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MATTERS CONCERNING LAWYERS

The Newsletter of the Jamaican Bar Association



FEATURE ARTICLE: AN INTERVIEW WITH ALEXANDER WILLIAMS PRESIDENT OF THE JAMAICAN BAR ASSOCIATION

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Suggestions for the Young Lawyer**

Contributed by Carla-Anne Harris Roper

**Photos of the Jamaican Bar
Association Annual Banquet 2021**

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Concerning Lawyers* was
edited and curated by
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THIRTY-THREE YEARS & COUNTING WITH

Alexander Williams

In this issue of Matters Concerning Lawyers, Sophia Bryan sat down with Alexander I.E. Williams, LL.B (Hons) C.L.E to discuss his illustrious 33 year legal journey and his aspirations for his tenure as President of the Jamaican Bar Association.

Q: What would you say are some of the key strategies to building a successful practice?

To build a successful practice, there are two basic things you must do. One, you must ensure that you are good at what you do. Secondly, communicate, I can't stress how important that is. Communication.

There are certain rules of practice that I live by. If a client calls or sends an email, 24 hours should not pass and the client doesn't receive a response.

When an attorney reaches out, we respond to the attorney. We have an open door policy and any attorney can turn up at my door and I will see that colleague if I'm there.



Let your client know exactly what it is that you're doing. Copy them on all correspondence as best as possible. In addition to being good at what you do, communication is another major element.

The next thing is to be strategic. Sometimes as Attorneys we take on certain matters because we're concerned about cash flow. There is always that concern.

Even in those instances, always chart a course knowing exactly where you want to go and be strategic in the matters you take on.

Currently, I conduct quarterly review meetings with my staff. I have a development plan that I work towards and our quarterly review meetings allow us to see where we are in relation to our targets and what we need to tweak or adjust in order to achieve them.

The final thing I'll say is networking. Networking is crucial to an attorney's professional development. The highest fee I've ever earned as an Attorney-at-law came because I was a Kiwanian. When I reflected, I realized that the client was referred to me based on my association with the service group and the positive impact I had on members of that community.

On top of that, it goes without saying that you must follow the rules of ethics. Be good at what you do, communicate and be strategic.

Q: From your profile, I observe that you do a lot of criminal and civil litigation. Was it natural talent that drew you to that practice area or did you take a decision to focus on litigation early on?

It was actually a combination of both. I have always been interested in litigation. On my first day of practice, Alec Young gave me a fatal accident case involving Queen's Counsel in the Supreme Court.



I was elated. I said yes, I stepped into the court room and I won. Since then, I have never looked back.

I was at Myers, Fletcher & Gordon for eight years and at that time, they had a policy to start all the associates in the Litigation Department. The rationale was that whichever practice area you wanted to go into, litigation would lay the foundation. Having gained the skills and experience from there, you could then move on to commercial or another practice area. I did not want go.

Once I got to litigation, it never crossed my mind to go anywhere else in the firm. I felt fulfilled and I was happy. Litigation is what I wanted.

Q: In trials, there's usually a great deal of pressure to perform and deliver at your best. How do you handle that pressure?

I must confess that I am very comfortable in court. I enjoy being in court. I find myself thinking to tell jokes while I'm in court and I know I can be quite performative.

If there is a matter that I know is going to be difficult, or there's an issue I haven't quite resolved in my head yet, I may have a few butterflies in my stomach. But usually when I get going, I'm in full flight and I revel in it.

Q: Were there any challenges along the journey that made it difficult for you to ascend? And how did you work through those challenges?

A Queen's Counsel once told me that all litigation attorneys will suffer burnout. There will be a point in time at which you start to hit your teeth, and you begin to wonder why. You will have bad days and you may start to think about doing something different. I did go through that period, there was a time where I suffered, I was grumpy and all of that. I was quite unhappy with the client base.

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I said yes, I stepped into the court room and I won. Since then, I have never looked back.

Well, how did I get out of it? That's an interesting question.

