

Insights from a First-Time Attendee and Speaker at the ACC Annual Meeting



By: Jennifer Denny, Senior Litigation Counsel, Cardinal Financial

For those of you whom I have not had the chance to meet yet, my name is Jennifer Denny. I am Senior Litigation Counsel at Cardinal Financial (a mortgage lender). I joined ACC shortly after becoming an in-house attorney, and joined the Communications Committee to become more involved. A colleague on the Communications Committee asked if I would be interested in joining the Litigation Practice Area Network (“PAN”) leadership on the national level, which was another great way to be involved. Joining committees and volunteering time can really be as simple as that – most committees need additional input and volunteers to contribute time and expertise.

One of the unexpected outcomes of being on the Litigation PAN was getting a chance to attend and speak at the Annual Meeting this past October. All of the PANs get a chance to submit topics for the annual meeting and have a programming chair to head that effort. The Litigation PAN had been selected for several presentations, but had a speaker drop out of an ethics panel presentation on short notice. The Litigation PAN leadership asked for volunteers to fill the speaker role, and I raised my hand. The topic was one that I could study for and use the presentation materials that had already been prepared by the other members of the panel. Being a speaker meant I received free admission to the conference that I would not have otherwise been able to attend.

The weeks leading up to the conference are full of emails and meetings to help participants prepare, including how to sign up for the different programs, information on the vendors and other attendees, and invitations to the after-parties hosted by various vendors and ACC chapters. The conference organizers did an excellent job making sure the attendees knew what to expect once they arrived.

Despite all the preparation, if I could describe the first day of the conference and the initial impression, it would be *overwhelming*. There is something exciting and interesting going on almost every minute and in three different places, both before and after the official

events and programs. It is important to plan ahead to make the most of your experience. Goals can be getting as much CLE as possible, or networking with the ACC leadership, or getting all the swag from the vendors (bring an extra bag to bring stuff home!). If I get to go to the conference next year, my advice to my future self is to schedule some downtime and to wear more comfortable shoes.

Being a speaker at the conference was an extraordinary experience. Our panel was scheduled in one of the largest ballrooms and had over 300 people in attendance. Walking into that huge room and climbing onto that podium was surreal, inducing a feeling of Imposter Syndrome – this was a room of attorneys that represented the largest and most notable companies from around the world. What did I have to say that would be important to them? Then I remembered the great equalizer among all attorneys – the need for CLE ethics credits. I did my best to smile, to entertain, and let the preparation I had done do the work for me. The presentation was over before I knew it and I hope the people who attended had as much fun sitting in that room as I did.

I am extremely grateful for the experience of attending the annual meeting and being a speaker. I hope to attend again next year and join other members from our St. Louis Chapter on the national stage.