

The Changing Legal Services Market

Offering Services Now and for the Future

If you've read my columns over the last few months, you'll find a pervasive theme of focusing on the future of the profession. In both pieces, my overarching message was the importance of preparing for, and seizing the opportunity, to bring our profession into the 21st century.

In the first column, I outlined some of the major trends influencing the profession and followed that with specifics about the changes we might think about in order to prevent being overtaken by the tidal wave of changes coming.

Moving from the bigger picture level to the daily operations here at the Bar, I'd like to share some of the changes happening at the WSBA to ensure our programs and services are aligning to meet the transitions occurring.

As we move into the future, the trends indicate we will no longer be educating and regulating just lawyers; rather, we'll be educating for and regulating a legal services market. This latter concept can be understood as a market where lawyers are the cornerstone, but legal services will be provided by others, such as limited license practitioners, and perhaps other professionals not yet thought of.

As you'll read about later in this issue (see page 23), the Supreme Court's Limited License Legal Technician (LLLT) Board is underway, and under a national spotlight, as this program, created by Court rule, is the first of its kind in the nation. Within a year, the board is expected to establish the educational and professional framework for the LLLTs. They will have more training and responsibility than paralegals but will not appear in court or negotiate for clients.

Significant sectors of the public cannot afford lawyers, and those of us in the profession are best positioned to figure

out what's needed to address these issues. We also know there are many people out there engaging in the unauthorized practice of law, which is harming the public and the profession. One hope of this new program is to bring these folks in under the regulatory framework of the LLLT program, while helping to meet the needs of those who are inadequately served or not served at all.

Another change just around the corner is the WSBA's transition from the Washington Bar Exam to the Uniform Bar Exam (UBE), beginning this July. This change addresses the increasing need for cross-border mobility. Besides Washington, 12 other states have adopted the UBE thus far. Those who pass the exam earn portable scores that allow them to gain a license to practice in the other UBE states without taking another bar exam, as long as their score meets the standard set by that state, and they meet additional admission requirements in those states that require it.

Getting new lawyers up to speed as they enter the profession has long been a focus for the WSBA, but a few years ago the Board took a bold step and said that WSBA must play a stronger role in on-boarding new lawyers into the profession. The result is the New Lawyer Education (NLE) program, which provides free and low-cost skills training for attorneys in their first four years of practice. NLE has focused on two key initiatives — first, providing all new



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admittees a free four-hour orientation course, which is required prior to receiving a bar license. This Preadmission Education Program (PREP) is available as an interactive online course or as a program available to bar and county leaders statewide to deliver in their local jurisdiction. Second, NLE continues to build a library of skills-focused, MCLE-accredited seminars, with the involvement of Young Lawyers Committee (YLC) and Section leaders.

Helping to address the lack of practical experience, and in many

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cases, job prospects, WSBA offers significant training and mentorship through its Moderate Means Program, which is designed to help those clients between 200 and 400 percent of the poverty level.

The program is a partnership with the state's three law schools, where students conduct the intake and refer potential clients to attorneys who have signed up, trained, and agreed to accept cases for reduced fees.

Through this program, law students gain valuable skills training before graduating and attorneys in all stages of their careers are signing up to participate; our newer and younger attorneys are finding it increasingly valuable as they gain practical experience while also having access to ongoing training and mentorship from more seasoned attorneys. It's a win-win for attorneys, law students, and clients.

On the other end of the spectrum are those of you who are nearing retirement. This "graying" of the bar is a trend we have been watching for several years. To address this demographic shift, the WSBA has created a program

called Practice Transition Opportunities (PTO), which seeks to match those ready to sell a practice outright or transition out over a period of time with those interested in buying a practice, or perhaps a more gradual mentoring experience that may lead to a sale over time.

Our goal is to provide the tools and a platform for sellers and those transitioning to find the right match for their situation. It allows for the confidential posting of a transition, and the ability for those interested to reach out. The WSBA serves as a resource and matchmaker, but steps out after that and leaves the parties to proceed on their own. This service is available on our website.

We're finding that not only is this program serving our members at the ends of their careers, but it's providing an avenue for younger and newer attorneys to potentially transition into or buy a practice outright. Again, a win-win situation for all of our members. Read more about it on page 25.

Finally, there has been much in the news and literature the last few years about outsourcing of legal work to In-

dia and other markets. In an attempt to help members who are interested in contract work connect with potential opportunities for work here, the WSBA will soon offer an additional feature on its Career Center page, which currently houses a robust job board. Those seeking contract work will have the ability to make that known, while those offering contract work will easily be able to identify those that might be a match.

Along with the changes I've highlighted and the programs I've called out, the WSBA offers a host of other programs and services aimed at preparing for the 21st-century legal services market. As I've highlighted throughout all three columns, this time is an opportunity to shape our future and the future of the profession. I look forward to seeing the places we will go and the things we will achieve. **NWL**

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