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Forced Evolution: From Diversity to Technology- How Covid-19 has modernised the legal profession

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Let me begin by thanking the Bar Association for Commerce, Finance, and Industry for the invitation to engage in this conversation. Given the history of the Denning Lecture and some of the recent speakers, I was both surprised and humbled to be asked to share my thoughts with you. I expect this will be a bit of a different lecture than you've had in the past- and not merely because of my funny American accent. Rather than give a talk on a specific substantive area of the law, I thought I would take this opportunity to reflect on our profession more broadly and the change we've seen in our recent history.

To say that 2020 has presented significant and unique challenges would be an absolute understatement. Indeed, Covid-19 has turned the world upside down with millions of lives lost, millions more forced into lockdown, and a financial shock to economies across the globe not seen since the Great Depression. Governments, employers, and individuals alike are facing new everyday realities never experienced in the hope to manage through this pandemic resulting in a profound impact not just on people's mental and physical well-being, but also in the way we work.

As Covid-19 spread across the globe, normalities and customs of many peoples' work life were immediately abandoned in an effort to protect people's health. A year ago, you would have considered me crazy had I told you masks would become a standard fashion accessory, trousers largely would become optional while working, the average commute time would be reduced to the time it takes to walk from one room in your flat to another, and a thing called zoom would replace many boardrooms and conference rooms. While we have to find these moments of light-hearted humour amidst the impact of this horrible virus, our world is undeniably different. And the legal profession, among many others, has involuntarily experienced one of its most rapid and extreme changes to how we do our jobs.

Long before this pandemic, many industries and sectors experienced significant periods of transformation prompted by competition, technological advancement, or the opportunity to reduce costs, increase margin, or create additional value. From the assembly-line in manufacturing to the printing press in publishing, some of these advancements have fundamentally reshaped industries. Yet, the legal profession has broadly been insulated from major shifts, unquestionably slower to evolve than many other occupations or

industries. That is not to say it has been entirely stagnate—we've of course taken advantage of aspects of technology and incorporated them into the delivery of legal services. And over the past few years, we even started to see new business models emerge with lawyers and law firms offering more services to create additional value and distinguish themselves from their peers. But before we get too far down the path of what has changed in the legal world, perhaps we should start with an overview of why our laws, the judicial institutions, and our profession generally are slow to evolve.

Let's begin with the law –which is steeped in tradition, at times intentionally and at other times unintentionally, reluctant to shift and transform. That is not always a bad thing. We need only look to *stare decisis* and judicial precedent to find extraordinary value in tradition within the common law system— the very idea that decisions of the past should inform future outcomes with similar fact patterns allows for both consistency and predictability. These are two characteristics that we can all agree carry great value. Yet- what happens when society begins to outpace the law? Does the stability offered then become a liability—an archaic reminder of a past we had intentionally left behind or ignorance to a new world in which society has grown accustomed?

One of the more painful areas where we witness the flaw in a system that is intentionally slow to evolve is when looking back on equal rights. During last year's Denning lecture, Lady Hale discussed the journey women have faced towards equality in the law here in the UK. Whether when considering property law, family law, or even criminal law, through most of the 20th century, true equality in the eyes of the law was always just out of reach for women—despite society professing its virtues. And in my home country, the evolution of gay rights demonstrates how reliance on custom and history can frustrate progress. In 1986, the United States Supreme Court in *Bowers v. Hardwick* reaffirmed that states could outlaw sodomy and target homosexual acts. Justice White wrote on behalf of the Court, "to claim that a right to engage in such conduct is 'deeply rooted in this Nation's history and tradition' … is, at best, facetious."[1] It took a further 17 years for the Court to overrule its *Bowers* decision when in 2003 it decided *Lawrence v. Texas*[2] and found that a law that prohibited private homosexual activity between consenting adults violated the Due Process Clause of the US Constitution. If gender and gay rights weren't enough, one could simply reflect on the racial injustices that the law has permitted over time to see how the law can neutralize or even hinder equality with past decisions and precedents acting as heavy anchors dragging behind a society at the cusp of progress.

