

Bridging the Generation Gap: Learning to Speak the Same Language

by Peter Roberts

This spring, I will be speaking at the 13th WSBA Lawyer Services Department statewide conference at Campbell's Resort and Conference Center in Chelan. Each year this conference explores issues encountered by Washington attorneys that are not often discussed. A theme for this year's April 16–18 event will be intergenerational communication within our profession. Attorneys are cordially invited to attend. The cost is modest and the CLE credit for attending is substantial.

Attorneys new to practice and those with many years in the trenches are often like ships passing in the night. What keeps veteran attorneys from reaching out and feeling comfortable with sharing their wealth of experiences? What keeps newer lawyers from reaching out to their more experienced counterparts for advice? Yes, age necessarily is a factor for all of us. We all live our lives in parallel, but also at different “speeds” and in different places. I was 20 when I first flew in a commercial airplane. Today, it is safe to conclude that most people do so at a much younger age. The advent of the Internet has brought people

both closer together and farther apart. The Internet is the most disruptive invention since the printing press in the 1440s. It is fair to say that the entire world is learning how to include the Internet in daily existence and measuring what social gains and costs this radical invention brings. If someone does not have an e-mail address, does that mean the person is less able to offer wisdom gained with experience? Of course not!

Recent working group meetings at the WSBA reveal that we share very real differences by generation. Books are written about how to communicate with whatever generation du jour we are discussing. E-mail and texting make it easy to avoid face-to-face meetings and picking up the telephone. A telephone conversation: today, it's a novel concept. But wait! Leaders of the Young Lawyers Division and the Senior Lawyers Section have agreed to meet on the shores of Lake Chelan next spring to frankly discuss intergenerational communication.

But why bother? Fundamentally, because we are a learned profession. As a learned profession, we are all members of the same “professional family.” While being a varied group of people, we share

an underlying ability to help our citizens in crucially important ways. Our differences scream that we have much to share between generations. The privilege to practice law carries an obligation not only to be civil and professional among ourselves but also to share our knowledge. In Chelan, we will explore the ways to foster this sharing as a profession. Attendants of a one-day CLE program at Seattle University in January had this same goal.

As a new lawyer, you are faced with the simultaneous tasks of learning to practice and managing the practice. The baby boomers are approaching retirement and exploring how to pass on their practices to you. There is a lot of knowledge to be gained inside the generation gap between new and veteran attorneys. Why not get together in Chelan to network and learn from each other? The event may shape your future — and teach you to speak the language of a different generation. ♦

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WSBA Lawyer Services Department – 13th Annual Statewide Conference “Creating Extraordinary Effectiveness in Your Law Practice”

When: Friday, April 16, to Sunday, April 18, 2010

Where: Campbell's Resort, Chelan

Cost: \$75 for up to 9 CLE credits (8 general, 1 ethics – pending approval); \$65 meal package

The WSBA Lawyer Services Department invites new and young lawyers to its 13th annual Statewide Conference. The conference draws attorneys from throughout the state to enjoy Lake Chelan and participate in lively discussions and presentations about the practice of law. For newer attorneys, the weekend presents a unique opportunity to network with experienced lawyers and reflect together on common themes facing the profession. To sign up, visit www.wsba.org/lawyers/services/lasconference.htm.

This year's topics include:

- “Setting the Tone for Effective Client Relations”
- “The Role of Effective Communication and Emotional Intelligence in Practicing Law: How It Makes a Difference”
- “How to Communicate Your Practice Through Your Website”
- “Protecting Client Interest in Case of the Disability or Death of a Lawyer”
- “Ethics – What's New: An Update on Issues and Rule Changes in the Past Year”
- “Fostering Positive Intergenerational Understanding: Professionalism, Civility, and Cooperation”

