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Thriving Not Surviving: Key Takeaways from the Young Lawyers Summit

On November 24, 2020, Canadian Lawyer held the Young Lawyers Summit: Thriving in Today's Changing Legal Industry. Like everything this year, the group gathered virtually for a packed agenda of panel discussions ranging from becoming a thought leader to making time for mental rest and wellbeing. What follows is a short summary of the sessions that we found particularly relevant given our varied experience and roles at the firm.

A conversation with tomorrow's legal leaders: What does it mean to be an effective lawyer in 2021?

Marina Skachkova, Specialist, Business Development

The legal profession has been changing rapidly over the past several years. This panel discussed the skills that junior lawyers should possess to provide the best service to their clients and to stay alert to their shifting needs. Key takeaways included:

- Leverage technology – the use of technology has advanced significantly throughout 2020 and is not going to slow down any time soon! Technology will continue to shape the legal profession and it is important for junior lawyers to familiarize themselves with the newest tools and features. The pay-off? Efficient communications with internal and external clients.
- Understand your client's business – according to the panelists, clients are looking for business advice and litigation expertise from the same source. To truly understand your client's business and industry, put in the time and do some research.
- Develop strong and lasting relationships – start early and focus on the activities that allow you to meet new colleagues (e.g. bar association committees, practice specific conferences, social events, etc.). Be patient and remember that building your network and developing meaningful relationships takes time.

To advance and grow professionally, junior lawyers are encouraged to be resilient, build self-confidence, push

themselves out of their comfort zone, and take initiative!

Practical guide to delivering an effective pitch (even in a remote environment) – Perspectives from both sides

Lindsey Bombardier, Director, Business Development and Marketing

Pitches and proposals are on the rise and law firms are becoming more sophisticated in their ability to respond. In this session, we were fortunate to hear from the Head of Legal from one of the world's largest quick service restaurant management companies. He described the elements of a winning pitch, how the type of matter can impact the process, and confirmed that informal pitching is still alive and well, despite our virtual limitations. Key takeaways from this session included:

- It's not about you! Unless you are responding to a formal RFP, keep your pitches succinct and laser focused on the client. Remove the boilerplate content (or bury it) and address the issue at hand, providing as much strategy about the matter as reasonable. Ditch the exhaustive experience list and describe only recent and relevant matters instead.
- What wins the pitch? Experience? Price? Reputation? The answer is still the same – it depends! This legal buyer confirmed that for complex litigation and big-ticket deals, they will pay top dollar for the best lawyers in Canada. For other types of legal work, they want quality lawyers at a reasonable price.
- Relationship building, outside of the pitch process, is still possible during the pandemic despite there being less typical places to connect and network. Reach out, stay in touch, and make every connection count.

Junior lawyers should carve out time to develop relationships and find ways to connect with their contacts. For those practicing at mid-sized or large firms, understand that you can play an important role in the pitch process. When your business development team comes calling, pick up the call and take their lead!

Strategies for young lawyers to manage and take charge of challenging workplace relationships

Mari Galloway, Associate

This panel focused on best practices for junior lawyers seeking to foster positive relationships and navigate challenging expectations and situations at work. A major theme was effective communication, and the panelists reiterated the

importance of developing skills to approach situations openly and honestly. The recommended concrete steps for young lawyers included:

- Reflect on both the content and method of communication. Pause to think before reaching out. What do I need to get across? Should this be an email? Is it more effective as a call?
- Give and ask for feedback. Honest and direct communication is key to resilient relationships. Take the time, even when busy, to reach out and offer times to chat with teammates and mentors.
- “Say no without saying no”. It can be tough to navigate time constraints and unexpected deadlines. Be proactive, manage expectations, and find helpful alternative solutions in tight situations.

Ultimately, the panelists stressed that relationships are dynamic. Building these skills takes time. The key is to focus on exercising empathy and reflecting on learning opportunities as you continue to hone your skills.

Pragmatic steps for young lawyers and practices to better balance personal and family needs with a growing practice

Kaitlin Soye, Associate

Practising law is a career that demands time, effort, and commitment. Even more so during the pandemic, the key to developing your legal practice as a junior lawyer is finding balance both at the virtual office and at home. The panel offered many great insights on balancing the demands in your personal and professional life, including:

- Managing expectations – manage client, colleague, and family expectations by communicating early. Be honest about work demands and personal commitments. Share what is going on in your life. This helps people understand and get to know you.
- Maintain connections in the workplace – be engaged in your work and with your colleagues. Set up times to meet—have a virtual coffee or, when safe to do so, a socially distanced lunch. Stay involved in your firm’s activities.
- Managing up – share ideas and strategies for tackling challenges with colleagues more senior to you. Many junior lawyers have new and innovative ideas that offer solutions that more senior lawyers may not be thinking

about. Take initiative and share your ideas.

The practice of law is about connections and relationships. To be successful, at home and in the office, it is important to communicate with the people involved in your life.