



**John T. Berry**

# Time to Learn a New Dance or Two

If my wife, Barb, saw the title of this article, she would whisper in my ear, “For you it is time to learn *any* dance!” To understand my title, you have to read John Reed’s article in this month’s *Bar Journal*. If you have time to read only one article in this issue, I would suggest you immediately turn the page to John Reed’s speech delivered at this year’s Annual Meeting of the State Bar of Michigan. It was even better in person.

“If we try to keep up with a burgeoning workload by doing the same things as before, only faster and faster, we fall farther and farther behind and, arguably, produce a less elegant result as well. We are like the woman on the dance floor who knows only the old steps. ‘Waltz a little faster,’ says her partner, ‘they’re playing the tango.’”

John Reed repeatedly warns our profession to learn some new dances. He states that change is so dizzying that old methods will not work. Interestingly, he also points out that our greatest strength as lawyers—reliance on precedent and rationality—can stifle the creativity we need to find new solutions to the changes we face.

He then puts the challenge to us as lawyers individually and to the State Bar of Michigan. He challenges us to think in a new way before we react with new programs or approaches—but react quickly we must. This new way of thinking must start with “constant inquiry, and creativity, and unselfishness.”

Most in practice will admit that with increased pressures on our profession and our

very livelihood, it is human nature to focus on how all this change affects us and our families. There is nothing wrong with that. In recent articles, I have outlined some of the things we are trying to do to help you, including the impending unveiling of a new Practice Management Resource Center.

We are very excited that two highly qualified individuals joined the Bar’s Practice Management Resource Center the first week of October. Sally VanDenBerg was a solo practitioner in East Lansing and taught law practice management at Thomas M. Cooley Law School. JoAnn Hathaway began her career as a paralegal in a private law firm environment, and then spent a number of years in the insurance industry in the area of risk management.

During the next few weeks, Sally and JoAnn will gather resource material, cultivate referral lists, and survey membership to find out what Michigan lawyers want from their Practice Management Resource Center. In its initial phase, the Center will have a toll-free call-in line for lawyers with practice management questions.

Later this fall, we will open the doors to our Practice Management Resource Center training room, which will be located on the first floor of the Michael Franck Building. It will be a place where Michigan lawyers can learn about legal software and talk one-on-one with someone about their practice issues—everything from how to set up a trust account to how to launch a solo practice. We also plan to go on the road so those outside of Lansing may also benefit from the program.

The strength of the legal profession will always be in its worth to those we serve—our clients and society. If we keep our eyes on remaining helpful to others, we will benefit individually. It goes hand in hand.

The timing of John Reed’s address could not have been better. To begin the new way of thinking encouraged in that address, the State Bar of Michigan’s Board of Commissioners recently approved the use of resources to increase our outreach and communication with you and to conduct research and development that will implement innovative ways to deal with the issues most important to you.

These challenging times offer the opportunity to be the best of times for lawyers and those we serve. It is truly a time to think creatively, and is that not why we became lawyers? Football season is upon us (thank goodness!), and I am reminded of the old adage in sports that the true champion is the one who wants the ball in his/her hands when the game is in doubt. Well the game is in doubt, and from a lifetime experience of working with lawyers, we have more than our share of champions.

I ask for your ideas about the changes ahead affecting your daily lives. Your Bar president, Tom Cranmer, and I and the other leaders of the Bar will be visiting as many of you and as many lawyer groups as possible to hear your thoughts.

Together let’s learn the tango. Maybe some of us can even learn the cha-cha slide (whatever that is!). A few of the more gifted among us might even start a whole new dance. ♦

## Share your thoughts/concerns

Please forward comments to  
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