



**Remarks of the Hon. Chief Justice Anne Ferguson
Chief Justice of the Supreme Court of Victoria
On the occasion of an admission ceremony in the Banco Court
9.30am, Tuesday, 30 July 2024**

The Court acknowledges the traditional custodians of the land on which the Court sits today, Peoples of the Kulin Nation. We pay our respects to their Elders, knowledge holders and leaders past and present and extend that respect to all First Nations people who may be present.

The Court is formally satisfied that each applicant has met the requirements for admission. An order will be made for each applicant to be appointed an Australian lawyer and an officer of the Supreme Court of Victoria.

On behalf of the whole of the Court, congratulations to each of you.

The legal profession is steeped in history and tradition. You only have to look at this ceremony to see some of that tradition, and in this courtroom. Admission ceremonies have been held in the Banco Court, where we are today, for over 135 years. The ceremony probably isn't very different from what it was in that time. But what we do know is that although the ceremony hasn't changed much, the law has continued to evolve, as has the legal profession; and we know that your future will be part of the evolution of the profession.

Being a new lawyer

Over the past few years, the way that we work has been transformed, both for the legal profession and for the courts. I have the fortunate position of being able to welcome new lawyers to the profession through these ceremonies. It gives me an opportunity to speak with each

new lawyer about things that I think might help them along the way. It doesn't really matter whether that is as part of the profession or if you choose to go on and do something different outside law.

The first thing that I would suggest to you is that you embody the qualities that you would hope to see in your colleagues.

Be professional and courteous at all times. Support those that you work with and be unreservedly polite to your opponents. To behave decently is to do the right thing. Moreover, some day, you might find that your opponent today becomes a colleague, they may become a client; they may one day be a judicial officer. The old adage to treat others as you would like to be treated will often serve you well.

There will be times I am sure when you find yourself tested. Reject any temptation to create difficulty for others. When there are problems, and I can assure you that they do come along from time to time, the important thing to do is to focus on the solution, rather than to look around for somebody to blame for the situation you find yourself in.

Always prioritise meaningful contributions to those around you and also to the broader community.

It may put you at ease, alternatively it might make you feel a little more nervous, to know that there are very few people who are admitted as lawyers who end up having the career that they perhaps anticipate they will when they are sitting in these ceremonies. But that's not a bad thing. What it shows is that they take some advice about taking opportunities, and that's some advice that I would like to pass on to you.

Be open to trying new things and don't hold yourself back from opportunities when they come your way. Keep an open mind, particularly to new areas of work.

If you are given an opportunity and you find yourself in doubt, always remember that the person who is giving you that opportunity already thinks that you will succeed. Why else would they put their faith in you?

Make wellbeing a priority

It would be remiss of me not to highlight the importance of wellbeing when speaking about finding success in the law.

The ongoing conversation about wellbeing of lawyers is a great leap forward for the profession. We know a lot more now than we did a few years ago. For example, we know that the legal profession in Australia is affected by a high prevalence of mental health issues. We also know that to create meaningful and lasting change, these challenges must be addressed at the organisational level, not just an individual one.

I strongly believe that wellbeing is a vital element of a healthy, well-functioning and sustainable profession.

There will be times when you are challenged and times when finding equilibrium in your life seems out of reach. Be mindful of your wellbeing and don't let it fall to the wayside. Prioritise it. Keep the conversation going with your peers and other colleagues. Engage with the supports in your organisation that will sustain you over a long-term career. I can assure you that it is possible to have a very rewarding and balanced life as a lawyer, and it is possible to thrive both personally and professionally at the same time.

There will also be times when your boundaries are tested, whether that be in an ethical or a personal sense. I know that pressures for new lawyers can be incredible and tricky to navigate. I implore you never to surrender your boundaries, not for anyone, because you're now a gatekeeper, not only for yourselves, but also for those who will follow you.

Importance of mentoring

Seek out mentors and peers who you can share your experiences with. This might be through a formal program, or it might be through the development of an informal mentoring relationship.

Please remember that mentoring is not a one-way street. It's more like a circle. While you are still at an early stage of your careers, you have

already learned more than you realise. Your life experience is different to others. So, I would encourage you to think about what knowledge you have and what experiences you have that you might be able to share with others for their benefit. Always think about what you can contribute to others.

Law and the community

I know that for many of you the desire to help others and to give back to the community is what inspired you to choose the study of law. It is a great privilege to be a part of the administration of justice and for lawyers to be entrusted with helping those in need who would otherwise not have a fair go. It is something which I have seen give lawyers a real sense of purpose, a sense of community. I have also seen it fulfil them on both a personal and professional level.

Pro bono legal work is one area where Victoria excels. We have a long and proud history of it. But we can't rest on our historical performance. There is still much more to do to address the persisting need for access to justice.

I strongly encourage you then to take up pro bono work whenever you can. It enables you to not only give back to the community; but it may also be beneficial for your growth and development, for your learning and for your career.

I'd like to share some of my thoughts about diversity within the profession. Historically, the composition of the profession has not reflected the community that it has served. It has lacked diversity in many respects. Encouragingly, in recent years we have seen some changes for the good. But there is still a way to go. The legal profession must continue its efforts to foster inclusivity, to imbed equitable practices and to effect long-lasting cultural change. Diverse and equitable workplaces produce better outcomes for organisations and for the people who work within them. A diverse profession will provide a better service to the community.

As new lawyers, I ask each of you to help us to continue to change things. With *your* help, we can work towards a community that is served by a legal profession that is more reflective of it.

Your paramount duty

I remind you that as an Australian lawyer, your paramount duty is to the Court and to the administration of justice. Some of you may never set foot in a courtroom again. But the duty remains with you. The duty attaches to you personally. It cannot be delegated. You can't make it somebody else's responsibility. That duty must prevail to the extent of any inconsistency with any other duties that you owe, whether those are to an employer or to a client.

If you take a strong ethical approach to practice from day one, you will soon find yourself building a reputation of which to be proud. A reputation to be envied.

At the beginning of these remarks, I commented on the evolution of the legal profession, and I also observed that you have a role; you're part of the evolution. What the profession looks like in years to come, how it operates, the respect it has earned – you can play a part in that. I'd encourage you to take up the mantle.

Conclusion

I'd like to conclude this ceremony by noting that I know that today is a really special day not only for you, it's also very special for a lot of other people – for family members, for those who have supported you throughout your studies and your early working life. For those who have educated you, whether through formal education or education in the workplace.

On your behalf I want to thank them – some of them are sitting in the body of the court, some upstairs, but the confines of the courtroom mean that there are probably more people outside that deserve this thanks. Nobody is successful without the support – and sometimes a nudge in the right direction – from those around us.

Today is a day to mark your achievements. I know that you will celebrate, and I encourage you in that regard. If you don't celebrate things like this, what do you celebrate? The moment will be over soon enough; the hard work's going to start pretty soon again. So, make the most of today, enjoy it, and keep some very fond memories.

My colleagues and I sitting on the bench today again extend our warmest congratulations to each of you. You are the newest Australian lawyers and officers of the Supreme Court. Please enjoy the day and take some photos outside in the courtyard – and all the very best for the life that lies ahead of each of you.

Adjourn the Court.

The Hon. Chief Justice Anne Ferguson
Chief Justice, Supreme Court of Victoria

30 July 2024

(The Chief Justice sits on admission ceremonies throughout the year. Her Honour's remarks on each of these occasions may change according to the ceremony.)