

" THE LAW OF OUR TODAY "

THE LEGAL PROFESSION AND PUBLIC RELATIONS

A REPORT OF THE COMMITTEE ON PUBLIC RELATIONS OF THE COUNTY OF
YORK LAW ASSOCIATION, TORONTO, ONTARIO

It is an unpleasant fact that the regard of the public for the legal profession is at a very low level. The members of the Bar alone are to blame for this condition and unless steps are taken that will improve the layman's attitude towards the profession, theirs will be the responsibility for the further loss of prestige that is certain to occur. The corrective for this condition is public relations work on the part of the legal profession.

As ordinarily understood public relations activities are directed to creating a receptiveness in the public mind for the services available. In the usual commercial approach to the problem it is assumed that those responsible for furnishing the service have seen to it that the service is the most suitable one for the needs of those expected to avail themselves of it and that it will be continually adapted to changing requirements.

THE PUBLIC'S REQUIREMENTS: In the learned professions the improvement and the maintenance of standards of service must depend on the efforts of the members of the professions. Before the public can be impressed with the usefulness of the learned professions, the public must be assured that in seeking the services of a professional advisor, they are obtaining a high standard of professional knowledge and skill.

The external phase of public relations work—the forming of a favourable attitude outside the profession—must be accompanied or preceded by an equally important internal phase, the education of the members of the profession to be qualified and willing to render the service that the public is entitled to receive. In improving the standard of professional ability,—the most important phase of public relations within the legal profession—the County Law Association is the medium best suited to stimulate the interest of the profession in the education that improvement implies.

This report while recognizing that a complete programme of public relations activities entails features which are provincial and even national in their scope, is confined to bringing attention to certain practical steps which can be taken, that are especially within the field of the County Law Associations.

RESPONSIBILITY OF THE PROFESSION: The legal profession, in common with other learned professions, must be made to realize that the reservation of an exclusive professional field is not an hereditary monopoly for their own lucrative benefit but is essentially for service to and protection of the public and to insure that those who aspire to enjoy the privileges of the profession do so only by assuming the corresponding obligations.

The profession must face clearly a choice brought about by the increasing complexity of the possible fields of activity for a legal practitioner; the choice between, on the one hand, maintaining in an ever-widening sphere a higher degree of skill and knowledge than possessed by others attempting to serve the laymen, and, on the other hand, surrendering to those who are better fitted for the task, the particular activities for the discharge of which the lawyer is not willing to prepare himself. The members of the Bar must realize that professional ability and conduct is not a purely personal matter but that any departure from accepted standards is a serious failure of the profession's duty to the public and a personal injury to every fellow practitioner.

Assuming that the profession has by its internal public relations work again attained a position of pre-eminence in its field, then is it not proper, not solely in the interests of its members but for the protection of the public to make known the advantages of legal advice and what is to be expected by those seeking that advice?

PLACE OF THE COUNTY LAW ASSOCIATION: In approaching the consideration of some practical steps in this direction which could be carried on through the medium of a County Law Association, two main considerations have been borne in mind.

First—The County Law Association is by far the most effective and direct means of making personal contact with the individual members of the profession and so is the ideal medium for the internal portion of this work as well as for the external portion which is local in its character.

Second—While the external work cannot proceed in the absence of a foundation of internal work, the internal can and should go ahead of the external.

NEED FOR IMMEDIATE ACTION: Even granting that there may be valid objections to embarking now on a programme of public relations work of a national scope it is necessary that some work among the profession should be done to improve standards of professional ability and knowledge. The ranks of

our profession are at present depleted due to the absence of a relatively large number on war services. To them we owe a special duty to exert every effort so that the profession to which they will return will be a better profession than that which they left. The absorption into the profession of them and the graduates who will leave law school in the period following the war will place a heavy strain on the ability of the profession to provide a high standard of professional service, and if the work of improving the status of the lawyer is left to be dealt with then, it will prove even more difficult than at the present time. All considerations indicate the necessity of undertaking this work now.

