

Satisfaction and regional practice

ANONYMOUS



Working in a regional law firm is about more than simply *working* in a regional law firm. Regional firms like to present their practitioners as members of the local community; and indeed many are, having grown up nearby, then being articulated and working in the community ever since.

Of course, for young lawyers going to the country to practise, it is not as straightforward as that. They are faced with uprooting their lives for the opportunity for “greater hands-on experience”, which can have significant financial and social consequences. And, like their country-born counterparts, they are expected to become part of the larger community.

As a positive, the day begins and ends at the office. Like many smaller firms, my firm professes a commitment to the “work/life balance” catchcry. From what I have seen, this effectively amounts to everybody arriving for work by 8.30am and no one being expected to stay after 5pm.

Unlike the stories I have heard about young lawyers working in Melbourne firms, there is no competition to be the last to leave. In fact, if you do so, there is usually nobody there to see it except for the cleaner, and even he or she seems to leave before 6pm.

In terms of work/life balance, this is undoubtedly a good thing, especially for practitioners who have families. However, given that I moved here from suburban Melbourne, I have found that a country town is not the easiest place to make new friends.

I had originally hoped that my firm would encourage social activities as a chance to get to know my colleagues out of

work. As would be expected, most of them have families of varying ages and after-hours commitments.

As a result, the opportunity to put down new roots in my new home is limited to whatever can be organised by me. And as many people will realise, after work all you really want to do is go home and relax and not be on your best sociable behaviour.

Many regional firms find it difficult to entice younger practitioners to the country. However, the battle does not stop there. Once regional firms attract young lawyers, they reportedly experience a similar difficulty in retaining them: many return to the city after a few years’ practice.

In my experience, if regional firms were serious about wanting a long-term commitment from their junior lawyers, they should make the effort to present their town as an attractive alternative to Melbourne.

For example, they should take the opportunity to introduce the new practitioner to the community and have a mentor of a similar age. Help them settle in. Encourage and support young lawyers to put down roots in their new town, and they will be less likely to return to Melbourne, as they have social and professional networks to support them.

Common arguments about shorter working hours, greater hands-on experience and reduced cost of living will not keep a young lawyer in the country if they are returning to Melbourne every weekend to see family and friends

After all, if working in a regional law firm is about more than simply *working* in a regional law firm, regional firms should provide further opportunities for their practitioners to become members of the local community. ■