

Certification Matters

Q&A with Gary McNeil It's Been a Great Ride



One of the first things I did was use technology to simplify CLE reporting and to better track the files of certified attorneys.



1. How did your legal career get started?

I was actually kind of a science guy growing up and thought I might go to medical school. I took some history courses in my early years at Baylor University and found them more invigorating than my chemistry courses. So I changed my major to history and made plans to go to law school. During my third year at The University of Texas Law School, I found out that the State Bar was looking for someone to take on a research project. I thought it would be interesting to try something different and be a good opportunity to get my foot in the State Bar's door. After I finished the project, I passed my bar exam and was hired on as a staff attorney in ethics and disciplinary matters. It was pure luck. Just one of those things that happens when you're at the right place at the right time.

2. Why did you join TBLS 30 years ago?

I was working with the State Bar planning CLE programs. A colleague who worked for TBLS told me the TBLS executive director was leaving to pursue another business opportunity, and asked if I would be interested in the position. I then thought, 'gosh, working at a specialization board sounds very interesting.' I also figured it will allow me to interact with people in different fields of laws. Boy was I right.

3. What were your goals when you first started?

The entire certification process was paper driven and we had redundancies in reporting CLE. So one of the first things I did was use technology to simplify CLE reporting and to better track the files of certified attorneys.

4. How were you able to grow the number of Board Certified attorneys to what it is today?

We didn't have to do a whole lot. Attorneys tended to concentrate in one or two areas of practice so it was a logical progression for attorneys to become Board Certified. It is certainly reflected in their careers.

5. What are some of your proudest achievements as Executive Director?

I've hired a group of people that are better at technology than I am. Secondly, we overhauled the TBLS exam system so that all exams are in the same format, which provides consistency across the various specialty areas.



Certification Matters



It's been really great to develop relationships with attorneys throughout the state.



6. What does the future hold for TBLS and the Texas legal industry?

In some ways, Board Certification is more important than ever because of the advent of the internet. People can advertise what areas they practice online and being Board Certified helps attorneys differentiate themselves as tested and certified specialists in specific areas of law.

7. What has been your favorite part of being Executive Director?

It's been really great to develop relationships with attorneys throughout the state.

8. What would you want your legacy to be?

I think just overall being a helpful and fair person. Also, with the help of the 12-member board, maintaining the integrity of the TBLS certification process.

9. What are your retirement plans?

I plan to be a part-time consultant as I'd like to keep a hand in the legal profession in some capacity. As for the fun stuff, my wife and I will be taking our first trip to Cuba in a few months. We also hope to visit Italy later on as my wife's never been.

10. Any final thoughts?

Thank you to everybody. I really do feel like I am a person with many blessings. It has been such an honor and privilege to work with so many wonderful people. I couldn't have asked for anything better.

“We have all worked together for so long, it's difficult to imagine Gary not leading us anymore. He is truly a great boss, and he'll be impossible to forget.”

— TBLS staff

