

“Next year, I will: _____”



Need some 2013 resolutions for your law practice? We have some!

As you'll learn in these pages, lasting positive change is less likely to come from radical self-reinvention than from the slow and steady accretion of many positive “baby steps”.

Would you like your practice to be more efficient, more profitable, more claim-proof, and more personally rewarding? Who wouldn't? But who has the time to think about practice management, when just practising law takes up every waking hour?

It's easy for busy lawyers to fall into the trap of thinking that there's no time for reviewing processes and changing habits. However, many of the changes that improve a practice for the better create efficiencies that allow you to be more successful in *less* time.

For example, one work habit that we at LAWPRO never tire of recommending (because it makes a big claims-resolution difference) is taking the time to document the steps taken on a matter. At first blush, more documentation seems like something that would take *more* time... but it depends on how you do it, and what use you make of the information you've recorded. A great way to document progress is to use a checklist. It's true – building or finding a checklist (and we have some excellent ones available at practicePRO.ca/checklists) requires an initial investment of time; but once you have one, it serves as a shorthand that you can use to organize the way you document your progress across a wide range of files. It also means time savings when you return to a file you haven't worked on in a while, because the checklist allows you to quickly pinpoint the status of the matter without having to wade through the file's contents.

Already using checklists? We applaud you; but we have plenty of other suggestions that can help organize your practice and protect you from claims. The theme of this issue – as you've likely guessed – is “resolutions.” As

you read through the articles, you'll find a wealth of suggestions for changes that can help you achieve the results you want.

Your resolutions can support our results, too. Our analysis suggests that the year 2012 will end, as did 2011, with a claims costs tally in excess of \$100 million (once internal claims handling expense is considered). We'd love nothing more than to miss that mark in 2013.

As you may have read in my editorial in the previous issue, we've taken steps to analyze the reasons behind the escalation in claims costs in the last few years. Not all of the contributing factors are within our control, or yours. But some certainly are. For example, we have seen a troubling increase, in certain areas of practice, in the number of claims attributable to the cause we label “inadequate investigation” or “insufficient discovery.” Proper investigation of the facts behind a matter is well within lawyers' control. We'd like to encourage lawyers to consider how they can change their work habits – even slightly – to ensure that sufficient effort is devoted to developing a full understanding of all of the facts relevant to a matter. Are there questions you're not asking that you should be asking? What kinds of questions generate the most useful responses?

Perhaps the first resolution you might consider is simply to step back and reflect on your practice. How do you work today, compared to the way you did things when you first entered private practice? Are you more rushed? Under pressure? Do you ever skip steps or make assumptions? If you do, does the time you save truly improve your practice's bottom line or the enjoyment you get from your work? If not, it's time to adjust your habits, or to learn new ways of doing things.

Of course, we wouldn't ask you to learn new things if we weren't prepared to do the same

ourselves. Like many other organizations, we at LAWPRO set aside time in the late fall of 2011 to identify goals and priorities for the coming year. One of our key goals for 2012 was to increase our fluency with and participation in social media. In the past year, we have increased our participation on LinkedIn and on Twitter, with a number of our employees (we call them “Social Media Actives”) making a special effort not only to post information we hope will be of interest to our followers and contacts, but also to pay attention to what other influencers in our field have to say. Starting with this issue of *LAWPRO Magazine*, we will be profiling at least one of these social media pioneers in every issue, beginning with Lisa Weinstein, whose profile you can read on the inside back cover.

We also launched Facebook sites for both the TitlePLUS program and for LAWPRO – if you haven't connected with us yet, we invite you to “Like” our pages and have a look at the content there.

Speaking for myself personally, I will be solidifying a new set of social media habits in 2013. What began as a weekly beginner's discipline of choosing content for LinkedIn, Twitter and Facebook has become easier and more enjoyable with each passing week: I've become accustomed to thinking about news and information not only from LAWPRO's perspective, but from the perspective of our LinkedIn contacts, Twitter followers, and most recently, Facebook friends. It's been a rewarding journey, and I look forward to pursuing it further in the coming year. I hope our readers have some rewarding learning experiences of their own – perhaps starting with this magazine issue!

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