17 tips for the business of law amidst COVID-19

The COVID-19 pandemic has brought unprecedented challenges for lawyers and law firms, including economic pressures and potential changes to the business of law. The Law Society has heard from many lawyers in British Columbia who are concerned about their economic future as individuals and as businesses. Our Practice Advisors and other departments have put together some tips and advice for lawyers and students that address the business impacts they are experiencing during this difficult time.

We are indebted to the Law Society of Alberta, which produced similar recommendations, some of which we have modified for the BC context.

1. Apply for federal or provincial grants, programs or other relief available for individuals and small businesses.

2. Speak with commercial lenders about interest relief or deferral of loan payments without interest.

3. Discuss rent reduction or deferrals with landlords, and apply for utility and property tax deferrals.

4. Seek remote bookkeeping services in the event you or your bookkeeper are quarantined.

5. Ask insurers about policies and business interruption insurance for COVID-19. If no business interruption coverage is available, consider improvements to the existing policy and consider products by other insurers.

6. Learn about student loan deferrals made available by the federal and provincial governments.

7. Be aware of leave provisions and employment standards regarding layoff and termination of employment related to COVD-19. Keep in mind the requirements for lawyers leaving firms. Read "Ethical considerations when a lawyer leaves a firm" in the Summer 2017 *Benchers' Bulletin* (p.15).

8. Continue to comply with the Law Society's trust assurance requirements. With staff working remotely, supervision becomes a bigger challenge, which creates more risk for anyone handling money. Lawyers must continue to be vigilant about monies leaving their trust and general accounts.

9. Although pursuant to s. 9 of the *Emergency Act* limitation periods are suspended from March 26, 2020 until the date of declaration of a state of emergency regarding COVID expires or is cancelled, ensure you take care of filings as soon as you can and well in advance of the day the emergency order expires or is cancelled.

10. While working remotely, take steps to protect client confidentiality and maintain security over books and records.

11. If you are struggling, reach out for help. If you are having trouble coping with economic pressure, isolation or any type of anxiety or depression, the Lawyers Assistance Program remains open to support you by phone or through other means. LifeWorks is also available to provide counselling and resources.

12. Make sure that all staff are coping well. Keep in touch with your teams while working remotely.

13. Be cautious about phishing attempts and emails that are out of the ordinary or that contain instructions to send money or share passwords and contact information. Fraudsters may take advantage of the disruption and panic surrounding the pandemic. Read risk management tips here.

14. Keep up to date on issues affecting your practice areas and solutions that others have developed. Tap into your professional associations to stay connected. Be sure to check the Law Society's web page dedicated to updates on COVID-19.

15. Stay in touch with clients. Give clients regular updates of any legal developments and discuss strategies that can be implemented once the pandemic is over.

16. This may not be the best time to be aggressively pursuing outstanding statements of account, and this should be considered on a client by client basis.

17. Carve out some time to think about the future and the services that will be needed after the pandemic. Make sure you are well prepared for the next possible disaster or pandemic. Document any processes that worked well or areas for improvement.