It isn't just significant issues like equality where history, tradition, and custom can lead to the law appearing out-of-date. There are a number of laws that remain on the books today despite being designed for a different era. In several jurisdictions in the United States the authorities are permitted to detain, in jail, material witnesses in criminal cases indefinitely, even if they themselves have done nothing unlawful. In other states, it is actually unlawful to take too much time voting if there are people waiting to cast a vote. And here in

[1] 478 U.S. 186 (1986)
[2] 539 U.S. 558 (2003)

England, it is illegal to enter the House of Parliament wearing a suit of armour[3] or for people to sing profane or obscene ballads on the street[4]. You may think antiquated laws do no harm and are merely a source of trivia or humour. However, in 2015, the state of Oregon detained an immigrant who was a material witness for more than 900 days *in jail* without any allegation of wrongdoing.[5] And in 1988, a court found that a dated Alabama law limiting the time in a voting booth to five minutes was disproportionality being used against black Americans.[6] Laws that fail to evolve and become arbitrary or archaic still remain laws with the risk of discretionary enforcement. We might even advise members of the minority government to think long and hard about their choice of fancy dress during next year's Halloween celebrations at Parliament and similarly discourage the cast from the Book of Mormon from rehearsing publicly in the streets of the West End given the technical letter of the law. These all-too-frequent examples demonstrate the importance of ensuring our laws do not lag too far behind changes within our society.

Hopefully this is obvious, but I do not mean to suggest that the entirety of the law or even a significant portion is flawed, nor that tradition and history are inherently bad foundations on which to base our legal reasoning. I firmly believe that the law provides significantly more justice than injustice—and that history and tradition are a source of value to ensure we can maintain stability. The downside is obvious if the law could evolve too easily and drastically without challenge. We must, however, continue to keep a watchful eye out for when the burdens and costs begin to outweigh the value and look for opportunities to hasten the evolution of the law where it is so clearly needed.

As with the law itself, our institutions that write, enforce and interpret those laws are similarly immersed in history, custom, and tradition. As an example, in the highest court of my home country- the United States Supreme Court, advocates on behalf of the government continue to wear morning coats, the justices wear black robes, quill pens are placed on counsel tables, and the seating of the justices and format of the arguments have changed very little in the 230 years since the Court first assembled. As technology advanced and the world evolved, the Courts seemed to be frozen in time. The first photocopier didn't show up in the Supreme Court until late in 1969—two decades after Xerox invented the Model A- the first xerographic copier and years after commercial photocopying became prevalent. While the rest of the world took advantage of a technological breakthrough to improve speed and accuracy of copying, because of custom and tradition, carbon copies were still being used in the Court with the junior most associate justice receiving the final, often blurry carbon copy of a memorandum.

The battle between tradition and sanctity of the institution on the one hand and modernisation on the other can also be seen across Europe and the United States within the robust debate that continues over the use of cameras and other recording devices within

[3] 1313 Statute Forbidding Bearing of Armour
[4] Section 28 of the Town Police Clauses Act of 1847
[5] https://www.oregonlive.com/portland/2015/03/oregon_man_commits_no_crime_bu.html

[6] *Harris v. Siegelman*, 695 F. Supp. 517 (M.D. Ala. 1988)

the courtroom. It was only earlier this year that the British Ministry of Justice indicated that cameras would start to be present to record judges' sentencing remarks in crown courts— a step that was welcomed by broadcasters while simultaneously drawing reservations from the legal community. The significance of this move cannot be ignored— not only were filming and photography banned in English and Welsh criminal courts, but even live sketching was prohibited requiring artists to work from memory after leaving the court.

To be clear, I'm not intending to challenge specific laws or the bedrock of our legal system nor question the customs and practices of our judicial institutions. As I already mentioned, there is undeniable value in many of these practices. I reference them only to highlight the strong foundation of history and tradition on which our profession is established. More than anything, these examples that reflect the gradual pace of change within the substantive law and our institutions may help frame why the legal profession as a whole may be slower to embrace change than other professions. But while there is undoubtedly value in our laws evolving at a deliberate, thoughtful, and perhaps, slow, pace—that cannot always be said for our broader profession.

