



On The Record

## Koskoff Leads Superstar Lawyer Group

### Inner Circle of Trial Advocates is tort law think tank

**L**ike a small personal injury dynasty, Bridgeport's Koskoff, Koskoff & Bieder has been a landmark on the national map for trial lawyers since the early 1960s. That's when Theodore Koskoff helped create the American Trial Lawyers Association. That tradition continues, with his son, Michael, the firm's senior partner, recently achieving the honor of being elected president of the Inner Circle of Trial Advocates for a two-year term.

This group of superstar plaintiffs lawyers is dedicated to improving personal injury trial practice at the highest levels. Koskoff is described as "one of America's most respected lawyers" by Honolulu attorney Mark Davis, who is the outgoing president of the Inner Circle. Davis also said Koskoff is "a thoughtful teacher and an innovator in the court room."

The group was started 40 years ago by Tucson trial lawyer Richard Grand, who was the first attorney in the U.S. to win a \$1 million verdict. Grand brought together others who were in the \$1 million category, and the invitation-only group eventually set a 100-member limit. The men and women in the group have included famous names like Ron Motley, of tobacco settlement fame, Morris Dees, who has successfully sued hate groups, Johnnie Cochran, and John Edwards.

Koskoff is the only Connecticut lawyer currently in the group. "I think right now we have 86 or 87 members," said Koskoff. "You have to have numerous seven figure or eight figure verdicts, and some of our members have actually had nine and 10-figure verdicts."

Beyond the money, the biggest payoff is the educational benefit, said Koskoff. Joining him as Inner Circle vice president is Seattle trial lawyer Richard (Rick) H. Friedman, the co-author of several well-known books on trial law, including "RULES OF THE ROAD: A Plaintiff's Lawyers Guide to Proving Liability." Koskoff's recent studies of persuasive communication draw heavily on the

classical Greek philosopher Aristotle, spreading wisdom from 300 B.C. in a manner that is fresh, enthusiastic and insightful. Koskoff spoke recently with Senior Writer Thomas B. Scheffey.

**LAW TRIBUNE:** Are these multi-million verdicts the most important aspect of your group?

**MICHAEL KOSKOFF:** No. There's a commitment to a sharing of ideas. If you don't attend the annual meeting at least once every three years, you're out of the organization. What has happened over the years is they had to become so much better, in order to take on those industries. It's an idea-sharing organization. It's to stimulate creative thought, help one another through thorny legal problems, and be creative in the way you go about things.

**LAW TRIBUNE:** What have you been focusing on recently?

**KOSKOFF:** I've talked to the group about different kinds of communication techniques, talking about Aristotle's rules of persuasion. Virtually all the techniques people use in persuasion were developed by Aristotle. He talked about pathos and logos — sympathy and logic. And he gave the framework for most of the things that we take for granted in communication.

**LAW TRIBUNE:** How do you use this in court?

**KOSKOFF:** Well, Aristotle said three things influence persuasion. The character of the speaker is called *ethos*; the argument, which is *logos*; and the emotional state of the listener — those are the three things that influence persuasion. Everybody who's been successful in the courtroom knows that the character of the speaker is incredibly important. One of the things is to be honest with the jury. You don't start off where the client was under the influence of alcohol and try



Page 1 of 2