

Articles 101

What they didn't teach me at Law School

Renato Marasco's winning speech at the 1995 Gordon Lewis Speakers' Trophy

Osborns Concise Legal Dictionary defines an articulated clerk as a clerk under written articles of agreement to serve a practising solicitor in consideration of being initiated into the profession.

It sounds quite mystical doesn't it? Being "initiated" into the profession. I suppose someone unfamiliar with the legal profession would find the admission ceremony at the Supreme Court rather odd. All these (usually) young men and women in their best suits surrounded by these odd looking people in wigs and gowns. Then all the people in suits hold up their Bibles and swear by Almighty God to do so. Whilst all the atheists quite rightly sitting far up the back affirm sincerely to do so.

I was an articulated clerk last year, or an artichoke as one of the banking solicitors used to call me. I am no longer at that firm having been told that there was no position for me after articles.

Law School was no preparation at all for articles at McKenzie Brackman. When I was a first year at University I had visions of being a rich wealthy lawyer who charged \$10,000 a day and drove a BMW convertible. It still astounds everyone that I was only paid \$15,000 for a whole year at McKenzie Brackman.

I was paid less than a 16 year old bank teller, I was the lowest paid person in the entire firm. If I had gone on unemployment benefits after finishing my articles I would have only copped a pay cut around 5-10%.

There should be a course at university to prepare potential artichokes for their initiation into the legal profession and it should be called Articles 101.

Topic 1

The Pecking Order - Know your Place

A banking lawyer at McKenzie Brackman once told me that the articulated clerks at one of our major competitors were so arrogant that they were called Articled Partners. One so called articulated partner loved speaking his mind at top level meetings that several QCs and top executives were present. His principal was less than impressed however at one such meeting where the articulated partner began raising points in favour of the other side.

As an articulated clerk you are the lowest of the low. You are at the very bottom rung of the corporate ladder. As an artichoke you are at the bottom of the pile and you should know your place.

It is your job to buy the partner his lunch, pick up his wife's dry cleaning, pick up his prescription from OPSM or do a special errand for him. Stocking the bar is also a very important artichoke function.

One day I was enjoying myself proof reading a 200 page heads of lease agreement when I received an urgent phone call from my principal Mr McKenzie, "Marasco, I want you to meet me up at the Melbourne Club, I've got something urgent for you to do".

I raced up Collins Street in a state of excitement. What could it possibly be? What kind of urgent transaction could it be? Or did he want me to sit in on a top level meeting with the leaders of Victorian business and politics?

I actually spent my afternoon blowing up balloons for his son's 21st that evening.

Remember the partners are not always the most important people to suck up to. Often the most important person in the firm is the Office Manager. McKenzie Brackman's office manager was big and fat with a big black moustache. He sat in an office with all glass walls in the middle of the clerks area so he could look out at the conveyancing and banking clerks to make sure they were working. I was very proud to have made up his nickname which everyone started to use: "Fat Slug".

In my first week at McKenzie Brackman I met the Environmental Law Partner, Mr Pollute. He had said I could sit in on a meeting. I went into his office where he was scribbling furiously. "Hello Sir" I said, "I'm Renato Marasco, I'm articulated to Mr McKenzie".

"Oh hello, how are you?" he said, shaking my hand. "The clients are waiting in reception, let's go and meet them and then go into the boardroom".

We strode down the corridor together. The clients, Mr & Mrs Aggrieved stood up to meet us. "Good morning, I'm Mr Pollute" he said. He gestured with his hands towards me. "And this is, ah... ah... Renata Mascara, who's an articulated clerk here".

I bit my lip hard to stop laughing. I don't know what came over me but I replied, "Sorry, Mr Pollute, you're getting confused. My name is actually Renato Marasco. My drag name is Renata Mascara, but I only use it after 9.00 pm on Fridays".

During articles I became an expert at getting away with a long lunch

