

# Are you “thriving and surviving” in your workplace?

by Catherine Dwyer, Abbott Stillman & Wilson and Professional Development Committee

## A closer look at the official launch of “Thriving and Surviving – Employment Practices and Achieving a Healthy Balance – Guidelines for employers, employee solicitors and articulated clerks in Victoria”

Have you ever had to work until 12.00 midnight? And then come in at 6.00am to do it all over again? Perhaps you have also had to work on the weekend after a week of long hours – then where do you find the time to spend with your family or engage in sporting activities?

In early 2000 the Young Lawyers’ Section (“YLS”) of the Law Institute of Victoria was keen to establish a set of guidelines which would enable lawyers to develop a balance between their work life and external commitments. The YLS was aware



TONY WILSON

that many of its colleagues work so hard that they eventually leave the practice of law behind them and pursue other careers. With these issues in mind the YLS committed itself to providing a mechanism to ensure that Victorian law firms are able to retain their junior practitioners, encourage them to enjoy practising law and maintain a healthy balanced lifestyle.

The idea behind the guidelines originated from an attendance by members of the Young Lawyers’ Executive Committee at the New South Wales Young Lawyers’ Assembly, where issues of flexible work practices were discussed and debated. Our Young Lawyers’ Section decided to put it on the agenda as an area to be addressed for the benefit of Victorian junior practitioners.

The consultation process took approximately 16 months with submissions being sought from the LIV’s Small Practice and Membership committees, the LIV Council, the Work Life Association and over 50 law firms. After several drafts and consultation with various law firms, legal interest organisations and Council, they were finalised and presented to the Law Council of the Law Institute of Victoria.

“Thriving and Surviving – Employment Practices and Achieving a Healthy Balance – Guidelines for employers, employee solicitors and articulated clerks in Victoria” (“the guidelines”) are an initiative of the Professional Development Committee. The primary goal of the guidelines is to improve the employment conditions of Victorian solicitors. The objectives of the guidelines are primarily to:

- Foster and encourage a positive and professional work environment;
- Increase job satisfaction, foster professional behaviour, increase employee loyalty, encourage career development and promote community interest; and
- Assist employers and employees achieve a healthy balance between career, family and other responsibilities by the adoption of

supportive work practises, flexible working hours and clearly defined leave policies.

The guidelines encompass a range of desired obligations including, for both:

(a) the employee

- providing quality professional service;



RADHIKA KANHAI, JACQUI BOYMAL AND ANTHONY BECK-GODOY

- maintaining confidentiality and proper records;
- complying with statutory and ethical duties; and
- providing requisite notice for resignation.

(b) the employer

- encouraging a culture whereby the employee does not feel obliged to work past nominated working hours unless required;
- providing a written position statement;
- advising of requirements to achieve promotion; and

- encouraging professional development, and the development of specific leave policies.

The guidelines have been endorsed by the LIV and were formally released at a media launch on 8 August 2001 at Bluestone Bar in Flinders Lane.

The guest speakers for the evening were Con Kilias, a barrister and the famous actor from the Australian film "The Castle" and Tony Wilson, for-

merly a solicitor and presenter of the ABC television program "Law Matters".

The launch was attended by Managing Partners of medium and large law firms in the CBD, representatives from the universities, the Attorney-General, representatives of the various sections of the LIV, young lawyers and a selection of reporters from print and television media.

Young lawyers are the future of the

legal profession. The guidelines are designed to encourage junior practitioners to work in an environment that will foster professional excellence and recognise the importance of factors external to the workplace in the development of young lawyers both professionally and personally.

Thank you to Radhika Kanhai and Anthony Beck-Godoy for their contributions to this article.

## Young Lawyers' Social Committee comedy debate

by Abby Thorbeck, Robert Walters and Social Committee



THE YOUNG LAWYERS' TEAM – ADRIAN ANDERSON, SHIVANI PILLAI AND MARK JONGEBLOED

Through the events that it organises, the Social Committee seeks to encourage young lawyers to get together to chat about their experiences, learn from those of others and develop their network of contacts within the profession. We believe that these goals are best achieved in a forum which is both fun, entertaining and relaxed – far from the inherently stressful and competitive world we inhabit during the working day.

With this in mind, throughout 2001 we have hosted cocktail parties and

various other functions, such as the Young Professionals' Network events, where our members have an opportunity to catch up and mingle, champagne or beer in hand. We have arranged the fun run and established the running club. We also organised the extremely successful inaugural Young Lawyers' Comedy Debate. Ticket sales were donated to the Royal Victorian Institute for the Blind.

For those who attended there was the chance to witness senior legal practitioners engage

in a competition of repartee and satire against a team of young lawyers. The senior lawyers did not disappoint. Judge Betty King, Ron Meldrum QC and Howard Obst, Partner at Minter Ellison, were challenged by barrister Shivani Pillai, solicitor Adrian Anderson (Corrs Chambers Westgarth) and Minter Ellison Articled Clerk Marc Jongebloed, to debate the topic "That Lawyers should have drafted the 10 Commandments."

The function was held on 24 April at Le Meridien at the Rialto and guests were well-looked after with complimentary champagne and *hors d'oeuvre* prior to the official proceedings.

Providing alcohol to guests prior to the event may have been a ploy to get more laughs, but in the end, such devious tactics were not required. The speakers had the audience in stitches.

Perhaps the quote of the night came when the young lawyers' team was reminded of the letters after Ron Meldrum's name – "QC? More like BC!" was the speedy response from



RON MELDRUM QC, HER HONOUR JUDGE BETTY KING AND HOWARD OBST