

A Lawyer's road map for success

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There are three essential qualities a lawyer needs to develop to achieve continuing success in their career. Lawyers should ensure they:

1. Receive continuing legal professional development to further their skills and knowledge of the profession itself as well as their specialist practice area.
2. Focus qualitatively on their service and legal work.
3. Gain commercial knowledge relevant to their practice as well as social skills to successfully communicate with clients. Lawyers should use simplistic language and provide creative solutions based on their understanding of business in the relevant sector.

With reference to the above points, the sky is the limit when it comes to how much a lawyer can continue to develop themselves throughout their career. In this article, I will concentrate on continuous legal professional development, a subject that is essential for all law firms, communities and individual lawyers. The knowledge and skills needed to practice law are dynamic and lawyers need to keep up with developments in the law to continuously refine their skills.

Continuing professional development (“CPD”) is the maintenance and enhancement of a lawyer’s professional knowledge, skills and professionalism throughout their career. It helps to ensure that lawyers meet the standards of learning, professional competence and conduct that is appropriate for the legal services they provide. CPD programmes exist within most developed legal systems and are sought after by emerging legal markets. Most western jurisdictions require lawyers to complete a set number of CPD hours on set topics each year. Lawyers are required to verify their compliance with the CPD requirements to renew their practising certificate.

The Government of Dubai Legal Affairs Department will be introducing a programme requiring lawyers to enrol in different courses each year to further their local education with regard to skills and professional ethics. At present it is unclear whether lawyers with current practicing certificates from western jurisdictions will also be required to enrol, however there is strong reason to believe that they will also be required to take part.

The Ministry of Justice is also considering an initiative to start a similar programme, however at present it is the Legal Affairs Department who has committed to progress, structure and introduce the programme. It must however be mentioned, that this programme is not undertaken by the Ministry of Justice for the purpose of qualifying lawyers (as part of their one year training programme) to be fully licensed to act and appear before a court or as an advocate. It is instead ongoing CPD.

What is interesting about the programme is that it not only covers updates on changes made to laws in various practice sectors like shipping or banking, but goes further to provide training on ethical standards and the conduct of lawyers. This is of equal or even greater importance than a lawyer’s technical skills and training. It is very important for the development of the younger generation of lawyers and lawyers from different cultures who are practicing in the UAE.

The UAE does not currently have comprehensive laws or regulations relating to the ethical practice of

lawyers, apart from a few articles within the laws of Dubai and Abu Dhabi and the DIFC Courts' Code of Professional Conduct for Legal Practitioners in the DIFC Court, for lawyers who appear before the DIFC Courts.

An essential element for legal education carried out either in-house or via the Legal Affairs Department is concentrating on qualitative issues such as advice and service to the client, organising files, communicating with the client, billing style, format of advice, conduct of lawyers before the judge, marketing, and delivery of the final version of a contract to the client. CPD should not be restricted to technical advancement but should also embrace personal development in essential management, business and client development skills. These elements are essential and highly relevant to everything a lawyer does within the firm and for their client.

The good news is that Dubai has a healthy environment to continue to incorporate and execute CPD training and a local and international community of senior lawyers with the necessary skills and knowledge to provide excellent support and assistance in the training of young lawyers and other lawyers within the UAE. This will gain traction when the Legal Affairs Department introduces its own CPD programme, which is in the final stage of implementation.