

THE LAWYERS WEEKLY

Vol. 25, No. 44

www.thelawyersweekly.ca

March 31, 2006



Articling students at Sherrard Kuzz LLP in Toronto benefit from an orientation program. See Careers story p. 22; (left to right) Lawyers Madeleine Loewenberg, Keith Burkhardt, Shelly Patel; students James Butlin, Thomas Black, Carol Chan. Photo by Paul Lawrence

CAREERS

Orientation programs worth the effort for firms and participants

By donalee Moulton
Halifax

Gone are the days when law students and associates showed up for their first day at work, hunkered down and dug in behind closed doors.

Law firms have learned that efficiency, and loyalty, comes from introducing students, clerks, and associates to the job and the team from the outset. That introduction generally takes the form of an orientation program.

At McInnes Cooper, which has offices throughout the East Coast including Halifax, St. John's and Charlottetown, the orientation program for associates spans two consecutive summer days. Then in the Fall, the new employees are brought back together for a one-day follow-up session.

During the initial two days, the new employees are introduced to the people they will be working with and the policies and procedures that shape the law firm and its practice. "We want people to hit the ground running — and to feel comfortable," says Gail Salsbury, director of professional development.

"This is an important part of building the firm's culture over time," she added. Understanding that culture is an inherent part of an orientation program. Law firms are not cut from the same cloth.

At Sherrard Kuzz LLP in Toronto, the orientation program for first year, second year, and articling students takes place over the course of a week (see photo, TLW, p. 1). On the first day, participants attend a session with partners on

the firm's values. "We have strong feelings about how we service clients and how we treat other lawyers and each other," said partner Erin Kuzz.

"We think we have an obligation to the students to introduce them to the firm," she added, "and to labour and employment law."

There is little doubt that orientation programs are intended to foster bonding, and to prepare lawyers for what lies ahead. In practical terms that can span a range of activities.

The orientation program at Farris, Vaughan, Wills & Murphy LLP in Vancouver, which takes place during the first two weeks students are at the firm, includes practical elements such as training in using the library, conducting research, and

of associate and student programs.

Orientation programs provide useful, often detailed, information. It's incredible what needs to be learned to operate efficiently and effectively in a law firm. At Farris, Vaughan everything from door

development position at McInnes Cooper with Salsbury in Halifax.

"It can," she added, "be very intimidating to ask questions sometimes."

That may be especially true when the questions are law-related,

participants and between participants and members of the firm. That's why it is essential that senior members of the firm take part in the program. "The support for the program from the lawyers — at the highest levels — has been tremendous," said Salsbury. At McInnes Cooper that support is evident from the outset when a senior partner welcomes everyone to the session.

At Farris, Vaughan, which also has a mentoring program, lawyers set up a spot in the boardroom over lunch and answer questions about specific aspects of the law from students. Lunch with lawyers is also a significant part of the orientation program.

Indeed, the getting-to-know you aspect of an orientation program cannot be under-

estimated, or undervalued. "The social aspect is really important," said Salsbury.

Fit within the firm, acknowledged Kuzz, is a critical component of long-term success. Ultimately that is what orientation programs are all about: setting the stage today for a career ahead. "Lawyers and students are our greatest resource," said Kuzz, "(and) growth is important to this new generation of lawyers."

"A lot of work goes into developing the program," noted Sangha. "It's a commitment. (But) the students are the core of this firm."



McInnes Cooper associates and clerks at Sport Nova Scotia's annual Dragon Boat Race.

"The program introduces (participants) to staff resources and opens the door to asking questions and getting the help they need," noted Karen Hollett, who job shares the director of professional development position at McInnes Cooper with Salsbury in Halifax. "It can," she added, "be very intimidating to ask questions sometimes."

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Farris Vaughan students are also taken out of the firm to the land titles office and for a tour of the courts. "We think it's important for them to understand what happens and where it happens," said Sharan Sangha, the firm's director

codes to photocopying procedures are covered, said Sangha.

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and there is an expectation that as a student or an associate, you should know the answer. That is not the expectation at Sherrard Kuzz, an eight-member firm that handles labour and employment law cases. Part of the orientation program includes what Erin Kuzz calls Labour Law 101 and Employment Law 101. "The intent is to educate," she said, adding, "Students feel a lot more comfortable and lawyers understand what basics they have."

But orientation programs go beyond the basics and the practical and help to build bonds between