Which brings me to where I'd like to spend the bulk of our time today— the practice of law itself—our profession. Like with the law, intentional and enduring traditions must always be grounded in more than history. There must be a purpose or value to justify the way we work and to resist challenge and new ideas. What *was* should not always be what *is* or indeed, what *will be*. Over-reliance on tradition without reason stifles opportunity, creativity and progress. So, as we reflect on the developments across the legal profession, it's worth focusing on three separate areas: (1) Business Models, (2) Technology, and (3) Culture.

1. Business Models

First, Business Models. Perhaps because we've faced very few competitive threats to our business model, the practice of law has fundamentally remained largely unchanged for decades if not centuries. Many will argue what's not broken need not be fixed. Yet I submit, from firms, to in-house legal functions, to individual practitioners, there is significant value in interrogating how we work to find opportunities to change and realise additional value. While our profession is hundreds of years old, we've only recently seen innovation in the core legal business model covering fees, scope of service, partnerships, and outsourcing.

For generations, the traditional hourly rate has remained the dominant mechanism to charge clients for legal services. However, in recent years, firms and lawyers are finally starting to offer newer, creative solutions —from fixed fees, to blended rates, to risk collars, to other alternative fee arrangements. As a client, it is refreshing to have more options for engagement, and those firms or lawyers that consider innovative fee arrangements are recognised for developing customer-centric solutions that satisfy our varying needs. More often than not, we are trying to balance several objectives when we hire external counsel, including obtaining quality guidance while also achieving predictable and cost-effective legal solutions. When instructing counsel, we also seek to align both of our interests to achieve

efficiency and effectiveness in outcome which is rarely done through an hourly rate model that can often have the perverse incentive of encouraging less efficiency. In my experience, those that stick to the traditional model are facing increasing competitive pressure from the more innovative lawyers and firms—and unless they begin to consider alternative fee arrangements, they may soon find themselves losing business.

Other recent shifts in the legal business model have included opening lower-cost offices (or fully outsourcing lower value tasks) and expanding services to include adjacencies such as project management, document production, ethics and compliance support or consultancy services. These changes may be novel to the legal world but would otherwise be considered dated in other industries. Our profession resisted changes to the core of our business often defending the law as unique- a noble institution that should remain protected from scrutiny or cross-contamination with more common business models. This protectionist approach that stalled some of the changes to the business model may have caused more harm than good as lawyers and firms are only now realising additional benefits by lowering internal costs and creating new value pools.

2. Technology

The second area to discuss is technology, which has often been the source of innovation across industries and sectors-- from precision robotics helping surgeons with medical procedures to trading houses using computer-assisted rule-based algorithmic trading to automatically place and execute thousands of trades per second. In almost all cases, technology has improved the performance of people's jobs increasing accuracy and output and reducing human error. Yet the legal profession, more so than most others, has been insulated from significant transformation at the hands of technological advancement.

Where we have seen technology integrated into legal services, its value is clear. Gone are the days when lawyers spent hours in a library with volumes of hardbound caselaw or treatises researching their arguments or trying to even understand whether the caselaw referenced remains valid precedent. From the comfort of a computer, we can now conduct more thorough research and immediately see whether a particular case has been overturned, reaffirmed, or questioned by later matters. Technology has made research and preparation for our arguments easier and more accurate—and therefore, we are able to do our jobs more efficiently and effectively. Though, perhaps as a nod to tradition once again, law offices and courtrooms alike still remain adorned with legal treatises either as a strange obligatory design choice or a reminder of a not so distant past when we didn't have the benefit of technology to help us with our jobs.

Another area of the law that has seen technology not only enter, but become the standard is document review and production. Previously a legal team might send dozens if not hundreds of lawyers to a warehouse for weeks to review large document productions in an effort to identify key documents in a litigation – a seemingly compulsory hazing ritual that a lot of us went through as we entered this profession. Spending long hours on such a mundane task could hardly be considered developmental, and there can be no doubt that documents were inadvertently overlooked by tired, junior lawyers. Today, OCR scanning

and key word searches have allowed us to more easily and accurately identify potentially relevant or privileged material. Indeed, an entire supplemental industry was born in the 1990s and grew in the early 2000s specifically aimed to service the legal community around document review and production.

