

Legal Staff Support Group Leadership Profiles

Rose Gutierrez, LSSG Chair



In my professional life, I am the Litigation Manager at Lew-Stevens, LLP, located in Los Angeles, California, specializing in Medical Malpractice and Catastrophic Personal Injury. I have worked in the legal field for over 25 years in various capacities and my experience ranges from filing clerk to my current position as Litigation Manager. For the last 20 years I've overseen and managed litigation assistants and cases that are in active litigation. I've worked closely with the attorneys in my firm formulating and implementing case strategy as well as assisting at trial.

I haven't always been in the legal field. Prior to working at a law firm, I was a high school mathematics teacher at Canoga Park High School, a part of Los Angeles Unified School District. I have a Master of Education and a Bachelor of Science in Mathematics, both from the University of California Los Angeles, GOOOOOOO Bruins!

I've been recognized and awarded the Presidential Award of Merit by the Consumer Attorneys of California in 2023 and 2025 for my contributions to Legal Staff Support Group (LSSG) as well as the Presidential Award by the Consumer Attorneys Association of Los Angeles (CAALA) in 2021. I've been an invited speaker on various subjects pertaining to various aspects of the litigation process throughout the years and have been

honored to present at both CAALA and CAOC conventions.

In my personal life, I am a wife and a "mother" to a sweet 11-year-old white Maltese named Luna. I enjoy early morning snuggles with her followed by a scathingly hot cup of coffee to get my day started. Physical exercise is important to me, so I try to make time to work out at least five days a week. I find that exercise helps to clear my head and puts me in a great mood. It also offsets my other loves, cooking and baking. My husband would argue that pre-pandemic, our kitchen was more of a museum requiring nothing more than a light dusting every now and then, but things have certainly changed since. I discovered that I LOVE to cook and bake, especially for close family and friends. I would describe myself as a bit of a wine snob and am constantly on the hunt for the "perfect" bottle of wine. I also believe in giving back to the community and being a role model, so when I have time, I volunteer at my sorority, Gamma Phi Beta and other community organizations.

What is one of your greatest career achievements to date?

My greatest career achievement to date is being one of the founders of CAOC LSSG. I had the honor of serving as Chair of the LSSG for CAALA in 2022 and 2023 and through that organization I met some amazing people including my Co-Vice Chairs, Assal Badrkhani and Cesar Garcia. CAOC LSSG was born at 3:00 a.m. on a Sunday morning at Convention in San Francisco in November 2024 in the lobby of the Palace Hotel while munching on a

cheeseburger with Assal. We were both feeling excited and re-energized about the work that we do and we wanted to create a program that would help staff achieve personal growth and provide quality on-going education. I firmly believe in personal and professional growth and empowerment and reject the notion that our value or success is somehow tied to or defined by the firms or attorneys with whom we work. I wanted to create an organization where I and others could share our knowledge for the benefit of our clients and attorneys we support. I was lucky enough that I found two amazing people who shared my vision, and my "crazy," who are as committed to those ideals as I am. My deepest gratitude and appreciation goes to them for helping me achieve my career high.

What is one of the toughest challenges you've faced in the legal field and how did you overcome it?

I came to the legal field quite by accident. I was a young teacher working for LA Unified, living in Playa Del Rey, living paycheck to paycheck. I took on a second job working as a file clerk on the weekends for a law firm in Westwood. After about three months I was offered a full-time job as a legal assistant. I knew nothing, I mean NOTHING, about the law, how it operated or what it meant to obtain justice for clients. I'm still not sure what prompted me to quit teaching and take a leap of faith into the legal field, but I did and here I am, 25 years later regretting nothing. The toughest part of my journey has been (and is, if I'm being truthful) feeling inadequate or lacking confidence because I don't have

an official paralegal certification. All my training and knowledge has come through trial and error on the job. At times, it has caused anxiety, especially when dealing with opposing counsel and/or their staff. Feeling terrified of making a mistake that could jeopardize a case, saying or doing the wrong thing. I've been lucky I've always had amazing mentors, both attorneys and peers, who have taken the time to teach me. Not all who enter our field are so lucky. My advice would be to never allow the voice of inadequacy or lack of self-confidence to paralyze you or keep you from trying to better yourself. Look for those individuals who are going to lift you and support you. Our jobs are tough enough; we don't need to add to that by beating ourselves up.