I don't know. Maybe time just passed. Now that I am reflecting, I think what happened is that I took on some cases that made me remember that I loved what I was doing. Big victories made me realize I still had it.

Then I took a critical decision to be strategic. At one point my practice was 75% personal injury work. Now, my practice is perhaps 20% personal injury and the rest is mostly commercial litigation. I'm also doing a great deal of Conveyancing (I'm not quite sure when that shift happened), along with commercial work.

Q: What are your goals for your tenure as President of the Jamaican Bar Association?

I started a project in November last year in which we assist an NGO that helps women who are victims of domestic violence. We're offering free legal services to women with Protection Orders, or family law related matters.



That has gotten off the ground and my goal is to build it. I want it to outlast my tenure as President of the Bar Association.

I am nurturing it to ensure that it gets to the point where that project will attract donor funding, so that it can become a staple for the Bar Association going forward. That is one particular goal. I have a number of others.

I want the Bar Association to continue to serve in the proper administration of justice at all times and in matters of general public importance, to be at the forefront of it and do so in a timely manner.

The intention is to build on the foundation that exists, in the spirit of the association's true purpose.

In that regard, I try my very best to be quick with the press releases, engage the media, make submissions to Parliament when bills are being debated, make presentations before Joint Select Committees and to discharge other fundamental responsibilities with accuracy and urgency.

The team and I at the Jamaican Bar Association are resolute in the execution of our role as advocates.

Another goal that I'm working towards is for members of the Bar Association to feel that their membership is a benefit to them.

Our health insurance offering, which we're reviewing right now, is available to roughly 2,000 members of the Association but only 100 attorneys are part of the scheme. When you look at the benefits, it's actually better than a lot of the other plans, it just

needs marketing. We are about to do a relaunch with the intention of ensuring that all attorneys know about this and are aware of how they can get involved.

Q: What are some of the personal strategies you implement, to stay productive and to stay on task with managing your firm?

A friend of mine taught me this and it is the biggest, biggest thing. It's called the 80/20 rule.

You do the critical 20% that you must do and that only you can do. Then, you hire excellent people to do the other 80%. That is how you'll be productive.

You can't micro-manage every team. You can't prepare every single document.

Every single member of my staff knows their purpose and their function.

And I'm right here in my office, they know that they can come to me when they need me and I will give feedback and monitor what is happening.

My 20% is maintaining and generating the client base, collection of invoices, making sure that things are running smoothly and to see to it that we are on track with our goals. Trust me, don't try to do everything yourself.



Sophia D. Bryan, Esq.

After her stint in Washington DC, Sophia returned to launch her practice where she primarily serves UK and US based Jamaicans in probate, land and civil litigation matters.

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Introducing the

Young Counsel Series

Matters Concerning Lawyers' newest offering to young attorneys, aimed at providing younger members at the Bar with tips and tools to navigate the early years of a legal career and vital resources to encourage personal and professional development.



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SUGGESTIONS

FOR THE “YOUNG” LAWYER

However long it may have taken you, and the various twists and turns of the journey, you have made it...

Welcome to the Noble Profession! Yes, Law is called the Noble Profession for a reason.

“The task of lawyers in the practice of their profession is to particularize what is implicit in that terse definition. It is intended to give meaning to the purpose and spirit that it hopes to express or evoke. The professions exist for the purpose of rendering service for the benefit of others, whether persons or communities.”^[1]

As you proceed to become engrossed in the practice of law, here are a few suggestions to keep in mind as you not only make a living, but render service to your clients and the community at large.

More on page 9 from Mrs. Carla-Anne Harris Roper

[1] From The Profession of the Law Edward D. Re, Journal of Civil Rights and Economic Development ST. JOHN'S JOURNAL OF LEGAL COMMENTARY, Vol 15, Issue 2

#1. Cultivate good and sustained relationships.

My dad once told me that *“you never get a second chance to make a first impression.”* It is very important that your interactions with others are respectful and genuine.

In the practice of law there are many stakeholders; clients, the judiciary, fellow counsel, your own support team and depending on the area of law in which you practice, many functionaries of institutions that you will need to interact with in delivering your service.

