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CHAPTER



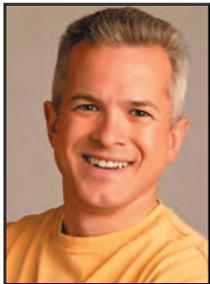
Volume 2 Number 1

# The Agenda

January 2009

## “Leading through Crisis: If You Have To Ask, It’s Too Late”

by Stevie Ray



Everyone is saying about the current economic crisis, “This will weed out those who weren’t really working hard in the first place” or “This will separate

the customer service pros and real salespeople from the lazy order-takers.” One thing I haven’t heard is, “This will separate the good manager/leaders from the bad ones.” The reality is, tough economies like the one we’re in do just as much to weed out bad leadership as they do poor employees.

I’ve been asked dozens of times in the past few months to deal with the issue of leading through crisis. I can’t imagine how many people are re-reading the book, “Leading at the Edge,” the story of how Ernest Shackleton kept his entire crew of sailors alive after their

ship was crushed at the South Pole in 1914. The times might be different between then and now, but leadership hasn’t changed much. And, in my opinion, if you’re just starting to look into this issue, it’s probably too late. Salespeople who just sat back and took orders from customers during the fat years have to scramble to pick up good sales skills needed during lean years. And with the turn-around time needed for customers to respond to better service, there is a painful lag between improved performance and a better bottom line.

The same is doubly true for leaders. Leadership is based almost solely on trust. You can be the most brilliant thinker and planner in the world, but without the trust of your team your ideas go nowhere. Trust is not an intellectual exercise; it is a purely emotional response. If you haven’t been fostering an atmosphere of trust in your workplace, you’ve got the same scrambling to do that a poor sales professional has to catch up. And if you think the lag time is long for improved sales to affect revenue, try rebuilding trust in a low-morale team.

Try saying, “We’ll get through this together” if together hasn’t been part of your dialogue all along. Try saying, “We need to work harder to keep the company afloat” if the company has just laid off eight of their best friends. And it certainly doesn’t work to say, “Times are tough for all of us” if your employees see you pull up in your Mercedes as they step off the bus.

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This isn’t to say that employees are unrealistic. They know that the boss will always earn more, have final say, and have a bigger parachute to jump with when the plane goes down, but there are some companies where the employees aren’t bothered by that fact. In fat economic times, it is easy to ignore the type of leadership those companies possess. I see them now in my workshops. Rooms full of employees ready to do what-ever it takes to ride out the storm. I also see the companies where the staff has gone from best friends to suspicious enemies, just hoping that their own heads aren’t the next on the chopping block, and ready to undermine or backstab anyone in order to keep their jobs. When leaders ask me, “How can I regain morale in my group?” my question in return is, “What did you do to lose it in the first place?” If their answer is, “The economy went sour” I suggest they look inward. Marriages rarely end because of an extra-

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## Message from the President

By Michelle Mistretta



Happy New Year! Another year is over and a new one is just beginning. My time as President is coming to an end and, as your outgoing 2008 President, this will be my final President's message. As I reflect on 2008 and plan for the New Year I would like to say it has been a privilege and an honor to serve as your Chapter President this past year. I would like to say "thank you" to all of you for your support, efforts and membership in the Metropolitan Detroit Chapter. Our Chapter is only as strong as its members. You make a difference!

I shall become the Board's Past President and retain my position as Editor of the Chapter's newsletter, The Agenda. I look forward to assisting in any way possible. It is with great pride and humility that I pass the gavel to Denise Doherty, as there could not be a more worthy replacement. Congratulations Denise! I would like to take this opportunity to thank each and every Board member for their dedication, support and friendship over the past year. It has been my great pleasure to know and work with each of you.

Denise will become President effective April 1st, and will be honored along with the new Board of Directors at our Chapter's April 16th monthly meeting. I hope to see you all there!

Good luck to you all, happy New Year, and I look forward to working with you in the future!

## Diversity Scholarship Winners

By Pat Costigan

The Metropolitan Detroit Chapter of ALA is pleased to announce the award of its annual diversity scholarship to the following Law School students.