What is an important lesson you've learned in the workplace?

Ask questions and don't stop asking until you understand the answer and the reasoning behind it. This goes back to the previous question; not having a background in law made working in law *really* hard in the beginning because everything was new, it was like people were speaking Latin (and sometimes they were!). Don't be afraid to ask a question a hundred times if you don't understand the answer or explanation you've been given. You not understanding an answer isn't a reflection of you, perhaps the person explaining just hasn't found the correct way to respond to your question or isn't being clear in the explanation. We all learn differently; that isn't a bad thing. Our jobs require an in-depth understanding of what we're doing and why we're doing it. If you don't fully understand something, it could lead to mistakes that could have been avoided or even worse, mistakes that can't be fixed. Your colleagues will respect and appreciate the fact that you care enough about your job to continue honing your skills. Remember that there are no "dumb" questions, *ever*.

What advice would you give your younger self?

Don't be afraid of setting boundaries. I think it's fair to say that we all have one thing in common, and that is that we love to say "YES." Can you finish this discovery? YES. Can you draft that template? YES. Can you send these documents to

Dr. Scissorhands? YES. Can you summarize these records? YES. Oh, and can you have it all done in the next hour? YES!!!!. Saying "Yes" all the time is going to cause burn-out. Don't be afraid to let people know what you can and cannot accomplish in an hour, day, week, or month. Saying "Yes" to everything is not only unrealistic but a recipe for certain failure and unneeded stress and frustration for everyone. Agreeing to everything and not delivering is worse than acknowledging your limitations. Doing a few things well is better than doing many things haphazardly or not at all. A better approach is to say, "I would love to be able to finish everything you've asked but realistically, I can only accomplish X in the timeframe you've given. What is the priority?" Or better yet, offer to prioritize the tasks you've been given, "I think we should finish and serve the discovery today, I will finish the rest of the tasks tomorrow (or whenever you can realistically get to them). Do you agree?" Setting boundaries, using your voice and being realistic about what you can accomplish doesn't mean you're inadequate, quite the opposite.

Cesar R. Garcia, LSSG Vice Chair

I am Cesar R. Garcia, a senior trial paralegal with the firm of Chang | Klein LLP based in El Segundo, California. I have over thirty-four years of experience in handling large document, multi-party, high dollar litigation matters, including large and complex personal injury, wrongful death, auto accident, product defects, and class action cases on behalf of injured individuals and consumers. I have been the trial paralegal providing in-courtroom trial support in over 60 cases tried to verdict. I am a frequent speaker on paralegal panels speaking on topics such as the use of technology at trial, the use of technology for case management, trial techniques for paralegals, preparation during the last 110 days before trial, client services and discovery. I have also had the privilege to serve as co-vice chair of CAOC's Legal Staff Support Group for the past year.



What message do you have for future paralegals?

Set boundaries and set them early. Easier said than done, especially when you first start out and you feel you have to show your worth. But setting boundaries will also show your mindset and a good employer will see that you want to start with a good work-life balance. You can show your worth and have a life. Make time for your life outside work.

What is the best piece of advice you've ever received?

Don't take losing a trial personally – "If you ain't losing, you ain't trying." I remember the first trial my attorney and I ever lost; it happened late in my career and the attorney from my office and I both took it hard at first – we'd tried dozens of cases successfully, with no losses. We teamed up for trial with a local attorney in Northern California where the trial was held. This attorney – a seasoned, well-respected successful attorney in his own right – saw how down we were, and told us, "If you ain't losing, you ain't trying and you can't call yourself a trial attorney." Best advice I ever received.

What does success mean to you?

Getting justice for our clients. Unfortunately, in our business we can never make our clients 100% whole, but we can make sure they are fairly compensated for their severe losses. I have been fortunate to work for firms where we have been successful in obtaining just and right compensation for our clients. Thanking me for all my efforts and time in helping them and/or their injured clients – those results are success to me.

What is the most challenging aspect of your career?

Keeping everything business, nothing personal. There are a lot of mean people out there – they will talk down to you because you're not an attorney, or even worse, talk down to you because they're just mean. You can't take it personally – they don't know you or anything about you, so keep it business. When I receive a derogatory email from someone, I don't immediately respond. I get up, walk around and take time before I respond. Best not to respond when you're upset. Cooler heads always prevail.

