Message from the Incoming Chair

Robert Shawyer

As the incoming Chair I would like to take this opportunity to thank Aaron Grinhaus for all of his hard work in chairing the section over the last year. Aaron has worked hard to ensure that the section produced high quality Continuing Professional Development programming (“CPD”) such as the event in Kingston, Ontario this past April that passed the Law Society of Upper Canada’s professionalism audit with flying colours. I am sure you will all join me in wishing Aaron well in all of his future endeavors.

Speaking of future endeavors as the section year ends and we get ready for a break during the summer in order to gear up for what is shaping up to be an exciting fall I am looking forward to what should prove to be an eventful and exciting year. As the incoming Chair of the section I am anticipating that with the assistance and input of both our section executive and the broader section membership we will be able offer a wide variety of interesting and extremely useful CPD programming to solo and small firm practitioners across the province.

Recently I had the opportunity to attend the LSUC’s 7th annual Small and Solo Firm Expo (“Expo”) co-hosted by the Ontario Bar Association (“OBA”) once again this year. Thanks to the efforts of one our own, section executive Dan Pinnington, who co-hosted the 2 day event the section was invited to sponsor the opening day breakfast. I am hoping that the section will be in a position to sponsor future events similar to Expo breakfast in order to both advertise our section and expand our membership base. If anyone has any suggestion I invite them to contact me or our superb section coordinator Peter Grunel to share them.

The theme of the Expo this year was marketing. Specifically the thrust of the 2 days of events was trying to help us learn how to generate more business. After all the bread and butter of solo or small firm practitioner business is the ability to cultivate more clients and therefore generate more business. While I know that for many if not most of us the idea of “marketing” makes us head for the nearest exit if we are attending a CPD event or the nearest bar for a light refreshment depending on your choice of beverage, the fact remains it is a matter of necessity in order to survive. With an ever increasingly competitive landscape before us, what with the paralegals agitating to expand the scope of the services they can provide and with increasing numbers of graduates being churned out by the law schools across the province, marketing whether we like it or not is something that we as solo and small firm lawyers must think about and actively engage in both consciously and subconsciously on a day to day basis.

To that end one of the goals I have as the incoming Chair of the section is to expand the resources available to our members to assist them in running their practice and increasing the volume of their business. As the Chair of the American Bar Association Solo and Small Firm section said recently in her regular article from the Chair “many solo and small firm practitioners focus on survival, which is important, but do not always think about getting beyond survival and growing their business so that survival is a given and not a part of the dialogue”. I agree with this
sentiment. It is time that we as solo and small firm lawyers move beyond the idea of survival and start focusing on growing our practices instead. That means that we need to focus our energy on our ideal clients and targeting our energies towards attracting that our ideal client’s. If we can as solo and small firm lawyers can begin to focus on moving beyond just paying the bills and getting to a place where we are actually able to attract clients whom we genuinely want to represent, with matters we have developed an expertise in handling or for which we have passion and ability then we will be able to prosper in today’s highly competitive legal market place. It is my belief that there is so much that we, the Solo, Small Firm and General Practice section can provide to our members that can serve as a great resource to help land the big fish, market our relationship skills, improve our business, and otherwise generate referrals.

In addition to expanding the resources that our section can and I hope will provide our members in the future I would like to see the section provide our members as many opportunities for networking either in person or virtually as we possibly can. In the past there has been some discussion of starting a LinkedIn group for our section. If anyone is interested in spearheading this initiative it would make a great tool for our membership and would allow for the membership to refer work to each other. Another initiative I think would be invaluable to our section members is an idea I will readily admit I poached from our sister section at the ABA. Recently their section has started virtual brown-bag seminars that are once per month from noon to 1:00 pm during which various topics are discussed including technology tips, tax and estate planning information, dialogue with local trial court judges, retirement planning, and bankruptcy tips for the non-bankruptcy lawyer. Unlike our sister association who does not accredit such seminars for the equivalent to CPD hours I envision these seminars as a way to earn hours towards your CPD requirements and as an opportunity for members of the section to share, on an informal basis, expertise in an area and to allow for interaction with questions and answers. Like most other events this is also a networking tool to share information with lawyers from across the province. Ideally if these seminars catch on they could be expanded to on a national level through our nation section under the auspices of the Canadian Bar Association.

Finally, the summer is a great time of year to put on your thinking caps and contribute your ideas for programming for the upcoming year. At the present time our big initiative for the fall is a program entitled “Starting Your Own Practice.” Anyone interested in being a speaker or willing to volunteer in putting this program on during the afternoon of November 1, 2012 is welcome and encouraged to participate. Remember section programming is not only a great way to get your annually prescribed CPD hours, but is also a great way to network with fellow section members. I am excited about the upcoming year and look forward to see you all in the fall!

Robert Shawyer
Shawyer Family Law
504-3200 Dufferin Street
Toronto, ON M6A 3B2
(T) 416-398-4044 EXT 25
(F) 416-398-7396
robert@shawyerlaw.ca