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After a 14 year management career in the telecommunications industry Shari joined her first law firm in 1985 as an Executive Director. Three local firms and 18 years later, she took a brief hiatus and ventured into the legal vendor arena but was thrilled to return to her current position as Director of Human Resources with the U.S. law firm of Bowman and Brooke. Shari has served in a number of leadership positions in her local chapter of ALA as well as for the organization.

Q. What are the major issues you face as a legal administrator in your country?

A. As is true for nearly every industry in America, the shrinking labor pool is of particular concern. With baby boomers leaving the work force and fewer and fewer next generation members entering the legal secretarial field and other support service positions, it is becoming increasingly difficult to find the caliber of employees we need in a professional services environment. Secondly, because legal billable hour increases become more and more difficult to implement and there are only so many hours in the day to be billed, controlling costs will forever be of highest priority for legal administrators. And because labor costs are the largest expense in the budget, keeping benefits such as health care costs contained will be imperative. Third, the mobility of attorneys as compared to even 10 years ago substantially increases the cost of doing business. Attorney retention, after investing in training and development, needs to be a high priority to avoid the financial ramifications of turnover. Add the new associate salary ranges that took a significant jump this past year and firms can't afford to lose associates. Those that create an environment that retains associates longer than the three-year average will be ahead of the competition in the depth of their talent pool and in reduced costs of retention.

Q. Where do you see legal administration headed in your country?

A. I believe that legal administration has grown to be the norm in the United States. Of course, not every firm is on board with the concept of the professional manager but by and large, over the past 15 years in particular, the profession has grown considerably. I believe this will continue and as client pressures demand more and more of the attorney leaders' time, more authority and autonomy will be granted to the legal managers/leaders in these firms. Clearly, the largest firms are well aware of the economy and practicality of running the practice of law like a business. More and more firms are searching the ranks of corporate America to fill the highest management roles of the larger law firms. Mid-size and smaller firms are beginning to follow their lead. The wisdom of using business professionals to manage the firm is clear and I don't see a reversal of this trend.

Finish this sentence: By participating in PLMW, I increase awareness of the profession and all we have to offer which paves the way for the future generation of professional legal managers.

Q. What initiatives have you taken or do you plan to take to promote the awareness of legal administration (one of the goals of PLMW)?

A. Already active in our chapter and in ALA, I frequently provide material gleaned from our resource bank, giving credit to the network for availability. I'm often used as a resource by both vendor and other firms pursuing qualified persons to fill roles in their organizations. I actively promote the concept of non-attorney legal managers/leaders to my large network of attorneys outside my firm. I counsel law students and young attorneys on the role non-attorney managers fill and how those managers and their business perspective can add to the success of maturing attorneys.

Q. Why is legal administration important to people in your country?

A. In an increasingly competitive market with often competing priorities, it is important to place non-attorney managers and leaders in the position to effectively manage the business of a law practice. Usually the attorney leaders of the firm are also leaders in their practice area and significant rainmakers for the firm. Whenever possible they should be given the freedom to practice their craft, impact the legal system of our country, and mentor and teach the next generation of lawyers.

Finish this sentence: A career in legal administration has given me a broad and rich education, constant exposure to a high level of intelligence which pushes me upward, opportunities beyond my wildest dreams, and a challenging and very fulfilling career.

Q. How do lawyers in your country view the legal management profession?

A. This has evolved over my career, but I believe lawyers truly understand and value the practicality of the legal management profession. Are they all ready to give up the power and control? Certainly not. But the wiser lawyers do and their success in this regard is a lesson for others. Of course, it is incumbent upon the legal management professionals to nurture this growing acceptance.

Q. What types of programs would you like to see implemented in your country to advance this profession?

A. Our professional organizations must continue to forge relationships with our attorney counterparts such as the American Bar Association (ABA). Mutual respect and promotion is the only way these efforts will advance. Thankfully this is already in play in the United States.

Q. How has legal administration evolved since you entered the field?

A. I've been lucky enough to have been in this profession since 1985. Legal administration was relatively new and my first firm's managing partner was a strong proponent of the professional legal management concept. His mentoring of me as a novice in the legal environment and in the legal manager role paved the way for my success. Progressively each firm at which I have worked as been more and more willing

to grant the authority and autonomy to perform the work and serve as a leader in the firm. I have been treated with respect and as a partner in the leadership of the firm. I think my career is fairly indicative of the growth of the concept across America.

Q. What does PLMW mean to you?

A. It is a method to highlight the professionals that serve the legal community, to grow awareness of the profession, and expand responsibilities as a legal management professional.

Q. How would you like to celebrate PLMW 2007?

A. I'll be at a partner meeting for three days; what better way to promote the value of the profession than to be granted access to this event and be an active and respected participant.

Q. What advice would you give to someone who wants to increase awareness in legal administration?

A. Build your network. Talk about your career (your 'career' not your 'job'). Network. Continue to build your educational foundation. Network. Seek opportunities to be a leader in your firm, in your professional organization, in your community. And did I mention network?

Q. In what ways can legal administrators increase the awareness of the legal profession among students?

A. Every year our firm works with a local high school and sponsors a half day seminar on the business of law for their Legal Studies students. Our local chapter of ALA is working with the state to increase awareness of the need for more legal secretarial educational opportunities through the state funded community colleges and assisting in the design of training courses. Many of the firms in our area have relationships with those schools and use that resource placing students in entry level positions upon graduation.

Finish this sentence: When it comes to legal administration, I would be happy if I could do this the rest of my working career. Of course, that is until I become a greeter at Wal-Mart or the social director in my retirement community.

Q. What advice would you give to someone in your country interested in entering the legal administration profession?

A. Start by contacting the professional organization of the career path you choose (administration, paralegal management, etc.). They are a tremendous resource for information, education, contacts, and networking. They will be happy to assist in sorting through the options and opportunities and will connect you to the appropriate resources in your local community.