

News

Moves

- Immigration lawyer **Cathryn Sawicki** has joined the Toronto office of international law firm *Baker & McKenzie* as a partner in the global immigration and mobility practice. Sawicki, called to the Ontario bar in 2007, was previously at *Fogler Rubincov*.
- Dustin Klaudt** has joined Vancouver firm *Legacy Tax & Trust Lawyers* as an associate practicing in the areas of estates and trusts litigation, estate administration, and estate planning. Klaudt, called to the B.C. bar this year, previously articulated at *Clark Wilson*.
- Megan Self** has joined personal injury law firm *Smitiuch Injury Law* as an associate. Self, who previously articulated with the firm, was called to the Ontario bar this year.

Appointments

- Noble Chummar**, a partner in the business law and government relations groups at the Toronto office of *Cassels Brock & Blackwell*, has been appointed to the 10-person board of directors of the Liquor Control Board of Ontario. Chummar is also a certified member of the Institute of Corporate Directors.

Alliances

- International law firms *Fasken Martineau and Simmons & Simmons* have entered into an alliance combining their largely distinct geographical platforms and client bases for the purpose of enhancing their respective African offerings. *Fasken Martineau* has over 80 lawyers located in Johannesburg, South Africa, while *Simmons & Simmons* was ranked No. 3 in announced 2013 deals with sub-Saharan African involvement by value by Thomson Reuters.

Legal firms taking look at mental health

GRANT CAMERON

The psychological well-being of employees has become an integral part of many workplace policies. Leaders of companies and organizations have begun to realize that promoting good mental health will help them retain talent and lead to more productive employees.

With the pressure that lawyers often find themselves under, it's critical that law firms take the same approach, according to legal experts who tout the benefits of such policies.

"Firms must really pay attention and promote the well-being of their employees," says Nathalie Boutet, a family lawyer who has her own practice in Toronto and is founder of NEXT, a company that teaches people how to eliminate counter-productive patterns of behaviour.

"I think we need to care about the individuals that are working for us. If, for example, we put a lot of work on someone's desk and we expect it to be finished by the next day and they have to stay late, wouldn't it be nice for us to check in with them and ask if they need 10 minutes to make child-care arrangements, or ask if they want a break for lunch?"

Such approaches must start with the partners at the top of the law firm, she says.

"If they come in and they're all stressed out and they're grumpy and they don't eat and they scream at their staff and they expect their staff to be happy and healthy that's not going to work."

Lauren Bernardi, founder of Bernardi Human Resource Law in Toronto, affirms that a positive approach to mental health is good for business. Her firm is participating in the rollout of a new voluntary psychological health standard developed by the Canadian Standards Association, and is taking part in a three-year study commissioned by the Mental Health Commission of Canada (MHCC) to



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Nathalie Boutet
Family lawyer

assess the impact of the standard. Bernardi law is the only law firm taking part in the study.

The new standard has guidelines to help companies identify potential hazards to mental health and identify where they can improve policies and practices.

"We're really excited to have been chosen as the only law firm to be piloting the project, to be able to give feedback on what's working and what's not and, more importantly, to be able to give feedback on being able to introduce this into the workplace," says Bernardi.

The standard has helped, she says, especially when it comes to improving communications with staff at the firm, and has led to a "culture of teamwork, of absolute respect for each other and really maximizing productivity in whatever time is available."

At the time Bernardi's firm adopted the standard, it was mov-



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Salima Alibhai
ZSA Legal Recruitment

ing office due to growth, resulting in some mental instability and stress for employees.

"We found that we probably weren't communicating enough during this time of instability," she says. "The standard helped us to do more of that and be mindful of some of the impacts of the changes."

Bernardi says the firm will soon be undergoing an audit of 13 factors that lead to psychological well-being. The results will identify where staff members think the firm is doing poorly and will result in a plan being drawn up that will map out steps to be taken in future.

Salima Alibhai, a lawyer who is client partner, legal division, at ZSA Legal Recruitment in Toronto, says law firms have been lax in addressing mental-health issues in their workplace policies.

Law is a very stressful field and the hours of work are long, as is the pressure to bring in new clients, she says, so mental and psychological issues from the pressure can be a problem.

"The push to ensure that you're doing business development is huge which means you're out socializing. I've talked to a lot of law students and they've told me, 'I didn't start drinking till I was in law school.'"

On top of the pressure, lawyers also have to keep up appearances on the job, she says, in spite of the fact their marriage might be falling apart or their children aren't seeing them.

"You have to keep that straight face because you're there for a purpose and you have to work from 7 a.m. to 11 p.m. and that's the way that life is."

At the very least, says Alibhai, law firms should have workplace assistance programs that help people with marriage or addiction problems, as well as a budget for career and life coaches who are independent of the firm and can help employees.

Alibhai says she's heard about lawyers committing suicide over the years because of the pressure. One female lawyer jumped out of an office window.

"The parents knew that she was suffering mentally" but she kept her real face hidden at the firm "because when you go to somebody with these kinds of problems you're looked at as being weak," says Alibhai. "There's no support network and there's not an ability to say, 'No.' No matter how much the partners are throwing you work, you don't say, 'No.' You keep at it."

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