**Jehan Crump-Gibson** – Wayne State University Law School

**Jarvis Williams** - Thomas M. Cooley Law School



**Jehan Crump-Gibson**

The Chapter is excited to report that interest in our diversity scholarship project continues to grow among Michigan law school students. 19 Applicants presented essays to the Chapter's Diversity Committee chair, Raisa Medvisky of Williams Williams Rattner & Plunkett, for consideration.



**Jarvis Williams**

The committee held personal interviews with 6 of those 19 applicants, and then sat down for the tough assignment of selecting the scholarship recipients. These 6 individuals provide insight into what is great about today's young professionals. They provide mentoring support to youth in their communities, establish organizations to provide assistance to those battling mental health issues, and volunteer for organizations such as AmeriCorps Vista; in essence, they see a problem and take action for change.

Having participated in this program since its inception, I encourage you to consider volunteering to serve on the 2009 Diversity Committee. You will come away from the experience with an awe of today's law school student, and optimism for the future of the legal profession.

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important information, a  
calendar of events and past  
editions of the Newsletter!



# Surviving and Thriving in Today's Business Environment

By Denise Williams, PhD and Nancy J. Snell



Nancy J. Snell

The current economic downturn places unprecedented pressure on companies and their leaders to do more with less and to maintain a competitive edge in an increasingly complex, "24/7" global economy. Today's leaders struggle with shrinking business, global competition, dwindling budgets, operational cutbacks, and staff reductions. Moreover, leaders facing reorganization must not only facilitate the transition of terminated staff, but must also shore up the morale and re-energize productivity of the staff that remain.

Business leaders find themselves juggling multiple priorities more frequently than ever before. Research shows that such multi-tasking does not enhance one's productivity or output, but actually compromises it. Psychologists have noted that people may perceive themselves as more productive when multi-tasking, but it is seldom the case. Many work tasks require activity from different parts of the brain. If we perform tasks which require several brain functions to be tapped concurrently, the brain is not able to effectively support all of these divergent tasks. Thus, the quality of one or more of our simultaneous work products will suffer.

In light of these concerns, it is perhaps no surprise that business leaders are feeling more overwhelmed and stressed than ever. Although business leaders have typically thrived on the fast pace and energy of the business environment, many feel that this environment has now become more stressful than exciting. It has often been noted that the two greatest contributors to workplace stress are (1) lack of control over the parameters of one's job and work expectations, and (2) lack of sufficient feedback about and recognition for one's work

accomplishments. Historically, business leaders have had a fair amount of control over these factors in their work lives, and as such were often buffered from negative stress. However, today's challenges have eroded many business leaders' sense of control over their work life, with potentially disastrous results.

Prolonged stress is associated with a host of negative physical symptoms, including elevated heart rate, increased blood pressure, higher cholesterol levels, and excessive blood sugar levels. If one is at risk for heart disease, stroke, or diabetes, long-term stress can increase the risk of developing these diseases. According to the global Inter-Heart Study, people who endure prolonged high levels of stress are twice more likely to suffer from heart disease than those who experience lower levels of stress.

As a result, business leaders must take stock of their current stress levels and assess the strength and effectiveness of their coping skills in the face of stress. They must then take immediate action to preserve their own health and well-being, or they will not only be unable to rise to the sizeable challenges they currently face, but they may fall prey to serious health problems in the process.

## **The Effect of Stress on Well Being and Productivity**

The negative effects of stress on health, well-being, and productivity are well documented. Prolonged stress can cause our bodies to become "stuck" in what is called the "fight or flight reaction". This is a state of increased physical capability and readiness which prepares us to fight or flee from an imminent threat to our survival. This reaction is rooted in the most primitive and basic survival mechanisms within our brains.

Despite the fact that our modern threats are mostly intangible, and there is nothing concrete to fight or to flee from, our brains and bodies still react as if we were in immediate physical danger. With prolonged stress, our

**Many work tasks require activity from different parts of the brain. If we perform tasks which require several brain functions to be tapped concurrently, the brain is not able to effectively support all of these divergent tasks. Thus, the quality of one or more of our simultaneous work products will suffer.**

bodies remain in a physical alarm state. We may suffer from exhaustion, muscle tension, body aches, headaches, heart palpitations, excessive sweating, nausea and gastrointestinal distress, anxiety, mood swings, anger, and depression. To minimize the negative effects of stress on our health, it is important to:

