

Throwing solicitors a lifeline

Training courses would do much to help practitioners survive the credit crunch

James Dean's report entitled 'Law firms yet to feel credit crunch' (see [2008] *Gazette*, 12 June, 5) contains the comforting news that half of law firms have not yet been affected by the credit crunch. We are obviously acting for the unlucky other half.

Our experience is that firms are already closing, finding it increasingly difficult to make ends meet, and claims are being issued against partners, with salaried partners caught up in the crossfire.

A pro-active regulator adds to the range of issues confronting solicitors.

The representational Law Society has an important role to play in this economic climate. Much greater support is needed for the excellent work of the Solicitors Assistance Scheme, LawCare and the Solicitors Benevolent Association, all of which can help prevent crises becoming disasters.

Neil Wright's suggestion (see [2008] *Gazette*, 19 June, 12) of a fund to support solicitors facing regulatory issues is well made. The Law Society could serve the profession well by establishing such a fund. The defence fund would make a difference in those

cases where the legal expenses insurance element of the private indemnity insurance does not come into play. However, much more effort is needed by the Law Society in prevention. Training courses would be a start – for those about to enter into partnership, and on new areas in which to make a living. These steps would do much to ensure more solicitors survive the credit crunch.

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Preparing for partnership

I read with sympathy Tony Guise's plea for more support for those about to enter into partnership (see [2008] *Gazette*, 26 June, 11). This is a crucial time, when lawyers are making the leap from fee-earning employees to

employers with wide management responsibilities.

Some of us have argued for years that we should make such training obligatory (the Law Society of Scotland requires all those in this position to undergo a two-day training course). The fact is that, otherwise, the vast majority of the profession will not attend.

“ Making partnership is a crucial time when lawyers make the leap from employees to employers with management responsibilities ”

I and others have conducted such courses through various organisations, and know that it is impossible to attract substantial numbers. A handful attend who are already committed to good management. If the Law Society offered such courses, they would meet the same fate.

The Law Society does, however, have a proactive role to play. The Law Management Section offers conferences on topics such as quality management, finance, HR and IT. Law Society publishing has a range of management-related publications suitable for new partners, and my volume in this series, *New Partner's Guide to Management*, offers an overview.

Tony Guise is right, however, in saying that there is no substitute for focused, directly delivered training.

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