Assal Badrkhani, LSSG Vice Chair

I am a Senior Litigation Paralegal with Arias Sanguinetti where I work on behalf of clients who have lost loved ones, suffered catastrophic injury from persons or products, or are victims or survivors¹ of assault or abuse. I am honored to simultaneously serve as the 2026 Chair of the Consumer Attorneys of Los Angeles LSSG as well as the 2026 Vice-Chair of the Consumer Attorneys of California LSSG.

Prior to starting my legal career, I graduated from UCLA with a bachelor's degree in political science, minoring in international relations. I attended a year and half of law school before withdrawing due to personal hardships I could not overcome at the time. Since then, I have dedicated almost two decades to civil litigation focusing on personal injury, wrongful death, sexual assault, and catastrophic injury cases. Along the way, I obtained my paralegal certificate from California State University. In 2023, I was awarded the American Association for Justice "Paralegal of the Year." AAJ is a vital national political organization where I currently sit on the Paralegal Task Force Committee. Other notable honors include the CAOC Presidential Award of Merit which I received in 2023 and 2025, as well as the Arias Sanguinetti inaugural "Vision Award" in 2024. I am currently a member of AAJ, CAOC, SFTLA and CAALA, where I enjoy education planning and speaking on topics ranging from public records requests, protecting clients' privacy



and conducting in-house investigations ... *all in my free time of course.*

At home, I'm a goofy mom to a witty nine-year-old who told me the other day she wants to be a lawyer when she grows up so she can help care for hurt people like I do. My greatest achievement in life is the light she sees in me through her innocent eyes.

Are there any role models that have guided your path?

I am thankful for many role models that have guided my legal path, but one that I will forever be indebted to is a wonderful attorney named James O'Donnell who hired a young legal assistant with barely any experience almost two decades ago and patiently taught her the process and reasoning behind every step he took throughout the life of a case. For nearly seven years, we worked side by side as a law firm of two. I never called him Jim, only Mr. O'Donnell. And he will always be the person who I credit for providing me with the tools to be great by assigning me a task and teaching me how to do it the first time, then handing it off to me with trust for the next go round. Whenever an attorney complains that a staff member doesn't know how to do something, I always wonder – *ever thought of teaching them?*

If every attorney out there took a little extra time to delegate assignments and give their staff the opportunity to learn *by doing*, instead of being shown a final product to just file or serve, our legal staff community would not only benefit, but each firm would benefit from having more knowledgeable, versatile and confident staff.

What is a moment shared with a client you'll never forget?

Jane Doe was in deposition. I was listening as an observer with my camera off while doing other work. I had logged on knowing that seeing a familiar name on the zoom would comfort her. Mid-way through the morning, I received a call from my attorney asking, "Are you able to facetime?" *Of course I was.* When the call started, there was Jane Doe, with tears in her eyes, feeling anxious and asking to see me as the one thing that would calm her down. What a privilege to be the person someone asks for in a time of needing comfort. I remember telling her she was beautiful, and I was proud of her. We both cried on that call. There have been so many profound moments shared with clients throughout the years, but that one will stay with me forever.

How do you cultivate your creative side in the work you do?

I am an information junkie. When a new case comes in, I immediately want to know everything there is to know out there, not just about the potential defendants, but also about our plaintiff. I am constantly researching new ways to obtain information outside of formal discovery, whether it is good or bad for us. When I need a mental break from a deadline, you'll often find me digging up dirt on social media, scouring through old newspaper archives and sending out creative public records requests, looking for needles in haystacks. I take pride in being referred to as my firm's resident sleuth.

What is the best piece of advice you have ever received?

"You don't get what you don't ask for." The moment these words finally sank in, I started asking for things I deserved, and this advice hasn't let me down yet. Thank you to Jamie Goldstein. ■

¹ I am of the strong belief that it is not up to me to decide what to call a client who has suffered sexual assault or abuse, i.e., a survivor or victim. For many struggling to come to terms with the harm done, there is a fluidity between those two words that depends on the day, the moment, the trigger or the coping mechanism. The struggle is ongoing for all of us.