1. Be vigilant for the physical signs of prolonged excessive stress, and incorporate time for relaxation, exercise, sleep, social interaction, and pursuit of hobbies into your day. Do not fall prey to the fallacy that "if I just work harder, I can get everything done". By building in time for work-life balance and guarding your downtime as diligently as you guard your work time, you will be able to recharge and re-energize so that you will be better able to effectively work on your tasks and accomplish your goals.
2. Be vigilant to your everyday thought processes. Research has shown that certain thoughts and attitudes can either amplify the negative effects of stress or protect us against stress. Stress-producing thought processes include:
  - "All or nothing", "black and white", or inflexible thinking

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We are pleased to announce the  
**2009-2010 Region 3 Management Team**

\* \* \* \* \*

**Fran Gentili, Greater Kansas City Chapter**  
**Julie Hill, Gateway Chapter**  
**Cheryl Nelson, Minnesota Chapter**  
**Karen Griggs, Director, Greater Kansas City**

**Welcome New Members**

**Christine Applebaum**, Seyburn, Kahn, Ginn, Bess & Serlin, P.C.

**Perpetua Crawford**, Helm, Miller & Miller

**Rosemary Gilchrist**, Giarmarco Mullins & Horton

**Rachel Klein**, Siemion Huckabay Bodary Padilla Morganti & Bowerman

**David Robson**, Miller Canfield Paddock & Stone

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## MARK YOUR CALENDARS TODAY!

### 2009 Schedule

<i>January 21, 2009</i> Indispensable Legal Technology	<i>August 20, 2009</i> Law Firm Profitability Enhancement
<i>February 18, 2009</i> Leaves of Absence	<i>September 16, 2009</i> Strengthen Your Bottom Line With a Well-Built Budget
<i>April 22, 2009</i> Mastering Time (Time Management)	<i>October 21, 2009</i> Stepping Out of the Rubble: Developing a Disaster Recovery Plan
<i>June 17, 2009</i> Strategies for Digging Out of the E-mail Bag	<i>November 11, 2009</i> Control Stress Before It Controls You
<i>July 15, 2009</i> Alternative Work Arrangements	<i>August 19, 2009</i> Records Management -- Finding the Needle in the Haystack

**Registration Opens in December 2008**

Program descriptions and educational credit details can be found at [www.alanet.org/webinars](http://www.alanet.org/webinars) or call (847) 267-1252 for more information.

# ALA Board Acts to Extend Benefits to Members Who Become Unemployed in 2009

The economy and potential layoffs in a number of law firms in 2009 are facts of life. ALA's Bylaws provide that if a Regular Member becomes unemployed, they continue as a Regular Member for 180 days from the date they become unemployed. At that point, they are transferred to Associate Member status -- and that usually means significantly fewer benefits in terms of loss of access to Members Only sections of our Web sites, not being eligible for discounted fees for attendance at ALA conferences and programs, etc., as well as loss of Regular Member benefits and opportunities (including holding office) at the chapter level.

Regular Members who have renewed their membership for 2009 and become unemployed during 2009, will benefit from a new policy adopted by ALA's Board of Directors in recognition of the heightened resource and networking needs of unemployed members in the tighter job market that characterizes the current economy. In this situation,

they will continue as Regular Members for 180 days and if they are still unemployed at the 180-day mark, they will become Associate Members as required by the Bylaws.

However, under the Board's recent action, ALA will extend and continue all Association membership benefits as if the unemployed member was still a Regular Member. This extension of Regular Member benefits beyond the standard 180-day period for unemployed members will continue until the member becomes employed and requalifies for Regular membership status OR the end of 2009, whichever comes first.

To assure that this extension of benefits continues, members who become unemployed during 2009 should contact the Membership Department at ALA Headquarters via phone at (847) 267-1252 or e-mail [membership@alanet.org](mailto:membership@alanet.org) to make ALA aware of their unemployment and to provide updated contact information.

# Surviving and Thriving in Today's Business Environment

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- "Making mountains out of molehills"; magnifying a small mistake into something large and insurmountable
- Over-generalizing, where a single event leads to a sweeping judgment
- Predicting that things will turn out badly in the future with only limited information
- Giving oneself negative feedback, such as "I was so stupid."
- Taking blame for everything that happens around you, whether you could control the situation or not

If you fall prey to such counter-productive thought processes, take some time to challenge the validity of these thoughts, and develop alternative, more positive thought processes you could use to react to and solve problems and challenges that arise in your life. This technique is called "cognitive restructuring" and is a very effective way to reduce stress and increase your sense of confidence and control.

