

From the President
Elizabeth Hernandez
BD&J, PC

Consumer Attorneys Association of Los Angeles
CAALA

Why our presence matters

BEING OF SERVICE, LEADING WITH DIVERSITY, AND MAKING SPACE FOR EVERYONE

Service has always been one of the defining forces in our profession. It strengthens organizations, shapes policy, and builds community. When we choose to serve – not out of obligation, but out of conviction – we transform the spaces we enter. When our service is grounded in diversity, authenticity, and lived experience, we don't just participate in leadership; we expand it.

Throughout my career, and especially during my time as CAALA president, I learned that leadership is not about titles or hierarchy. It is about responsibility to show up, advocate, mentor, and create pathways for others. Leadership is about ensuring that the organizations we love reflect the communities we serve. It is also about recognizing that our presence at the table is not symbolic; it is strategic, necessary, and deeply impactful.

Why your service matters

Being of service to an organization, such as CAALA, is an act of commitment. It means investing time, energy, and heart into something that will outlast us. Service strengthens institutions because it brings people together around shared values and purpose. It also creates continuity, stability, and vision while ensuring that the organization does not simply react to change, but anticipates it.

Service also builds credibility. When you serve, you learn the inner workings of an organization such as its challenges, strengths, and culture. You understand how decisions are made and how progress happens. You become part of the solution. In organizations like CAALA, where advocacy, justice, and community are at the core, service becomes the bridge between individual passion and collective impact.

Diversity in leadership is essential

Service alone is not enough. Leadership must reflect the diversity of the people it represents. Diversity in leadership is not a box to check; it is a strategic advantage. When leaders come from diverse backgrounds, cultures, and lived experiences, they bring perspectives that enrich decision-making and strengthen the organization's ability to serve its members.

Diversity ensures that voices historically left out of leadership are heard, and policies are shaped by people who understand the realities of marginalized communities. It also ensures that mentorship is accessible, opportunities are equitable, and the organization evolves with the world around it.

In my own leadership journey, diversity has never been abstract. It has been personal. As CAALA president and while serving the past six years on CAALA's Executive Committee, I have seen how representation changes the dynamic of leadership. When people see someone who looks like them, shares their cultural experience, and who understands their challenges, they feel seen, valued, and invited. That sense of belonging is transformative.

There is a place for everyone at CAALA

CAALA is strongest when it is inclusive and there is a place for everyone at CAALA. Whether you are a new lawyer finding your footing, a seasoned litigator shaping the future of trial practice, or a community leader advocating for change, CAALA has room for you. The organization is not defined by a single perspective; it is defined by the collective strength of its members.

Leadership is impact

Leadership is not about being the loudest voice in the room. It is about being the voice that makes space for others. Leadership is also about using your platform to elevate those who have been overlooked and about ensuring that the next generation of lawyers sees leadership as accessible, attainable, and meaningful.

While I have been serving as CAALA president and when I served as the 2024 President of the Mexican American Bar Association, I learned that leadership is impact, the ability to change the trajectory of an organization, and the ability to inspire others to serve. Leadership is also the ability to create programs and opportunities that ripple outward for years, while helping to defeat initiatives which harm the access to justice. Leadership is not measured by the number of meetings you attend. Instead, it is measured by the number of lives you touch.

Why having a seat at the table matters

Having a seat at the table is essential, not for prestige, but for influence. At the table, decisions are made, policies are shaped, and opportunities are created. When we are not there, our communities are not represented. A seat at the table allows us to advocate for fairness, equity, and justice. It also allows us to challenge assumptions, broaden perspectives, and ensure that leadership reflects the diversity of the membership. It allows us to make a difference.

Having a seat at the table is only the beginning. What matters most is what we do once we are there.

A rallying cry to serve

Here is my call to action – to all of us who believe in justice, community, and the power of showing up. Service is not abstract. Leadership is not accidental. Diversity is not optional. Our presence at the table is not something we wait to be offered. Instead, it is something we claim, cultivate, and use to lift others. If we want CAALA to continue to reflect the best of our profession, we must step forward. If we want our organization to continue evolving, we must lead. If we want our communities represented, we must take our seat at the table and make room for those who come after us.

So, let's rise, serve with purpose, lead with courage, embrace diversity as strength, claim our seat at the table, and pull up chairs for others. Let's continue to make CAALA stronger, more inclusive, and reflective of the world we live in. We can make a difference that lasts. I encourage you to take the next step and be of service.