

It's that time of the year again for AGMs and conferences

Mapula Thebe – Editor

As we head towards the end of the year, this is the time when different organisations hold their annual general meetings (AGMs) or annual conferences. Practitioners may ask themselves, is there any value in attending these meetings, and is it really worth taking a day or two out of one's busy schedule to listen to speeches and seminars? In my view, attending annual conferences is a worthy exercise as practitioners have an opportunity to learn something new, which has the potential to enhance their practice. Over and above the educational benefit of these meetings, practitioners have a first-hand opportunity to network and discuss issues that are at the pulse of the profession.

Our October issue contains reports from the Southern African Development Community Lawyers' Association (SADC LA) annual conference, the Johannesburg Attorneys Association (JAA) AGM as well as the Law Society of South Africa and Legal Education and Development's first annual Practice Management Conference. One of the trending themes at the conferences was transformation.

The word 'transformation' seems to be South Africa's catch phrase, with many people focusing only on two of its approaches, namely race and gender. However, when the word is looked at holistically, one finds that all approaches of the word are interlinked. Meaning, there cannot be meaningful gender and race transformation if there is a lack of social, economic and political transformation.

The big question is: How does the legal profession ensure that holistic transformation takes place? Judge Thokozile Masipa, in her speech during the JAA demonstrated the answer to this eloquently. Judge Masipa compared two young previously disadvantaged fellows seeking articles: One, who attended private schools, speaks impeccable English and obtained good grades. The other, who stays in a shack, funded his or her distance education through washing cars and speaks with a heavy African accent. She added

that the youngster who lives in a shack, in many cases, does not stand a chance of securing articles as he or she does not conform to the world view of what an attorney should look like. On the other hand, the youngster with the good grades manages to secure articles, does extremely well and is an asset to the firm and is eventually made one of the directors. Judge Masipa asked: 'Is the transformation initiative successful? Not necessarily. Whether there has been real transformation will depend on what this fellow does with his knowledge and his success. If what he has gained from his firm only benefits him and his firm real transformation has not taken place. For real transformation to take place he would have to persuade his firm to empower more people from "previously disadvantaged backgrounds" or quit the firm and do the work of empowerment with or without his firm.'

The other trending theme that was discussed at the conferences was 'the law firm of the future'. During the SADC LA conference it was discussed that the law and law firms will be transformed by technological advances, but no more than other professions, and not more than law firms' clients will be. Also, the 'law firm of the future' must efficiently use technology as this will enable them to render better service to their clients and attract international clients. Other areas 'law firms of the future' will have to concentrate on are, demographics, specialisation and project management skills.

The above two topics are just some of the many issues and topics discussed at the AGM and conferences. It is clear that there is indeed real value and benefit to attending such meetings. For a full report on the above topics, in this issue, see:

- 'Using the law to strengthen good governance practices in the SADC region'
- 'Legal practice of the future discussed at practice management conference'
- 'Transformation discussed at JAA AGM'

2015 AGM venues and dates

- 16 October

KwaZulu-Natal Law Society

Durban Coastlands Hotel, Umhlanga.

- 23 – 24 October

Black Lawyers Association

Emperor's Palace, Johannesburg.

- 29 – 30 October

Law Society of the Free State

Windmill Casino and Entertainment Centre, Bloemfontein.

- 30 – 31 October

Cape Law Society

Flamingo Casino Complex, Kimberley.

- 31 October

Law Society of the Northern Provinces

Sun City.