

## Recap: “Law Firm Hot Topic: Andrew Thorpe and Karen Dempsey, Orrick”

By Hannah Porter, J.D. Candidate 2018 | October 11, 2016

On [October 5, 2016](#), the Berkeley Center for Law, Business and the Economy ([BCLBE](#)) hosted Orrick, Herrington & Sutcliffe LLP (Orrick) attorneys [Andrew Thorpe](#), [Karen Dempsey](#), and [John Palmer](#), for a conversation on how to best serve as a trusted advisor to clients.

Andrew Thorpe started his legal career in the Division of Corporation Finance of the Securities and Exchange Commission. He now represents clients in a variety of industries on issues including securities regulation, public offerings, mergers and acquisitions, and corporate governance. Mr. Thorpe talked about the importance of developing business expertise to best advise one’s clients. He suggested that law students try to take practical classes to learn basics such as how to read financial statements, but also made it clear that most of the real learning is done on the job. He discussed attending board meetings and observing other attorneys at the firm and how that allows junior associates to internalize business advice over time. While explaining the many different roles a corporate attorney serves, Mr. Thorpe said, “being a lawyer is very gratifying, very difficult, but it’s always interesting.”

Karen Dempsey represents public and private companies, venture capital firms, and investment banks in a broad range of corporate issues. Ms. Dempsey has worked with large established companies, as well as new emerging companies. She discussed the differences between these types of clients and explained that working with startups is “less legalistic” and more focused on business advice. She emphasized the value of having the client’s trust and talked about becoming an expert in each client’s business in order to gain that trust. Regarding learning about the e-sports industry for a recent client, Ms. Dempsey said “that’s what I like about being a business lawyer - I knew nothing about [e-sports] 45 days ago!”

John Palmer advises school districts, community colleges, cities, counties, and charter schools in financing matters. He emphasized the importance, especially if working within the public finance sector, of understanding the internal and external politics that are relevant to each client. Mr. Palmer said that he finds it helpful to reach out to clients outside of the pressure of a deal, after hours or on weekends, to discuss “big picture” issues and begin to understand the full landscape from the client’s perspective. Mr. Palmer also addressed the necessity to establish other relationships that benefit one’s clients, and said that one of the “neat things about being at a firm like Orrick” is access to experts with connections to regulatory agencies (like Mr. Thorpe and his former colleagues at the SEC).

Overall, the attorneys agreed that relationship management is the key to providing excellent service to clients. They made it clear that there is more to being a good lawyer than just knowing the laws, and they emphasized the importance of making a real effort to understand the unique issues faced by each client.