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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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**Young Counsel Series:  
Professional 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  
**Mikhail A. McLeod** on behalf  
of the Jamaican Bar  
Association's Publications and  
Law Reporting Committee.



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.



## 5 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.”***<sup>[1]</sup>

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 success comes before work 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 as 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.