Historically, our industry demonstrated some initial skepticism to these technological solutions—and frankly continues to do so. When advanced artificial intelligence is suggested as an option to either complement or, indeed, replace some activities that typically reside with legal professionals, our community has responded with more doubt than hope. Yet, despite this reluctance, the proof points continue to increase for the value technology offers. Not only is there software that can very easily draft standard contracts with limited parameters defined by humans, there are now more complex programs that can interrogate data about supply, frequency of disruptions, historical price variations, and other factors to recommend updated terms when a contract comes up for renewal that protect a party against potential downside risk. Although this technology is still nascent and is only as effective as the accuracy and completeness of the underlying data, the potential value to clients seems evident.

Although there are some firms that are experimenting with new technology, it has not yet become the norm. A few firms are starting to develop in-house solutions or enter partnerships that are intended to develop new technologies or ways of working and help protect against potential margin erosion from new entrants. Some firms have even created incubators—divisions structured like tech start-ups with the mission to boldly pursue new ideas and to test, fail quickly, learn, and adjust. Others are partnering with actual tech start-ups providing funding, office space, and the opportunity to test the effectiveness of their solutions with the firm's lawyers and clients. Still, many firms and lawyers consider these initiatives costly and fruitless distractions throwing good money after bad. As with many traditional start-ups, it's likely most ideas will indeed fail. But the value is not merely on the substantial potential financial upside, it is also in the mindset shift that can occur within the firm and its clients when creativity, forward-thinking, efficiency and boldness are encouraged and rewarded. Which brings us to our third area—culture.

3. Culture

As we've already discussed, the legal world is one established on tradition and custom. The result is that our professional culture is similarly slow to evolve. While I can understand the pace of change in the law or our institutions, I've grown frustrated with the hollow justifications for a work culture that is desperate for change. And here is where I might inject some controversy and challenge. Yes, we've made progress--- but not nearly enough. Clutching to traditions and customs is actually harming our profession and doing a disservice to clients.

Let's begin with an obvious area for improvement—Diversity. Many of us have advocated for equality, arguing cases to right injustices, promoting legislation and regulations to advance gender parity, offering pro bono services to victims of discrimination or serving on boards of non-profits in this space. Yet, as much as we're trying to make progress

externally, when we look inward—to our own profession—we see at best neglect with clear evidence of failure. At law firms, although females make up nearly half of all lawyers, they comprise less than 30% of partners.[7] Looking at the larger, more prominent firms, the situation is even more dire with females making up less than 20% of the partnership of the top 10 UK law firms.[8] Reports on the gender pay gap within our profession confirm the disparity already highlighted. If you consider racial or socio-economic diversity, the statistics show similarly poor results. Even if we can all agree there is a problem, we struggle to align on the underlying causation for that problem, and therefore never reach a real solution. Instead, we engage in intellectual debates and land on diversity ambitions that make us feel as though we're making a difference, but in reality have marginal impact.

Diversity (or lack thereof) is likely both a cause and effect of a legal culture that requires closer examination alongside a scrutiny of our basic working habits. We celebrate and reward long working hours. Bonuses at most firms are not tied to the value you create for your clients but rather the hours you bill. We rarely question deadlines, priding ourselves on delivering and exceeding client expectations even if a timeline is unrealistic or arbitrary. We're expected to be present—whether at an office, in a courtroom, or at a client meeting. And we share war-stories about the all-nighters we've pulled in our careers not with disgust but rather wearing them as a badge of honour as if they made us a better lawyer. With these characteristics, is it any wonder why diversity remains a problem within our profession? Those individuals that want a better work-life balance or prioritize family over work will either opt out or will be selected out based on our promotion standards.

Focusing too heavily on certain qualities during hiring and promotion exasperates the diversity issue and can ultimately lead to a loss of commercial value. We tend to find ourselves drawn to proven academics- Oxbridge and Ivy league educated lawyers. We look for social individuals, extraverts that can engage and relate to others with ease. The result is that many lawyers not only look alike, they think alike—That lack of diversity creates commercial risk by increasing the likelihood of "group think" rather than generating new ideas and encouraging challenge that can result in an atypical approach with greater value.

