

Professional and Interpersonal Skills

John Littrich

Introduction

Many of the professional and personal skills that a successful rural or regional practitioner needs to develop and apply are important for all lawyers, wherever they practice. However, the nature of rural or regional practice is such that lawyers practising in that context are required to apply those skills in circumstances that are less likely to be encountered by their urban colleagues. Further, certain skills may be called upon more frequently in rural or regional practice than elsewhere, and different emphasis placed on aspects of those skills.

This chapter will consider what particular professional and personal skills are of the most benefit to rural and regional lawyers in dealing with the challenges they are likely to face. Further, it will consider how law students and junior lawyers might be given opportunities to acquire, apply and develop such skills while undertaking their undergraduate studies.

Communication

Lawyers and Communication

As Wolski points out, communication skills are largely generic skills and making oneself understood and being able to understand others is important in 'almost every occupation and profession'.¹ In the case of legal work, where important decisions are made by lawyers, clients, courts/tribunals and other third parties that can have serious legal, financial and emotional consequences, effective communication is critical. Notwithstanding the critical importance of communication skills to client satisfaction and the effective delivery of legal services, in the 20 categories of complaint identified in the NSW Office of the Legal Services Commissioner's (OLSC) *2015-2016 Annual Report*,² 'communication' was identified as the second highest source of complaint against lawyers,

1 Bobette Wolski, *Skills, Ethics and Values for Legal Practice* (Lawbook Co, 2nd ed, 2009) 24.

2 The Office of the Legal Services Commissioner, *2015-2016 Annual Report* (2016) <www.olsc.nsw.gov.au/Documents/2015%202016%20OLSC%20AnnRep%20accessible.pdf>.

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