

Finding new ways for women 2016

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A year ago, Amanda Lamond's vision to bring together women in law to start a conversation about a new consciousness in law became a reality, and WOLELA (Women Leading in Law) was born.

The conversation continues. There are numerous matters to deal with and develop, amongst them:

- whether law serves the purposes it sets out to achieve and whether the processes are effective;
- whether the adversarial system of law is ideal and sustainable ;
- whether there is sufficient focus on the “humanising” issues of legal education and how to bring “conscious” lawyering into the curriculums and the profession; and
- of course, the role of women in achieving and enhancing these ideals.

Mmabatho Seeiso, Director of the Bridge and keynote speaker at WOLELA, was one of those who discussed how women can contribute to

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the legal profession's innovation, how to achieve balance in a stressful and anxious environment and how the personal journeys of women from diverse backgrounds have led to where they are today.

Innovation in law is necessary, not only in terms of how practices can be managed from a technological perspective, but also how the role of women in law is seen by both women lawyers and firms, and importantly the retention of female practitioners. Collaboration seems key, in terms of inspiring the younger generation to effect change from within. It is vital that culture shifts are made to make new recruits more comfortable and familiar with what is expected of them. Currently there is still the so-called "disconnect" between academia and the types of attributes such as critical thinking skills which are required to make substantial impacts.

How women adapt and perform in a stressful, and what remains a male dominated working environment, will vary greatly, depending on personal circumstances and support structures. Some believe that women are able to elect how they wish to practise, and make the necessary changes to the type



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of work they want to do and to thrive and make a difference.

It is encouraging to see that women are leading the way in legal education and are nurturing students in a more holistic and feminine way.

Ultimately, any discussion on women and work, whether in the legal sphere or not (as was illustrated by one woman who was MD of Global Load Control at Lufthansa), will depend upon the values that women ascribed to themselves and their personal lives. Women display different characteristics from men, and tend to empathise more strongly with their clients, which often leads to further anxiety and burn-out.

Balance is key to all this and one solution is to focus on quality rather than quantity of work. Firms that do away with the old practice of hourly billing can focus on the outcome and intention of the client and introduce new ways of practise to assist women lawyers.

While there is still much to be done, it is interesting and encouraging to find at a seminar led by women and the Centre for Integrative Law that women are collaborative, creative and courageous. They find new ways to add their voices to the law which is in need of their nurturing and nourishing spirit.

These conversations should continue. Young women graduates and those who feel inspired to practise from a different perspective can pursue new ways to lead in law. ♦

*Malherbe is a lawyer, blogger and the author of *From Courtrooms to Cupcakes*. She attended the conference as a guest of Whipping the Cat.*



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