



This edition’s BBC Leadership Spotlight feature with Leslie A. Berkoff. Ms. Berkoff is a Partner with the firm of Moritt Hock & Hamroff LLP where she serves as the Chair of the firm's Dispute Resolution Practice Group, is the former Chair of the Bankruptcy Practice Group, and serves on the firm's Management Committee. Ms. Berkoff is active in the American Bar Association (“ABA”) Business Law Section where she serves as the Section's representative on the Dispute Resolution Advisory Council, and is the Chair of the Dispute Resolution Committee, the Vice-Chair of Programming for the Business Bankruptcy Committee of the Business Law Section and the Vice-Chair of the Bankruptcy Study & Policy Committee. She is also a member of Business Law Today where she serves as a contributing editor on topics concerning Dispute Resolution.

**Q&A:**

**1. How did you come to be a bankruptcy practitioner?**

My trajectory to become a bankruptcy lawyer started (unknowingly at the time) in law school when two of my study partners insisted that I could not miss taking bankruptcy from a national leader in the field, Alan Resnick. Alan was a pillar in the bankruptcy community, and I not only excelled in his class, but when it came time for me to apply for clerkships, Alan was one of my key references and an advocate. I first

clerked for the Honorable Allyne R. Ross, who at the time was a Magistrate Judge in the Eastern District of New York (now District Court). Towards the end of my clerkship, the legal market took a hit and an opportunity presented itself to apply for a bankruptcy clerkship with the Honorable Jerome Feller, a Bankruptcy Judge in the Eastern District of New York (who just recently passed away). It was with Judge Ross' encouragement and Alan Resnick's input that I applied for and was fortunate to spend the next two years clerking for Judge Feller.

During this time, I simply fell in love with bankruptcy. For someone that wanted to be in the courtroom, the practice of bankruptcy law afforded both the ability to frequently be in court and to challenge myself with statutory construction and interpretation, as well as tap into a creative side to propose solutions to complex problems. While I did not start with the intention to become a bankruptcy lawyer, my path eventually led me here.

## **2. How did you get involved with the ABA BBC?**

My involvement in the ABA BBC grew out of my involvement in the ABA. I was a member of the ABA for quite some time, and over the years I met and became friends with many different bankruptcy professionals. I believe it was Sharon Weiss (a close friend) who encouraged me to become more active in the BBC. Given my extensive experience in healthcare bankruptcies, I was asked to co-chair the BBC Healthcare Committee and from there I have held multiple different roles in both the BBC and other Committees.

## **3. Who was the best mentor you have had, and why?**

I have had many mentors over the course of my career. At the early stages, I was fortunate to receive guidance and advice from some tremendous jurists. During law school, I interned for Judge Reena Raggi, United States Circuit Court of Appeals for the Second Circuit (ret.), when she was still serving as a District Court judge. Judge Raggi taught me that it was important to always be prepared and to truly understand the meaning and application of the cases we so often throw into long string cites in our papers. She (like all of the judges I worked for) was always fully prepared, more so at times than some of the lawyers who appeared before her, and her work ethic and attention to detail has remained with me through my career. I was fortunate that both Judge Ross and Judge Feller, who I previously mentioned, shared a similar belief in the need to uphold the integrity of the law and to practice with honesty and respect. Building onto these tenets, Judge Feller taught me how to interpret the Bankruptcy Code, and how to apply statutory rules of construction to give meaning to words, punctuation and even the absence of a word in one section over another. All of these wise jurists had a huge impact on how I conduct myself as a lawyer and approach both my practice and my career.

While I have had many other mentors over the years, both my firm's founder Neil Moritt and the firm's managing partner Marc Hamroff, were my initial mentors in private practice. They provided me with the tools and personal support which allowed me to grow and develop as a lawyer over the years and find my own footing as both a business originator and attorney. As a result, I not only was able to develop my practice and service my clients, but also speak, publish and serve on multiple organizations and boards.

**5. What tips do you have for other mentors?**

Mentoring requires an understanding of the nature, skills and needs of your mentee. You need to be able to mentor in a way that provides a benefit to your mentee and allows them to apply the guidance and advice in a meaningful way - just because something worked for you does not mean it will work for someone else as they may have a different lifestyle or personality. It is important to be constructive, but practical in the advice and guidance provided.

**6. What advice would you give to younger members of ABA?**

Younger members should recognize that the ABA is unique from other organizations. At the ABA and within the BBC in particular, members have the opportunity to interact with more judges and thought leaders in a different way than other organizations. Among other things you are interacting with people from multiple disciplines that are involved in the ABA, not just bankruptcy. This wider scope of involved professionals can provide a robust educational experience and the opportunity to interact and learn from a wide variety of professionals.

Additionally, one of the great things about the ABA is the level of support and ability to become involved at a very early stage. As a junior lawyer you are afforded the chance to be a part of educational panels, committees, publications, and more. These are tangible items that you can show to your firm or your organization so that it can appreciate what you are getting from the ABA not just in terms of exposure, but as potential leadership roles. By getting involved at such an early stage, the ABA can play a critical part of your growth as a young lawyer and have a platform to develop leadership skills and enhance your practice.