

A Team Approach to the LRA

I practice in a two-lawyer firm that has to provide all the services expected of small town practitioners. Real estate is naturally a significant part of our practice.

As I sat in the classroom learning all the wonderful details of the new Land Registration system, I wondered how I was going to be able to deal with the volume of technical work required. When we began our first few transactions, it became obvious that the time involved in a migration of title was substantial. No matter how dedicated to real estate work one's practice is, the amount of time involved in just filling out the forms and processing applications online is daunting.

Well, we had used title searchers for years and found their work invaluable. We had, over the years, used in-house and freelance searchers.

We consider all our staff to be paralegals. Most started out as secretaries, but quickly gained special skills that set them apart. Most have become adept at dealing with banks, insurers, municipal government and all the other institutions needed to put together a real estate transaction. They know how to calculate the usual adjustments. They know what to do.

Suddenly no one knew what to do. They had to do all that they knew plus a whole lot of new things that were mysterious.

Searchers now needed to know the requirements of the new system and to make sure that all the information that was needed to comply with the standards was apparent on the face of the documentation. Abstracts had to be readable by anyone, not just that lawyer who knew all the shorthand and local knowledge. Document numbers needed to be included.

Staff was faced with filling in online forms that were strange and seemed to reject entries for inexplicable reasons. Remember, "0" and "O" are not the same. No leading spaces (what is that anyway?). A whole new set of acronyms appeared. PDC what? What is an AFR?

After nine months of frustration, bewilderment and questions, we have finally arrived at relative peace with the Land Registration system. We have to give our staff credit for patience and perseverance. Most transactions can now be handled with as much confidence as before the Land Registration system arrived. I give particular credit to Donna Doucette of my office who has mastered everything from title searching to the peculiarities of "benefits" and "burdens." She has adapted to the online forms and the assembly of "bundles." She knows which form to fill out to send along with each document.

I do recommend that lawyers learn the process from beginning to end, and know how to carry out every aspect of the system. Only then can the proper guidance and support be given to staff. We have found that in placing various interests on the record, it is often important to have an understanding of the legal interest involved at the level of a lawyer's knowledge. Staff must know that you are there when they need you and that you understand the system and the parameters under which they are working.

We have to thank the Registrars of Deeds for their help and assistance. We have found the Registry staff prompt in their responses and helpful in their resolution of problems at a time when they were learning themselves.

Fear of change is an almost universal human condition. With supportive lawyers and a team approach, the change brought about by the Land Registration system can be managed. Your staff is your most valuable asset. Your support of their efforts and struggles through that change will pay dividends in the end. My suggestion is that you take the time to make that investment in your future.