

ADMISSIONS CEREMONY, 2 FEBRUARY 2015

SESSION FOUR

On behalf of the judges of the Supreme Court, congratulations on your admission as legal practitioners. You can be rightly proud of your intellectual achievement and your determination and resilience in completing the demanding requirements for admission. And a warm welcome to your family and friends who have supported you one way or another, in your success so far. They have earned a share of your reflected glory on this significant day in your lives.

The legal profession has undergone many changes since Justice Fraser, Justice Jackson and I were admitted as practitioners last century in a now-demolished court building. But we are not so old that we do not remember the expectations we had as newly admitted legal practitioners. Like you, we hoped it would mean more money after many years of student poverty. There is nothing wrong with that. Queensland needs clever, aspirational, entrepreneurial, hardworking young lawyers to assist in responsible, sustainable economic growth locally, nationally and globally.

Commercial considerations must, however, always remain secondary to the professional and ethical obligations of lawyers. As legal practitioners, you are officers of the court. That means you must place your duty to the court before your own interests or those of your clients. In particular, you must never mislead the court.

You may have noticed there was a State election last Saturday. It is appropriate this afternoon to look beyond partisan political issues and reflect on our good fortune to live in a democracy under the rule of law. We enjoyed a peaceful election campaign, an orderly polling day, we are awaiting the announcement of an election result which the community will accept as legitimate, and we can expect the new government to seamlessly take office.

But while the election of the legislature is pivotal in a democracy, the other arms of government are also critical. The independent legal profession plays an institutional democratic role, operating as a check on the abuse of executive power. It ensures that every citizen has access to the rule of law in independent courts. Lawyers are duty bound to protect and pursue their clients' rights, unswayed by the power, privilege or wealth of others, whether individuals, corporations or the State.

This means you may be required to undertake advocacy for the most despised, marginalised and unpopular members of society in the face of disapproval from the legislature, executive, media and the public. As lawyers you may also be called on to defend the independence of the third arm of government, the judiciary. In recent times, I was proud to see some Queensland lawyers appropriately speak out against populist legislative changes and executive action which impinged on the doctrine of the separation of powers and judicial independence. As new members of the legal profession, you should be proud of this institutional, democratic role and fulfil it when called on.

Despite this important role and financial success, lawyers are all too often dissatisfied with their professional lives. Justice Sandra Day O'Connor, the first woman appointed to the US Supreme Court, wrote in her book "The Majesty of the Law" that there is no greater duty or pleasure for a lawyer than to ensure there is indeed equal justice under the law for the poor, the disadvantaged and the disenfranchised." Many Queensland lawyers recognise this by donating scores of hours of pro bono service. In providing access to the law for impoverished clients or for community groups, lawyers not only help those clients. They also raise community confidence in the profession and in its institutional role. And they bring additional meaning and joy to their own professional lives. I recommend it to you. So does the National Pro Bono Resource Centre which encourages every lawyer to donate 35 pro bono hours each year.

May you achieve your dreams, including your financial goals, during your legal career. But do so by upholding your professional, ethical obligations; by fulfilling your institutional democratic role if called upon; by demonstrating compassion; and by sharing your skills with your fellow human beings. That way, when you are old men and women, retired from the law, you can reflect upon your working lives with satisfaction, knowing you gave your professional best.

Our good wishes go with you on your journey.

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SESSION FIVE

On behalf of the judges of the Supreme Court, I congratulate you on your admission and warmly welcome you to the legal profession. This achievement results from applied intellectual rigour and a healthy dose of determination and resilience. It was probably helped by the support of families and friends, some of whom are present this afternoon. I welcome you and them to this beautiful space, the Banco Court of the Supreme Court of Queensland on this significant day in your lives.

Whether you practice as a barrister, or as a solicitor in a legal firm; whether you become a sole practitioner, or a member of a national or international mega-firm; whether you join the corporate world, academia or a community legal service; whether you become a legal or policy advisor in the State or Commonwealth public service; or whether you do an assortment of these things throughout your legal career, you are now part of the legal profession. This profession has a fascinating tradition dating back to the 13th century. It was then that King Henry II amalgamated Norman and Anglo-Saxon laws with some Roman influences into the first recognisable body of English national law, the "common law" and established a centralised court system in which lawyers first emerged as an organised group.

There have been many changes to the legal profession since the 13th century and even since Justice Fraser, Justice Jackson and I were admitted as practitioners in the 20th century in a now-

demolished court building. But there are some constants. Like you, we hoped our admission would improve our financial position as a reward for many impoverished years of study. This is a commendable goal. Our community needs clever, aspirational, entrepreneurial, hard-working young lawyers to assist in responsibly and sustainably developing the economy, locally, nationally and internationally.

But financial success must always be secondary to your ethical obligations as a legal practitioner. Always remember that your duty to the court comes before your own personal interests and those of your clients.

With a State election last Saturday, it is appropriate that today we look beyond party politics and rejoice in our good fortune to live in an effective democracy under the rule of law. The independent legal profession you have joined today plays a vital institutional role in that democracy. It ensures access to the rule of law for all citizens, even the most marginalised and unpopular. The independent legal profession also provides a defence against the excesses of the executive arm of government. It is sometimes called on to defend the independence of the judiciary. Indeed, many Queensland lawyers recently rose to that challenge in publicly criticising populist legislative changes and executive action which undermined the separation of powers and judicial independence.

Yet, as Justice Sandra Day O'Connor, the first woman appointed to the US Supreme Court, observed in her book "The Majesty of

the Law", despite lawyers' high incomes and important institutional role, many are dissatisfied with their professional lives. In my experience, one of the most pleasurable roles for a lawyer is to use legal skills to assist impoverished clients or community groups who might not otherwise be able to access their legal rights. Many Queensland lawyers donate scores of hours doing just this. The benefits are threefold. First and most obviously, it benefits the recipient of the free legal assistance. Second, it promotes community confidence in the legal profession and reaffirms its legitimacy as a democratic institution. Third, it gives the pro bono lawyer great personal and professional satisfaction. I recommend it. So does the National Pro Bono Resource Centre, which encourages all lawyers to perform 35 hours of pro bono work per year.

May you have personal contentment and a long, successful, satisfying and prosperous legal career. With hard work your aspirations will be fulfilled, including your financial goals. But make sure this is achieved with the highest professional standards, by fulfilling your institutional democratic role if called upon, and with compassion for your fellow human beings. That way, many years from now, when you are even older than us and retired from your practise of the law, you can reflect on your professional life knowing that you have honourably given your best.

Our good wishes go with you on your journey.