As we have seen, the stress of the current business environment can have a range of negative effects on the health, well-being, and productivity of business leaders. By being sure that we prioritize time to renew our energy and preserve a healthy work-life balance, we can weather these challenges with a minimum level of physical and emotional damage.

*Denise Williams, PhD, MS is the founder of WellTrek Health Education, and assists employers seeking to improve the health and well-being of their employees. Nancy Snell is Area Vice President for Gallagher Benefits, they provide benefit consulting for employers with strategic focus on helping businesses develop and implement worksite wellness programs. She was also a speaker at our January meeting.*

## Save the Date



### February 19th

Club Venetian—5:30 pm  
Vendor Appreciation Night  
No charge for members  
Cocktails and hors d'oeuvres

### March 10th

Skyline Club, 2000 Southfield Town Center, Partner Event—7:30 am  
Breakfast and speaker - John Stolfus, Director and Senior Market Strategist, Bank of America  
Comments on President Obama, the financial marketplace, 401(k) plans, the 2009 outlook for the Midwest, Detroit and the autos

### April 16th

Club Venetian—11:30 am  
Member Lunch & Meeting  
Speaker - Michael Caruso

## Dramatic Finish to Indy Conference

by Karen Griggs, CLM, Region 3 Director



The Regions 2 & 3 Educational Conference and Exposition was “the best regional conference I’ve ever attended” is a comment I continue to hear

from many of our members. ALA members from Alabama, Washington D.C., Florida, Georgia, Kentucky, Maryland, Mississippi, North Carolina, South Carolina, Tennessee, Virginia, Puerto Rico, Illinois, Indiana, Iowa, Kansas, Michigan, Minnesota, Missouri, Nebraska, Ohio, Wisconsin and as far away as South Africa raced to Indianapolis on November 13 to enhance their skills and education.

Bruce Christopher, an ALA favorite speaker, started us off with his insightful and humorous presentation on the art of leadership. We were enlightened by Marshall Fletcher, former ALA President, on corporate America’s commitment to “going green.” This topic was enhanced by a walking tour of the state-of-the-art conference facility of Bose McKinney

& Evans, LLP, an Indianapolis law firm that has been recognized for its “green” initiatives by the Chamber of Commerce. One of the favorite sessions by attendees was “Excel(lent) Techniques” presented by Ivan L. Hemmans, III. A technology session on spreadsheets would not typically be entertaining, but Ivan has an engaging and lively style. I’m sure we’ll be seeing more of him at future ALA events.

There were many more great sessions and speakers including strategist, Barry Elms, and consultants Jim Durham and Alan Olson.

On Friday evening, we took a lap around the famed Indianapolis Motor Speedway and made a pit stop at the Hall of Fame Museum. We then met at the Brickyard Crossing for dinner and entertainment by the Groove Box Band, a group of musicians which includes an ALA member of the Indiana Chapter, Stephanie Carter.

The exhibit hall was sold out! Our business partners demonstrated new products and services which will enhance the operations of our firms. We especially appreciate the generosity

of our top level exhibitors Document Technologies, Inc. and SunTrust and our VIP sponsors ABA Retirement Funds, Robert Half Legal, and Gunlocke.

The Indiana Chapter members were great hosts and were instrumental to the success of this conference. Special thanks to Debbie Elsbury, local liaison to the Region 3 Management Team, and chapter president Jenni Ellis.

We finished with Derek Daly, a former race car champion and currently a radio broadcaster and motorsport analyst for ESPN. Derek offered a model of how to thrive in a high speed environment. We know that the speed of doing business is moving faster. We learned that working faster is not about doing tasks with greater speed but is about removing the speed bumps that slow us down. Derek’s dynamic presentation left us supercharged and ready to head home to put in motion the many things we learned in all of our sessions.

Please “Meet Me in St. Louis” on October 9-10, 2009, for the next great Region 3 conference!



