

What does diversity mean to our profession?



As I look forward to celebrating in 2015 the 20th anniversary of LAWPRO providing the Ontario bar's primary professional liability program, it is an appropriate time to reflect on the changes our society and profession have experienced during that time. This issue discusses the diversity that is now represented in our profession, how we are responding to change and how it is broadening our understanding of the world.

I was called to the bar in 1987 and at that time many of us never thought, from a professional perspective, of there being a world beyond Ontario. There was no easy mobility for lawyers throughout Canada and rarely did one meet a lawyer who had studied at a law school outside Canada (except, perhaps, the high flyers who pursued post-graduate degrees at "ivy league" institutions to the south). An exotic foreign client was someone across the border in the state of New York.

However, the composition of the bar and of its client base has changed immeasurably since those days (for a summary of the Law Society's most recent round of research into lawyer diversity, see "The changing mix of lawyers in the Ontario legal profession" on the next page). Ontario lawyers, who may have started life and/or pursued legal education anywhere on the planet, think nothing of acting for clients based all over the world, as technology has shrunk the size of the globe.

LAWPRO's staff composition increasingly reflects the diversity of our society. But at LAWPRO, as in the broader legal community, diversity isn't just a matter of ethnicity or national origin: gender, language, sexual orientation and a plethora of other qualities

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make up the world that is LAWPRO. For a practical approach to embracing the diversity within your own firm or organization, see "Cultural competence: an essential skill for success in an increasingly diverse profession" on page nine.

By the time I entered the profession, there were many women in law school and great female role models already practising. I am of the generation that sometimes has to be reminded that we need to pay attention to the impact of gender, but the work of the Law Society over recent years has brought home to us that the experience of all women in the legal profession is not the same, and not necessarily the same as that of men. I have every confidence that the work of the Law Society will continue to deliver insights as the diversity of the bar flourishes.

LAWPRO's role as insurer is to provide information that doesn't ignore our country's and profession's multitude of differences, but instead offers ways to accommodate and develop the rewards of a diverse and distinctive bar, so that clients are better served and lawyers are more satisfied in their working lives. That is surely a goal that will keep us going for another 20 years.

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