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What Matters Now

This issue of the *Michigan Bar Journal* marks a change for us: the departure of our executive director. The longer I practice law (almost 21 years at this writing), the more I know that the only constant is change. In sorting through our changes, how do we decide, as a profession, what really matters to us now?

The Bar's method of planning for change has been to create and implement a strategic plan. Sounds deep, I know, but what it comes down to is this: representative segments of the Bar getting together, deciding what is of current importance to each of them, and determining how other entities, be it the State Bar of Michigan or other groups, can help them achieve their goals.

Much of the Bar's strategic plan for the past five years has focused on one overarching goal: providing services to our members at their desks. This has resulted in the creation of many programs focusing on services that members have requested: the *e-Journal*, with its daily list of newly decided cases; the Public Policy Resource Center, with its weekly update of court rules and legislation; the Practice Management Resource Center (PMRC), where a myriad of practice tools can be reviewed and "test-driven" before purchase; and the increased reliance on e-commerce in all facets of Bar service, from dues payment and member directories to event registration and the purchase of goods and services.

To achieve these goals, the Bar had to make a lot of choices. We had to decide which programs to keep, which to jettison, and how to achieve the goal our members set for us in a fiscally responsible way. We had to adjust and reposition our staff resources as well.

What we face this year is the evaluation of our performance. We will be asking some of you for an evaluation of our performance.

When you are asked, please let the SBM know how the services it provides are working for you. If they're not working for you, by all means, let us know that too. Think right now about what else you need or want, and how the Bar could provide it to you. It's essential as we move forward and decide what the Bar's focus should be. What matters now?

Perhaps a larger issue for all organized professional groups is the rapidly changing face of our membership. By this, I don't mean who is joining the profession as much as who is leaving. While new attorneys all over the country are almost 50 percent women, and a far smaller than representative percentage of ethnic minorities than are in the general population, that is a column for another place and time. Baby boomers, born between 1945 and 1962, are a vastly disproportionate number of our members. What will we do as these members age? Will they retire? Will they practice? How will they approach each option? How will our organization change as 50 percent of its active members reach retirement age in the next 20 years? Who will volunteer? And will they want to volunteer in the same way?

These issues are also hugely relevant to our practices. Do we prepare to shift our work to planning for our clients' transitions? Do we focus on age-related litigation? Do we learn how to help our clients plan for transitions

like retirement, death of a spouse, caring for elderly parents? How do we change our waiting rooms? Our parking lots?

Most importantly, how can the Bar continue to provide services to our members that will help them adjust to these changes and be prepared for them before they overwhelm us?

A larger global issue is how to preserve the immense stores of knowledge that retiring attorneys take with them when they leave the profession. Are we just going to put it in the warehouse and store it? Is there a way to harness this knowledge and expertise? How can we accommodate the member who doesn't want a full-fledged practice, but wants to volunteer at her church's immigration clinic a few days a month? What will the impact be on the legal services providers who already rely on the Bar's volunteers? Will there be enough volunteers in the ranks of incoming attorneys to replace the departing baby-boomer volunteers?

Our challenge is to find a path to answer these questions. What really matters now is how we face the future of our profession. Do we react as the world changes around us (always the easy path for a profession that relies on precedent and stare decisis), or do we mold the profession to meet the changes that are inevitable? I vote for the latter. What about you? ♦

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