

CAOWI Fills Gap for Growing Profession; Membership Tops 300



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CAOWI President

Over the last decade, the employer's internal investigation of an EEO, whistleblower or retaliation complaint has become ever more critical. EEOC regulations call for an effective investigation that includes several key components. State and federal law allow for greater liability when there is a botched investigation and lesser liability when there has been an adequate one. Lawsuits scrutinize the employer's investigation and unseasoned investigators may be in the awkward position of having to testify at deposition, at a hearing or in court and finding themselves unable to articulate why they did what they did.

Despite the high stakes of a workplace investigation, the investigators themselves may not have received training or an opportunity to learn and improve on the skills and knowledge necessary to perform a workplace investigation. While HR and legal conferences often provide some basics on a workplace investigation, it is the rare forum that goes beyond those basics to really prepare the professional in this field for the multiple tasks that must be performed.

It is within this context that [CAOWI](#) - California Association of Workplace Investigators - was formed. As it turns out, despite the many professional organizations for human resource professionals, employment lawyers and private investigators, who make up the bulk of the professionals who perform workplace investigations, until the formation of CAOWI there has been no professional association specifically for workplace investigators. This has meant that there has been nowhere to go to for continuing training, resources, advice and collegiality within this growing profession.

CAOWI has filled this gap. Not yet two years old, there are already over [300 members](#) of CAOWI and the organization is in the process of becoming national, in order to meet the unmet need for a professional association of workplace investigators elsewhere in the United States and abroad.

CAOWI's mission is to improve and enhance the skills and knowledge of workplace investigators, regardless of the professional background of the investigator. About 60 percent of members are employment attorneys, 15 percent are human resource professionals, 15 percent are licensed private investigators, and 5 percent are in other professions. A professional organization that is inclusive of different types of professions is unique and affords members of different professions the opportunity to learn from each other.

In the short time that CAOWI has been in existence, it has already held its first annual conference in Oakland in November 2010, and will hold its [second annual conference in Glendale from November 13 - 15, 2011](#). The upcoming conference begins with an optional half-day skills seminar that focuses

on investigations on trial and will include a demonstration of direct trial testimony and cross-examination of the investigator and an expert. The conference itself is a day and a half and includes both plenary sessions and breakout sessions on topics such as interviewing techniques, tracking down witnesses, data privacy, document retention, privacy issues, wage and hour investigations and electronic evidence collection. [Phil Angelides](#), Chair of the [Financial Crisis Inquiry Commission](#), will be the keynote speaker and will discuss how he organized a complex investigation that included interviewing top government and Wall Street officials. The conference will also provide a variety of opportunities for investigators to meet and network.

In addition to conferences, CAOWI has provided [half-day and full-day programs](#) on the basics of performing workplace investigations and report writing, and [webinars on hot topics for investigators](#) such as ethical issues for attorneys performing workplace investigations, FCRA and ICRRRA, and making credibility determinations. The CAOWI conference and educational programs are open to non-members; however members are given a significant discount in the cost of the programs. Those who attend CAOWI programs can receive continuing education credit for attorneys (MCLE), human resource professionals (HRCI), and may be eligible for continuing investigator training credits for federal sector investigators.

Member-only benefits include resources such as the first look at new jobs posted on a [job board](#) that focuses on investigations, access to libraries of cases and articles about workplace investigations and [commonly-used investigation forms](#), and use of an [e-mail Listserv](#) to pose questions and receive immediate answers from other members. Each CAOWI member is also part of a ["local circle of colleagues"](#) that meets in their area. CAOWI publishes a quarterly journal with substantive articles about workplace investigations that is available to members only for the first nine months of publication, and to the public thereafter.

For 2012, CAOWI is planning a first-ever week-long intensive training institute on workplace investigations. This exciting program will include training and practice sessions on a variety of skills involved in workplace investigations, and provide the opportunity for workplace investigators to form lasting professional relationships.

CAOWI is governed by a [15-member volunteer Board of Directors](#), has a part-time Executive Director with a part-time Assistant, and has eleven [committees](#) consisting of volunteer members and directors. CAOWI is funded entirely by its [members](#), its programs, and its sponsors.

CAOWI is proof that workplace investigations has grown from a side issue done by busy HR professionals who have many other things on their plates, to a specialty increasingly performed by professionals who have dedicated their career to honing these skills. Workplace investigators have much to learn from each other. CAOWI is giving them the opportunity to do so. More information about CAOWI and its programs is available on CAOWI's website, www.caowi.org.

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