director of continuing legal education at the Washington State Bar Association in Seattle."

"That put me into both my first significant management position and my first association working experience," he added.

From director, he moved to executive director, and after 15 years, he left the bar association. For what? A six-month mid-career break.

Q. What do you do for fun?

A. Golf. Reading. Writing (short stories, etc.). Rare book collecting. Hiking. Travel-almost anywhere!

Q. What CD is in your CD player right now?

A. Diana Krall, soft jazz, and R. Carlos Nakai, Native American flute music.

Q. What is the last magazine you read?

A. *Fortune* and *Sports Illustrated*.

Q. What is your favorite TV show?

A. Almost none, as such-about all I ever watch is the news and sports, especially pro golf.

Q. Who is your role model?

A. Good question and not one I've ever really reflected on. I suppose, on balance, anyone-like Bill Dwyer and Bill Gates and so many others-who I have found to be thoughtful people of high integrity who are confident and sure of their own persona and who, whether intentionally or just because "that's the way they are," are not only able to make positive impacts on others but spur those others to do likewise.

"It was one of the best things I've ever done for myself," he said.

"[Fortunately], as that time neared its conclusion, a position opened in [the] University of Washington administration that included, primarily, serving as director of development and alumni relations at the UW Law School-a position that rather quickly evolved into being assistant dean at that institution," he continued.

It was there that Michalik experienced one of his most memorable career accomplishments-creating the structure and path for organizational achievement.

"As one example, at the [University of Washington], I laid the groundwork and developed the fundraising plan for both the campaign that led to what was then a unique private/state partnership in the ultimate construction of what is now the new law school, William H. Gates Hall, and beyond that, a pretty creative, much longer-term approach to private fundraising at the law school," said Michalik. "Those efforts reached culmination after my departure, but I have a lot of pride not only in that building but in what the institution gained in terms of an approach to long-term financial support and commitment from the private sector."

Not until a "very persistent executive recruiter/headhunter" convinced him to apply for his current position as ALA's CEO did Michalik consider leaving UW. But he did. And today Michalik has been ALA's CEO and executive director for 13 years and counting.



According to its website, ALA, a “10,000+ member professional association comprised of lawyers and non-lawyers who run, manage, and lead the business side of private law firms, corporate and government legal documents, court systems, and other legal organizations,” was founded in 1971 by Mary Ann Altman, Bradford W. Hildebrandt, and Robert I. Weil. In 1972, ALA’s first chapters were in Richmond, South Florida, New Jersey, and Los Angeles. Today, ALA is 100 chapters strong and has members from more than 30 countries.

“As with anyone who has achieved some degree of professional success, the journey of my life is marked by many from whom I have learned and who have, consciously or unconsciously, influenced my development,” said Michalik when asked about mentors in his life. Marked by many, indeed. Michalik offered accolades to numerous supporters

in his life ranging from his high school track and debate coaches to business and law school professors to his “very successful predecessor as executive director at the Washington State Bar.”

Washington legal professionals Judge William L. Dwyer and William H. Gates, too, influenced Michalik greatly and impressed upon him “the need and perhaps the duty to play that same role with those who I could influence and mentor in similar ways.”

With 32 years of experience, Michalik knows the legal field inside and out. The advice he gave?

“Never confine yourself to a box or limit your conceptions of what you can do. Be alert for the arrival of opportunities, even if they are a little outside your current comfort zone—the sum of the experiences you acquire and the

opportunities you approach with an open mind can take you down many paths and many adventures and successes in life that you would never anticipate. Don’t be afraid to try and fail; be afraid only if you are reluctant to try and if you don’t learn from failures you do experience.”

ON THE NET

Association of Legal Administrators
www.alanet.org/home.html

University of Washington
www.washington.edu

Washington State Bar Association
www.wsba.org