In presenting some suggested activities which it is within the scope of a County Law Association to encourage and promote, certain objectives have been first set out. A number of activities have been set out all of which are of a nature a County Law Association is particularly adopted to undertake. Some Associations may not feel prepared to carry on all these activities and may choose the ones they desire. The various suggested activities are independent of each other and work on one does not necessarily entail that all be undertaken.

STATEMENT OF OBJECTIVES: 1.—To promote among its members a proper appreciation of the unique privileges of a lawyer and his corresponding responsibilities to the public, to his clients and to his fellow practitioners.

2.—To develop in its members individually a pride in the profession that makes its welfare a matter of prime importance and collectively a spirit of co-operation in maintaining that pride.

3.—To create in its members an awareness of their duty to be fitted to serve the public and to encourage its members to keep informed of all developments in the field of law and practice.

4.—To create in its members a realization of their duties as officers of the courts and the guardians of civil liberties.

5.—To encourage its members to take a sincere interest in public affairs and activities as matter of public service.

6.—To obtain the deserved public respect for the administration of justice by creating a greater mutual respect as between the bench and the bar, and by persistently advocating reforms in the administration of justice that will be for the benefit of the public.

7.—To develop on the part of its members a more critical attitude towards unauthorized practice by disbarred or sus-

pendent members of the profession and to shape a more uniform and constructive point of view on the part of all lawyers in the province towards unauthorized practice by unqualified persons.

8.—To encourage its members to disseminate reliable information on legal matters for the mutual benefit of the public and the profession.

SUGGESTED ACTIVITIES: 1.—The arranging of refresher courses, local lectures, and group discussions where all members may obtain the advantage arising from the knowledge and experience of members and others having special qualifications.

2.—The preparation and circulation of periodic bulletins to bring to the attention of its members, matters on which they should be specially informed.

3.—The encouragement of the writing of articles for publication in legal journals as a means of increasing the general fund of legal knowledge.

4.—The arranging of meetings and discussions with other professional groups to improve the relationship between them and to develop an appreciation by each group of the particular functions and responsibilities of the other.

5.—The active participation in work to prevent and correct injustices and to improve the administration of justice by directing the attention of the proper officials and the public to inequitable legislation, regulations or practices and making the necessary representations against any undesirable features in legislation or the administration of justice.

6.—The encouraging of its members,—

(a) To establish necessary contacts with the press to the end that the Association will be looked upon as the proper source of information on legal matters;

(b) To give to the press whenever possible authentic information on legal matters and with respect to the activities of its members which are in the nature of public service.

7. The encouraging of its members to avail themselves of every opportunity to give reliable information on legal matters to official bodies, charitable organizations, service clubs and charitable and social groups and to bring about a condition where the Association will be looked upon by these as the medium through which, with respect to legal matters, information or the services of qualified speakers may be obtained.

In the development of any programme along the lines suggested our own Association could work most effectively as a unit of a provincial scheme, and while to gain the greatest effect the coordinated work of all County Associations would be desirable, your committee feels that work in the field of public relations by the County of York Law Association should not be dependent on the action of other Associations.

RECOMMENDATIONS: Your Committee therefore recommends,—

(a) That a standing committee on public relations be appointed by the County of York Law Association;

(b) That to this Committee be delegated the promotion of public relations along the lines in this report suggested and along lines which further study of the problem by such Committee would indicate;

(c) That the County of York Law Association recommend to a meeting of representatives of County Law Associations that,—

- (i) all such Associations in the Province work along parallel lines each in its own County;
- (ii) a co-ordinating committee of representatives of County Law Associations be appointed to deal with questions arising which have more than a local significance;

(d) That this Association recommend to the Ontario branch of the Canadian Bar Association that a study of public relations work be undertaken with a view to inaugurating work which would be province-wide in its character.

All of which is respectfully submitted.

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