

# SIX STEPS TO REBOOT FOR THE YEAR AHEAD

Addressing risk management as this year starts can set you up for success.

Having emerged from two disrupted years with pandemic restrictions, the new year is the perfect time to reset and reflect on what you can improve and set your professional goals for the year ahead. Here are six areas to focus on.

## Review your work intake strategy

Review your business plan for work intake and list areas of law you will take instructions on this year. This will give you clear boundaries and specific areas to focus your knowledge, precedents, training and resources required to do this work well.

When preparing the list, think about the matters you have run over the last few years and remove work from the list that you only do occasionally or lack expertise in. Dabbling is high risk and usually leads to matters that keep you up at night.

Ensure you remain disciplined throughout the year in rejecting or referring work that is outside your expertise and experience. For more information see LPLC's video "Define what you do" and article "It's OK to say no when it's not the right matter for you".

## Update your systems for generating work

With substantial disruptions and working from home for much of 2020 and 2021, the development and updating of precedents may have fallen off your radar. The new year is a good time to put precedent development back on the agenda. Good precedents are an important investment in running legal matters efficiently and effectively and, used well, are good risk management tools.

Ensure your agreements and other precedent documents are stored on a central system and as templates with blank variables. LPLC has seen many claims arise in circumstances where practitioners have simply copied over precedent documents from existing files. In these instances, the practitioner hasn't made the necessary changes to the document or the precedent lacks the relevant updates or variable clauses suitable for the transaction.

For more information see LPLC's webinar, The work habit.

## Revisit your approach to supervision

With many firms and clients now embracing hybrid and flexible working arrangements, it is more important than ever to consider your approach to supervising and mentoring staff. In this environment, supervising practitioners need to be more organised, planned and deliberate.

In LPLC's, More than knowing the Law podcast, Anna Hinder has provided some important advice around developing skills to supervise staff more effectively both in the office and remotely, including:

- be proactive and talk with your team regularly including scheduled meetings. Don't just have an open-door policy and rely on people to speak up with questions
- clearly communicate your instructions and what you need, and always check that you have been understood
- check work product and provide regular and constructive feedback
- use your firm's systems and processes to help remember upcoming deadlines and time limits and never just rely on the staff you are supervising. LPLC has seen many claims arise from

the failure to centrally record court deadlines and limitation periods which weren't communicated to principals

- speak with the people you supervise to establish what is working well and what can be improved.

## Prepare a professional development plan that incorporates soft skills training

Making a professional development plan for the year will help you focus on the things you must cover to do well in your role and also get the best possible outcome from time devoted to compulsory CPD.

Technical skills and knowing the law is obviously critical, but don't forget about the soft skills required including effective communication, leadership, supervision and mentoring as well as digital skills.

## Review the cyber security of firm and personal devices

Law firms remain prime targets for cyber criminals using email compromise schemes and ransomware attacks.

As the risks are constantly evolving, it is important to regularly review your firm's cyber security.

If you have not already done so, enable multifactor authentication and strong "passphrases" on both firm and personal devices to lock cybercriminals out of your systems.

All staff should undertake training to recognise new risks and red flags. When people are busy or distracted, it's easy to go into auto-pilot, and open emails or click links without stopping to think. For more information see LPLC's cyber security resources.

## Invest in your wellbeing

The COVID-19 pandemic has reminded us of the importance of personal wellbeing to productivity and performance. Think about things you need to put in place to maximise your performance and meet the demands of your role. Think about your diet, exercise and sleep, and other things that can influence your mental and physical health and ability to work effectively.

Carve out time to step away from your work to do the things you love and maintain support networks and connections with colleagues, family and friends. Taking breaks from work will help clear your mind and keep you refreshed. For more wellbeing advice see the LIV Wellbeing Program. ■

This column is provided by the **Legal Practitioners' Liability Committee**. For further information ph 9672 3800 or visit [www.lplc.com.au](http://www.lplc.com.au).

### TIPS

- Define the areas of law you will practise in this year and don't dabble.
- Invest resources in updating precedent templates and other systems to do your work effectively and to reduce the risk of professional negligence claims.
- Be more deliberate and planned in your supervision and mentoring of staff.
- Develop a professional development plan incorporating soft skills and cyber safety.
- Invest time in your personal wellbeing so you can bring your A game to work every day.