As an in-house lawyer, I consider myself lucky. We've become a viable option for those wanting to progress in a legal career in a very different culture. If an individual lawyer's values are in conflict with the traditional legal or firm way of life, they may find more comfort moving in house to a company with a more aligned culture. At the very least, a place that celebrates and encourages diversity ensures someone that thinks or looks different can feel valued rather than try to conform to progress in their own career.

In my opinion, the in-house legal profession is probably one of the communities that embraces change faster—largely due to the fact that our culture is driven as much, or more, by our employer as the legal community itself. Whereas law firms can often be viewed as reliably uniform and predictable, the culture of in-house legal departments varies greatly

[7] https://www.lawyer-monthly.com/2018/08/gender-pay-gap-why-is-the-legal-sector-failing/
[8] https://www.legal500.com/fivehundred-magazine/diversity-and-inclusion/the-battle-for-diversity-is-far-from-won/

from office attire to work habits. It shouldn't surprise you that some of the most progressive in-house legal departments sit within companies that are considered novel and forward thinking. For example, Palantir, the technology and data analysis company, abandoned the traditional titles of their in house roles and instead officially adopted the name of legal ninjas. While some may consider the name quirky or even unprofessional, it intentionally challenges the customary legal conventions to encourage Palantir's legal team to focus on agility, speed, and original solutions rather than hierarchy and traditional ways of working. The title alone likely attracts lawyers that want to execute differently.

In contrast to traditional legal jobs, in-house legal jobs typically offer greater flexibility and opportunity to distinguish oneself outside of billable hours. Within my legal team, the majority of our lawyers work flexibly—some officially part time, others adjusting hours to accommodate child drop off or pick-up to share parental duties with their partner, and still others working some days from home rather than coming into the office each day. Lawyers performance evaluations are based on what they've achieved for the company, not how many hours they've worked. As a result, part time lawyers have an equal opportunity to achieve higher bonuses and overall reward as well as promotion. This is quite common in the in-house legal world, because it is part of the culture across many sectors and industries that employ us.

We've seen the benefit of distinguishing our corporate legal culture from the traditional legal world. We find by respecting peoples' lives outside of work, we can attract some amazingly talented lawyers that struggle with the traditional legal culture. And, although there is always room for improvement, the diversity of our legal team is stronger than that in many firms—at every level. The majority of my leadership team is female, and we also have strong diversity on race, nationality, and leadership style. And as we've already discussed, increasing diversity also, I believe, yields better business results.

When discussing culture, I very purposefully began and ended with Diversity. It is both a source of our cultural problems and a product of our cultural problems. It's a vicious cycle that requires transformative and bold thinking – rather than soft diversity ambitions. If the cycle can be broken and progress made, the profession will not just look and feel different, new ideas and ways of working will emerge.

Now, you may be asking why Covid-19 takes such a prominence in the title of this talk—yet hasn't been mentioned in quite some time. This pandemic has forced us to reconsider our traditions and customs and revisit some of our biases to change. In the midst of some of our most challenging moments of 2020, opportunity has emerged. As a profession, we may not have chosen to test some new ways of working, but having been forced to do so, we should learn and grow from the experience rather than just return to our old way of working when this health crises is behind us.

Covid-19 has even forced both the law and some of its most traditional institutions to shift. Very valid questions arose about whether hard copy and wet-ink signatures were really necessary when it became a challenge during lockdown. The US Supreme Court, never

before allowing live recording or broadcasting of arguments, began to hold oral arguments via teleconference and permitting them to be live-streamed for the first time. If accommodations like these were made during the pandemic, we should ask whether there is value in continuing them—along with others-- even when we return to the new normal.

Despite our apparent aversion to change and trying new things, the legal profession had no choice but to implement new ways of working over the past eight months—a forced experiment that has yielded plenty of data points to debate the various successes and failures. One of the first professional victims was presence culture.