## A First Timers Take on the Region 3 Conference

By Beth Lockwood

As a new employee at Zausmer, Kaufman, August, Caldwell & Tayler, P.C., I was happy that they wanted me to attend the Regional ALA meeting in Indianapolis this past November. It was a very informative conference and I learned many things that I could directly apply to my position. Along with all the sessions, we also got to see the Speedway and had a nice evening at the complex. What I enjoyed most of all was meeting people in the same situation as me and sharing ideas and friendship with them. Special thanks to Michelle Mistretta and Pat Costigan for showing this “newcomer” the ropes! I am looking forward to the conference next fall in St. Louis.

# ALA Holiday Party held at Morton's Steakhouse in Southfield on December 11, 2008



## Bill Mech, Cleveland Chapter, Named Outstanding Volunteer

By Karen D. Griggs, CLM, Region 3 Director

At the recent Regions 2 & 3 Education Conference & Exposition, Bill Mech was recognized as the recipient of the Region 3 Outstanding Volunteer award. Bill is the Office Administrator at the Cleveland office of Squire, Sanders & Dempsey, L.L.P., an international law firm with 29 offices and approximately 800 attorneys worldwide.

Bill has been very involved with both the Cleveland and Pittsburgh chapters. In fact, Bill has not missed a year of serving ALA in some capacity since he joined in 1991. He has served as President of both chapters and on numerous committees for both chapters including Vendor Relations, Education, Newsletter, Technology, Publicity and Social Events. Bill served as Chair of the 2000 Region 1 Nominating Committee. He has attended numerous regional and annual conferences and

has been a speaker at both the local and international levels. He attended the first Extraordinary Law Firm Conference, an example of his commitment to enhance his skills and promote his firm as an excellent place to work. Bill currently serves on ALA's Vendor Relations Committee.

In addition to his ALA service, Bill has promoted our profession to other organizations such as Ursuline College where he serves on the Member Steering Committee for development of a bachelor of science and a certificate program in legal management. Bill also served on the Cleveland Bar Association's Steering Committee for Law Firm Matchmaker Event, a program to support minority-owned businesses.

Bill has been described as a "go to" person for ALA colleagues and business

partners. He is frequently called upon for his opinion on issues that often go beyond the typical day-to-day operations of a law office.

Mike Krnac, current Cleveland Chapter President, sums up Bill's dedication as follows:

**"I believe Bill goes beyond giving his all to the ALA, in fact, he gives his all to the profession."**

*(This is the second outstanding volunteer award for Region 3. The recipient of the first award was Mary Jennings of the Gateway Chapter. Chapter presidents submit the nominees for this award so if you have a candidate in mind, please let your chapter president know!)*

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Accept the *challenge*  
Create the *extraordinary*



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# "Leading through Crisis: If You Have To Ask, It's Too Late"

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marital affair; the affair is a symptom that the marriage was over already. A bad economy doesn't break up a good team, a bad economy illuminates problems that were underneath the surface all along.

So how do you fix broken leadership? Simple. Be honest. That sounds simple enough, but I would bet my classy 1998 Plymouth Grand Voyager minivan with the squeaky side door that the majority of leaders in America are pulling their cards closer to their chest rather than opening up to their teams. Now is the time to sit down with all your employees and say, "I'm scared too." And tell them why. Now is the time to find out what people are most afraid of, so a good leader can assure them that everything will be done to avoid that outcome.

And, in the spirit of honesty, I am not simply harping on leaders who are going through a difficult time. I don't exempt myself from this lesson. Every time I walk out of a company I think to myself, "Am I following the same advice I've just given them?" Too often I look around my own house and see the same shortcomings I point out in others. I'm not a dishonest guy by nature, but when I fear for the security of the future I will clam up and try to solve the problem myself. Great strategy, ignore the very people who are in place who could help the most. So I have some conversations coming up where honesty will be the centerpiece. I hope that step will make for a solid year ahead, without the slow turnaround of a bogged down

**The reality is, tough economies like the one we're in do just as much to weed out bad leadership as they do poor employees.**

sales cycle. I don't have time to form a human pyramid to reach the cookie jar.

*Stevie Ray is a nationally recognized corporate speaker and trainer, helping companies improve communication skills, customer service, leadership, and team management. He can be reached at [stevie@stevierays.org](mailto:stevie@stevierays.org).*

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