



# Answering the Call to Leadership

By Derrick A. Mills



What do attorney Fred Gray, Retirement Systems of Alabama CEO David Bronner and Thomasville Mayor Shelton Day have in common? They are all strong and effective leaders who care about the future of Alabama. They were also among the speakers who addressed Class 6 of the Alabama State Bar Leadership Forum. I was fortunate to have been one of 30 lawyers chosen to participate in this year's Leadership Forum.

Please forgive the cliché, but the ASB Leadership Forum is not another typical leadership class. Like many of you, I have been involved in several "leadership training" workshops and seminars. Let's face it—lawyers are usually tapped for these seminars because we are smart, hardworking and typically a bit more socially adept than nuclear physicists or arborists (no offense to anyone). Most of the other "leadership training" seminars in which I participated were how-to lectures on specific leadership skills. The ASB

Leadership Forum is fundamentally different. Rather than start from the premise that leadership can be taught, the Leadership Forum focuses on selecting and then challenging individuals who have shown an interest and ability to reject the status quo and have a desire to really make a difference in the bar and our communities. In other words, the goal of the Leadership Forum is to "promote" leadership, not to "teach" it.

During the opening session, we were introduced to the concept of "servant leadership." We learned that servant leadership is the ultimate, selfless practice of leadership, where servant leaders are *responsible* for the group, organization and/or *people* they are leading/serving. Put another way, servant leaders are purpose-driven advocates who seek transformational results for the people they are serving. Martin Luther King, Jr., one of the best known servant leaders, said, "Life's most persistent and urgent question is, 'What are you doing for others?'"

Both King and his poignant question embody what servant leadership is all about. Servant leadership is the theme of the Leadership Forum.

Class 6 of the Leadership Forum was exposed to a diverse group of established leaders who have all sacrificed on behalf of our state in government, business and education, as well as in the practice of law. Each month, from January through May, our class gathered in different locations to learn about the issues facing the state bar and the state of Alabama. Our challenge was not necessarily to debate the best solutions for society's problems, but, rather, to answer the call to leadership.

In January, we learned about the remarkable progress Mobile has made under the leadership of former Mayor Mike Dow and current Mayor Sam Jones. We also observed the passion of Dr. David Bronner, as he shared his vision of what Alabama could achieve over the next decade with strong leadership, and, on the other hand, where Alabama is headed absent fundamental change. Our February meeting was conducted in Montgomery and focused upon government. We intimately witnessed the law-making process, as our session coincided with several bingo rallies that took place at the capitol. We also engaged in question-and-answer sessions with several legislators, including Senator Rodger Smitherman and Representative Paul DeMarco.

Tuskegee University graciously hosted our March session, and Alabama's Black Belt was our focus. We heard from noted civil rights' attorney Fred Gray and the innovative Mayor Shelton Day. Through extraordinary vision and leadership, these gentlemen have truly made the lives of Alabamians better. During our April session, we learned from Alabama leaders in education. One of the highlights of the education session was the story of E. D. Nixon Elementary School in Montgomery. Through Anthony Lewis's leadership, the school literally transformed from a typical "inner-city school" into a Torchbearer School, a statewide recognition of being a "high-poverty, high-performing school." Our last class was inspired by Justice Bernard Harwood, Bobby Segall, Dean Charles Gamble, Alyce Spruell, and other leaders of the state bar regarding access to justice and professionalism. Each of them passionately pleaded for us to use our

talents for more public good, through community service, pro bono work, etc.

After having observed some of the great leaders in this state, I believe the common thread that binds together strong leaders is their commitment to service. During Fred Gray's presidency, the Alabama State Bar appropriately adopted the motto, "Lawyers Render Service." To me, this motto is special. Not only do we lawyers render service to our clients, but we render service to our state bar, our communities, our state and our nation. Lawyers are committed to service, but true leadership—that unique, transformational leadership that reaches people and actually makes a difference in their lives—starts with caring. True leaders (servant leaders) are hardworking, passionate and results-oriented, but, most importantly, they care. Leaders care about the communities, the causes and the people they serve. If you truly care about your state bar, your communities, your state, and nation, please consider answering the call to leadership and "Render Service."

If you are an ASB member who has practiced not less than five and not more than 15 years, I recommend that you apply for membership in the 2011 class of the Leadership Forum (Class 7). Applications are available at [www.alabar.org](http://www.alabar.org) under the programs/department link "Leadership Forum." The deadline for applications is November 1, 2010 and applicants will be notified on or before December 13, 2010. Applications will be reviewed in the order in which they are received. Mandatory attendance is required for all sessions. Session dates and locations will be announced.



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Law. Mills is currently the president of the Magic City Bar Association, was a participant in the inaugural class of the Birmingham Bar Association Future Leaders' Forum and is an alumnus of Class 6 of the Alabama State Bar Leadership Forum. He was recently elected to the Board of Bar Commissioners, Circuit 10, Place No. 9.



## COMMENTS FROM CLASS 6 ALUMNI

*"I have been greatly impressed by the combination of servant-leadership theory and practice included in the Leadership Forum experience, the truly unique opportunity to explore leadership issues with other aspiring bar leaders and a coming-together of servant-minded lawyers who bring an optimistic attitude toward the challenges that face our state bar now and in the future."*

*"In my view, there is no other group leadership learning opportunity that brings together more servant-minded lawyer-leaders from such a diverse cross-section of our state than the ASB Leadership Forum."*

*"I think the forum is building a solid base of people in our profession who want to continue to work to change and improve our state. Our group could produce the future governors, legislators, judges, business leaders, etc. of Alabama."*