

Bridging the Gap: Ethical Advocacy and Civility with Pro Se Litigants

Livestream: March 19, 2025, 3:00 – 4:00 PM ET (*available on-demand afterwards!*)

Series Description:

Exemplifying Professionalism

This series of courses explores the critical role of professionalism in legal practice and examines how civility shapes relationships with clients, colleagues, opposing counsel, non-lawyers and the court. Using the [American Inns of Court Professional Creed](#) as a springboard, you'll learn practical applications of professionalism and ensure your advocacy is not only effective but also exemplary.

Program Description:

Navigating Legal Professionalism: Balancing Client Needs with Ethical Standards

I will serve as an officer of the court, encouraging respect for the law in all that I do and avoiding abuse or misuse of the law, its procedures, its participants and its processes.

—The American Inns of Court Professional Creed

I will honor the requirements, the spirit and the intent of the applicable rules or codes of professional conduct for my jurisdiction, and will encourage others to do the same.

—The American Inns of Court Professional Creed

Pro se litigants can be found at all levels and in all types of courts. The prevalence of the pro se litigant can be attributed to the cost of legal assistance and difficulty accessing legal aid, and the proliferation of and easy access to online legal resources. In addition, there is a perception by many that any individual can navigate the legal system with the right information, even in complex cases. These factors increase the chances of encountering pro se litigants at some point during your career. Legal codes of conduct dictate that an attorney exhibit legal professionalism, even in the face of those not bound by such codes, making it a particular challenge for an attorney to uphold their professional and ethical obligations.

This session will provide you with the tools and knowledge needed to navigate these challenging scenarios with confidence and integrity. Gain clarity on your responsibilities to the court and your client, with a special emphasis on ethical considerations when dealing with pro se litigants. Explore actionable strategies for treating pro se litigants with civility and respect, ensuring a constructive and dignified legal process for all parties involved. Discover practical resources and effective communication techniques tailored for individuals unfamiliar with legal proceedings. Learn how to maintain ethical boundaries when advocating for clients, even in situations where opportunities may arise that could benefit your client at the expense of ethical standards.

Hear from both the Bench and the Bar and leave the program with:

- An understanding of your obligations to the court and your client.
- Practical applications for working with a pro se litigant that consider civility and respect.
- Resources for working with someone unfamiliar with the legal profession's understanding of professionalism.
- Suggestions for keeping ethical guardrails in place in the face of unforeseen opportunities.

Outline:

- **Welcome and introduction of the topic**
 - Why civility and professionalism matter when interacting with non-attorney represented parties.
- **The Standards of Professional Conduct**
 - *American Inns of Court Guidelines*
 - *American Bar Association- Model Rules of Professional Conduct*
- **Real World Challenges When Faced with a Pro Se Litigant**
 - Pro Se Lack of Legal Knowledge
 - Avoiding Appearance of Impropriety or Manipulation
 - Hostility or Unreasonable Expectations from Pro Se Litigant
 - Courts Expectations – Attorney to “Assist” Pro Se Without Overstepping
- **Q&A and Closing Remarks**

Presenters:

Carree Nahama (*moderator*) is the founder and owner of Nahama Law, celebrating its 10th anniversary of dedicated service to injured children and their families. With a reputation for compassion, diligence, and exceptional results, Carree leads her legal team to make a meaningful impact on clients' lives. An award-winning trial attorney, she was honored with the prestigious “Streetfighter” award by Consumer Attorneys of San Diego (CASD) in 2023. Throughout her career, Carree has exemplified the highest standards of civility and professionalism, setting a benchmark for others in the legal field. She is a Bencher and team leader for the Louis M. Welsh Inn of Court, where she fosters mentorship, ethical advocacy, and professional growth among peers. As co-chair of the Women’s Caucus for CASD, Carree champions initiatives that empower attorneys and promote inclusivity within the legal community. Guided by the Latin phrase “bona fide,” Carree embodies authenticity, integrity, and passion. A committed volunteer and gifted connector, she is known for her advocacy of intergenerational collaboration and her ability to unite professionals across various specializations and firm sizes.

Hon. Kenneth J. Medel (Ret.) brings 14 years of judicial experience and 23 years of civil litigation experience as a trial attorney to Signature Resolution’s neutral panel. With a rich background as a prosecutor, civil litigation trial attorney and judge with the San Diego County Superior Court, Judge Medel provides an innovative approach to mediation. Judge Medel began his career as a deputy district attorney in San Diego, where he completed 40 jury trials as well as countless court trials and other evidentiary hearings. Beyond the courtroom, Judge Medel has been deeply involved in the legal community. He served on the Board of Directors and as President of the University of San Diego School of Law Alumni Association and on the San Diego Defense Lawyers Board of Directors. He enjoys decades-long involvement with the San Diego Inn of Court (a hands-on trial techniques program for lawyers), the San Diego Chapter of the American Board of Trial Advocates, and the Welsh Chapter of the American Inns of Court, serving on the Executive Board and as President for all three organizations. He has lectured extensively on a variety of civil litigation, evidence and ethics topics to legal organizations in San Diego and at all three San Diego law schools and has been the presiding judge over countless mock trials at both the high school, college and law school levels, and consistently for the San Diego ABOTA Masters of Trial program.

Jenn French is a partner at Lynch Carpenter, LLP where she represents plaintiffs in complex class action litigation involving privacy, employee wage and hour, and consumer protection. She also serves as court-appointed counsel for criminal appellants through Appellate Defenders, Inc. Jenn volunteers as pro bono counsel through Casa Cornelia Law Center, the San Diego Volunteer Lawyer Program, and the Southern District of California's Pro Bono Panel. She is passionate about increasing access to justice and giving back to her community and is a volunteer leader in numerous bar organizations, and an active member of both the San Diego Appellate and Louis M. Welsh American Inns of Court. In addition to practicing law, Jenn is a freelance soprano soloist and a staff singer at St. Paul's Episcopal Cathedral. She lives with her husband and two cats in the Hillcrest neighborhood of San Diego.