Take the time to return phone calls, Whatsapp messages, emails and respond to correspondences as promptly as you can. Let your “yes”, be your “yes” and your “no” be your “no”.

Your reputation as a courteous and reliable counsel will pave the way in many instances, for your undertaking to be unhesitatingly accepted and for you to be given the benefit of the doubt if you ever find yourself in a tight spot.

#2. Seek out a mentor

Despite all the years of study, passing exams and having high GPA's, your Honours Degree and Law School prizes, though wonderful, are not much more than footnotes in actual practice.

The truth is that your first Practicing Certificate is nothing more than an opportunity to really start growing and learning in the real world. The knowledge of those who have been in practice before you can help you to avoid pitfalls that can easily befall inexperienced young counsel.

You may be acquainted with senior attorneys merely by association. Make a point of reaching out to them and requesting their guidance. My experience has been that most will be happy to share and assist wherever they can.

#3. Maintain an awareness of developments in the law (Yes CLPD Courses are not a “burden”!)

The law is not static! That is why we have the law of negligence which evolved through Lord Denning to meet the needs of a changing society. This is even more true today than ever.

I suggest that you bookmark Parliament's website to keep abreast of legislative changes and review cases coming from the Privy Council, Court of Appeal and the Supreme Court regularly. You can always research legal points online, but ensure that you verify the sources of the information on which you seek to rely.

The Law library still exists and sometimes it is good to consult an actual book and get out of your home/office to get a break. Additionally, attend the CLPD seminars not just for the points, but to keep yourself abreast of developments. As you do your own research, you can also offer share your knowledge with your colleagues in seminars (and get some extra CLPD points to boot!!)

#4. Be open to Learning... not just because you need it for your job

As one of our now departed law school tutors told us some 25 years ago *“the only place that work comes before success is in the dictionary”*. Simply put, you will have to put in the work to reap the rewards. It is the hard reality of being an attorney and the learning curve is steep at this stage of your career.

Therefore, take every opportunity to learn as much as you can. I recommend sitting in at court for a while after your case is complete or heading in earlier to hear other matters.

This will provide opportunities for you to observe the advocacy style of other counsel and to understand the judges' thought process in determining legal issues. As we emerge from the pandemic, seek to volunteer with other counsel, the Legal Aid Clinic, and other similar organizations. Use that to put yourself on a fast track for development.

#5. There is no such thing as a stupid question; If you don't know something, ask.

It may seem difficult to do this especially for some mature individuals for whom the law is a second or third career. Remember, despite your great experience in other fields, you are still a newbie in the law.

The same goes for wet-behind-the-ears younger people who are go-getters and want to prove to their seniors (and clients) that they are up to the task. In my experience though, it is better to ask about something you are not sure of and risk appearing stupid, than to continue on your ignorant way and make a stupid mistake.

That stupid mistake could cost you the ultimate price of losing the very thing that you have worked so hard for; your practicing certificate, as well severe monetary implications or even criminal sanctions in extreme cases. Stay on the safer side, make enquiries and then make reasoned decisions as you proceed on this professional journey.

Godspeed!!



Mrs. Harris-Roper is an attorney-at-law who was admitted to practice law in Jamaica in October 1997. She holds a Bachelor of Laws Degree, from the University of the West Indies, a Certificate of Legal Education from the Norman Manley Law School and a Master of Laws in Employment Law (with distinction) from the University of East Anglia, UK.

She is a recipient of the Alcan Jamaica Undergraduate and Postgraduate Scholarships and is also a Chevening (UK) Scholar. She is currently a Phd. Candidate at the University of South Africa.

JAMBAR AWARDS LUNCHEON 2021



Celebrating Our Honorees:

Hon. Dorothy Pine-McLarty, OJ, Dr. Adolph Edwards, The Hon. Mr. Justice C. Dennis Morrison, OJ (Ret'd), The Hon. Miss Justice Hilary Phillips, CD (Ret'd) and Lawyers 50 Years at the Jamaican Bar











Legal Humor

