

At Cahill Academy, Associates Shape Their Own Training

By Tracey Read

Law360 (July 30, 2025, 12:00 PM EDT) -- When Cahill Gordon & Reindel LLP associate Lauren Riddell first joined the firm in 2019, the litigation training she received was primarily focused on substantive hard skills, such as how to approach writing motions.

Back then, programs were taught by partners — usually in tandem with a senior associate.

Today, the firm has trainings that are often run by associates, and are designed to help junior lawyers develop soft skills, such as improving communication and teamwork, as well as substantive ones. It is part of a professional development program dubbed Cahill Academy.

"I've seen a lot of growth in the associates and their skills to manage teams, which is a direct result of that program," Riddell said.

Launched in January 2022 in the wake of the COVID-19 pandemic as the firm faced obstacles with educating new lawyers, Cahill Academy has grown into a firmwide program that is the formal training complement to the on-the-job training that associates receive through coaching from more senior lawyers and working on matters.

"As the programming went on and really grew, we received a lot of feedback from associates with respect to the training that either they would want to see or they thought they needed, and the Academy was very responsive to providing that type of programming," Riddell told Law360 Pulse.

The Genesis

Josiah Slotnick, a banking and finance partner and member of Cahill Gordon's executive committee, said the program's visionary was Susanna Suh, a former New York corporate partner who is now a senior counsel. Suh was on the verge of retiring during the pandemic but instead stayed on to help develop and launch Cahill Academy.



Associates Ryan Connolly, Timothy Hartnett and Alexander Van Zijl listen in on a Cahill Academy session earlier this year. (Courtesy of Cahill Gordon)

"Susanna is a terrific lawyer and has represented investment banking companies for decades," Slotnick said. "So getting her to turn that ability and skill into creating the Cahill Academy program was a real success for us."

The firm intended to roll the program out sooner than 2022, but the pandemic and ongoing quarantine and work from home situation required that they modify the content for remote programming. Once the firm moved to a hybrid model with some in-person office days, they moved the training programming to in-person as well.

"Part of the genesis of Cahill Academy was in the post-pandemic evolved legal market, we wanted to give associates a more formal training infrastructure to fit around the informal training that is really the core of what we do at Cahill," Slotnick said. "The training is learning by doing, and learning from the more senior associates, the partners and counsel."

Cahill Academy fills in gaps that exist in the more modern legal market, where attorneys are doing things by email and by phone and there's not as much in-person interaction, Slotnick said.

"Cahill Academy provides a staged, comprehensive training that makes sure that every associate at every level of their career at Cahill has the building blocks for both the substantive and practical parts of the job," he said.

Learning by Doing

There are year-round training modules for each associate level. The training sessions are between 50 and 90 minutes long, and are typically done in the mornings and afternoons on Tuesdays, Wednesdays and Thursdays. The trainings are largely led by associates at the upper junior level.

"We do think it's really important that associates participate from the training and educating aspect of it," Slotnick said. "I think that's a really powerful career development tool to be required to understand something the way we can teach it to someone else. Until you can explain to someone how to do something, you often haven't really understood all the elements of that task."

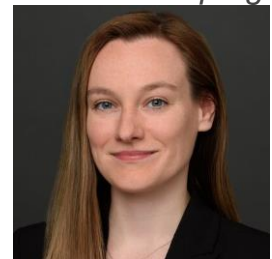
Slotnick said last year the firm did about 230 training sessions, which can later serve as practical guides for lawyers to refer back to. A typical Cahill Academy presentation is a 25-to-30-page PowerPoint with a legal explanation on a given topic. It has practical guides, along with precedent and precedent language that are included alongside the legal descriptions and themes, Slotnick said.

Some popular topics have included professional practice workshops that involve building relationships and team culture, such as "Leading and Managing a Team" and "Delegating and Supervising Junior Associates," Slotnick said.

Lawyers are put into a cohort for their level of experience. Each associate has a specific training plan that goes through completing all of the presentations for that year, as well as any outside work, and that training plan is included in the formal evaluations that the firm does for associates, he said.

"It's completely built into the foundation of our career development for associates and lawyers more broadly," Slotnick said.

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LAUREN RIDDELL
Associate, Cahill Gordon

While the program concentrates on the associate level, there are also sessions for summer associates, senior counsel and partners.

"At the counsel and partner level, it's usually more around soft skills," Slotnick said. "There's much more programming for first years through seventh and eighth years. But there are specific offerings for more senior lawyers around networking, business development, and things like that."

Associate-Driven Need

For the most part, the litigation and corporate trainings are done separately given the distinct subject matter. Attorneys are further grouped by class year.

"One of the big differences when we moved from our old model was you had a whole bunch of topics that we did continuing legal education presentations on, but you would have first-year associates sitting listening to very nuanced conversations about applications of securities law that were interesting to them, but you weren't going to go back and apply that to the work you were doing," Slotnick said.

Slotnick said the focus of future Cahill Academy programming is likely to be how to use new artificial intelligence technologies to improve the quality of lawyers' work and the quality of their training.

Meanwhile, Riddell said Cahill Academy is directly responding to the current needs of associates.

"Our litigation practice at Cahill traditionally focused on litigation in federal court, and we've seen somewhat of an expansion into state court practice, some being New York and some being elsewhere," she said. "And as that happened, our associates needed a lot of training in terms of the differences, whether it be intricacies in filings or procedural changes between federal court versus state court."

"We worked with our managing attorney to actually develop a program for Cahill Academy to help associates understand what those differences would be, whether it be specific filing rules or things like that. And I found that to be extremely helpful in terms of flagging issues and just sort of figuring out the logistics of how to be a lawyer," she added.

Riddell said she still finds the training sessions helpful refreshers as she moves up in her career.

"I have recently attended one on taking and defending depositions," she said. "We also had one that was targeted towards more senior associates on networking and client management that I found to be particularly helpful: there's a problem in your case, how do you convey that to your client, that sort of thing. To actually get formal training on that kind of communication was very, very, very useful."

--Editing by Alex Hubbard.

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JOSIAH SLOTNICK
Executive committee
member, Cahill Gordon