

Rowing Together – Suggestions for Creating Co-operation and Continuity in the Work Place

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Presented by:

Michelle Mackay

Gordon Zwaenepoel

Edmonton, Alberta

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ROWING TOGETHER - SUGGESTIONS FOR CREATING CO-OPERATION AND CONTINUITY IN THE WORKPLACE

INTRODUCTION

Offices are like families. They are busy, everyone has a different job or a different way of doing the same job. There are times of unity and times of division. There is not a lot of time to think about ways of doing things differently or different ways of interacting. As with families, if those within the office just keep doing the same things and ignoring growing differences or dysfunction the office will start to fall apart.

It is important to pay attention to work relationships and the need to constantly reinvent how things are done to strengthen how the people in the office work together and how the office operates.

The following are some ideas that have been employed in several offices which have made a difference in the dynamic of those offices and the way in which they function.

COMMUNICATION

Sharing Information with All Assistants

If you share what you know that adds to the overall knowledge of the work place and saves time for other assistants. An “all assistants” email address within the firm is good for sharing:

- Availability of chambers dates;
- New practice notes;
- Updated lists for outside referrals;
- Weird/odd rejections from the court house or land titles, why the document was rejected and how you fixed it;
- Letting others know when you have a rush and will need to monopolize the printer, photocopier, or other shared resource;
- Information about the preferences of other law offices/lawyers and assistants such as:
 - Whether certain lawyers have voice mail;
 - Whether certain lawyers will only deal with other lawyers;
 - Whether assistants in other firms are only allowed to do certain things;
 - Whether certain lawyers will only interact in writing;

- Whether certain lawyers have email/use email in the daily operation of their practice;
- Tips for dealing with difficult assistants in other offices.

Arrange for regular meetings among all assistants. The purpose of regular meetings is to:

- Share ideas;
- Add items into the shared precedent folder;
- Talk about merge or other documents that need to be fixed or updated;
- Discuss efficiency in terms of file organization, systems, and how to improve same;
- Problem solve;
- Work together to make the office happier and healthier.

Another aspect of communication is to address issues before they escalate. We all know there are times when real or perceived slights occur and that those incidents can cause division and toxicity in the work place. If you have an issue with another office member:

- Take some time to think about what happened, how you really feel, and how matters can be resolved;
- Think about the best long term outcome;
- Invite that person to have a conversation with you in private where no one else can become involved;
- Do not tell your coworkers, tell the person with whom you have the issue.

If the person to person approach is overwhelming:

- Send a thoughtful, non-defensive email to that person and invite their reply;
- If you have HR, talk to someone in HR to help problem solve;
- Talk to your lawyer to see if there is another way to reach a resolution.

Check in with your lawyer to ensure your relationship remains positive and healthy for both of you. Lawyers are notorious for being “too busy” to deal with the actual operation of their practice.