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PLAINTIFF ATTORNEY

By not recruiting at law schools, trial lawyers miss out on an invaluable opportunity to educate the next generation of attorneys about the importance of plaintiff work. Fortunately, bridging this gap requires only a little effort—and benefits everyone.

Unlike large defense firms that flock to top law schools in droves, smaller plaintiff firms rarely interview at law schools. These firms don't have regular job openings or formal summer associate programs, and often cannot commit to hiring young lawyers nearly a year in advance. Instead, plaintiff firms usually hire on an ad hoc basis—when work increases or someone leaves—and they usually hire lawyers they already know. But when you only interview who you know, it's hard to hire the best person. These practices can also make it difficult for minorities and women to join the plaintiff bar. The path of least resistance is well trod, but unenlightened.

Law students' path to employment is often equally arbitrary. Law schools' placement offices benefit big firms, large public interest firms, and government agencies by giving them physical access to interview students on campus. Generally, career offices make little or no effort to expose students to firms that don't come to campus. For their part, law students don't know much about plaintiff work, except what they might glean from

a first-year torts class. They don't realize that plaintiff work might fit their values and abilities, and they don't understand the nature and excitement of a plaintiff personal injury practice. They show up for on-campus interviews hoping to receive offers from big firms or other entities that regularly recruit on campus.

The benefits of a law school focus. By not recruiting at law schools, plaintiff firms are missing an opportunity to access a ready pool of talented law clerks and future associates. The on-campus interview process can be dynamic. Even if a plaintiff firm doesn't hire a well-qualified candidate straight out of law school, the connection made through the interview may eventually lead to a clerkship, a temporary position, or a future permanent job. Or perhaps the connection won't lead to a hire but instead to a future networking relationship.

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Law school campuses need plaintiff lawyers so that future judges, attorneys, and legislators understand the importance of the civil justice system and protecting victims' rights. Each interaction between a law student and a plaintiff lawyer is a potentially valuable lesson for that student to carry over to their future legal practice. We cannot expect future judges and legislators to be sensitive to what we do if we don't educate them.

The value of plaintiff work. The educational process starts in law school. Even if we don't have a job to offer, we should speak at law schools to share the importance of what we do. Plaintiff lawyers have compelling stories to tell. We protect and advance the rights of victims. We choose our clients. We work on the most serious matters for those who are most in need, and we improve their lives through our victories.

In big defense firms, lawyers don't choose their clients. Rather, they receive assignments and files from an insurance company or a huge, self-insured entity. Defense lawyers must account for their work in six-minute increments and are pressured to bill life-swallowing swaths of time each month. Young associates at large law firms rarely make it into court and have little opportunity to hone their skills. At the end of a successful case, the defense lawyer's reward often is nothing more than a complaint about the bill. These attorneys work for clients whose status and health will remain largely unaltered by the success or failure of that lawyer on that particular case.

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Few plaintiff lawyers aspire to be defense lawyers, but many defense lawyers would love to join your firm. According to an article in the *ABA Journal*, big firm lawyers are the least satisfied with their careers, when compared to lawyers at small firms, in the

government, or public interest sectors.[1] This may be because lawyers, from the start of their careers, expect that they will be able to contribute to the public good. While many defense lawyers may feel themselves falling short of this goal, plaintiff lawyers contribute to the public good by getting defendants to remedy their bad behavior and by obtaining compensation for injured clients. That's hugely satisfying.

Closing the gap. Plaintiff lawyers and law students both need and benefit from more interaction. State and local trial organizations should encourage and facilitate interviewing and speaking at area law schools. But don't wait to be asked by a committee head—get over to the nearest law school. Meet the students and tell them what you do. Listen to them and help them. They'll appreciate it—and so will you.

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Note

1. Jill Schachner Chanen, *Are You Happy Now?*, A.B.A. J., Nov. 2010, www.abajournal.com/magazine/article/are_you_happy_now/.