The view that we must be at the office or physically present to perform our jobs effectively has certainly been challenged. When in person meetings and traditional office working was necessarily abandoned, we didn't stop working or fail; we adapted. Within bp, two significant M&A deals announced in the past few months were negotiated entirely virtually. In the past, our commercial teams, in house and external legal teams, and the counter-party's teams would have spent weeks in conference rooms for long hours posturing in a traditional negotiation hoping to reach agreeable terms. The costs would not only include advisors' hourly rates, but also travel and human costs. By human costs, I mean the toll it takes on our body and mind to be away from home, working more hours in a day than normal without having our familiar routine that includes family and friends, exercise, or even a favourite coffee shop or pub to refresh and reenergize. The virtual format of these most recent negotiations seemed to be more structured. Although they required more pre-work, we completed the actual virtual negotiations at a quicker pace. Lawyers and commercial teams spanned a number of countries and even several continents. And while time zones offered some challenge, a number of the participants saw the value in working from their home location rather than traveling.

Outside commercial negotiations, we've also seen some value in this new way of working. Commute times have effectively been eliminated. Rather than working standard hours, people have been able to generally adjust their hours to accommodate other obligations such as childcare, household duties, or even just for personal preference. In a strange defiance, not being able to be with our colleagues has allowed us to grow closer to our colleagues in some ways- opening a window into their other world by having kids or pets occasionally join a video call or seeing a piece of art or decoration in the background that prompted a personal story. Not working from the office has also encouraged lawyers, clients, and employers to find the most effective and efficient team to attack a particular problem resulting in the globalisation of teams and matters.

None of us are so naïve to only see the benefits in this new way of working when there are some obvious downsides. While work hours have become more flexible and the line between home and work more blurred, employers, clients, or even the lawyers themselves may feel the need to constantly monitor, respond to requests, and effectively be "on call" 24 hours a day. Makeshift home offices rarely are designed with ergonomics at the front of mind nor do they contain the technology or office resources normally found in the traditional workspace. Technology has undoubtedly become our greatest blessing and curse with insufficient bandwidth or wifi resulting in dropped calls. We no longer have the

advantage of in-person meetings, random conversation that can take place at the water cooler, or impromptu collaborations with colleagues. "Reading the room"- a necessary skill during commercial negotiations and oral arguments, and core to our profession has become increasingly difficult when we're not, in fact, physically in the same room. And, although there is value to being close to your family, the expectation that we must juggle all responsibilities—whether personal or professional-- simultaneously rather than focus on one or the other may add pressure or create chaos.

It's not lost on me of the fact that the very format of this year's lecture provides us with yet another example of the costs and benefits of our current way of working. Yes, those that would not have been able to come into London today are able to participate. On the other hand, I certainly am finding it more of a challenge to speak to a camera than a room full of people. It's also worth reminding you all that the camera does add at least 10lbs. And while we'll have some virtual drinks following this talk, I'm sure we all would rather be together to network as has been the case in the past years.

If our professional culture before was close to one end of a pendulum, the pandemic rapidly and forcibly swung it to the other extreme. As with most things in life, the extremes carry both positives and negatives and rarely result in the optimal position. I do not believe any of us know what the new normal will look like when this pandemic becomes a memory. However, I hope that we can learn from the experience and transform to a new reality that minimises the downside while leveraging the benefits we've seen. A year or two from now, I have a few predictions—or at least hopes-- for our profession.

1- We are neither working entirely from home nor entirely from the office. Instead, we thoughtfully consider what will drive the greatest value for individuals as well as the clients, employers, or firm collectively. Some individuals will find greater value working mostly from home, while others will likely want to do nearly all work at the office. Flexibility, rather than a mandated approach, will allow us to realise the greatest value.
2- Business models in the legal world and performance evaluations for lawyers focus more on value delivered rather than hours worked. Alternative fee arrangements are the norm and compensation structures reward creativity, efficiency, and effectiveness more than time billed.
3- Technology is viewed as an enabler and an opportunity to enhance efficiency and effectiveness across our profession. We experiment and maintain an open-mind trying new technologies not with the expectation that it is a perfect solution, but with the eagerness to find opportunities to improve it which will ultimately result in better legal services and solutions.
4- Our flexibility, focus on outcomes over hours, and celebration of diverse thinking starts to attract and retain real diverse talent. The vicious cycle perpetuated by lack of diversity begins to break down and we find a virtuous cycle created with increasing diversity resulting in greater challenge, bolder change, and even more opportunity to transform.

Given we do not know how Covid-19 will actually change our profession in the long run, perhaps this talk is a bit premature. As an optimist, however, I'm hopeful and confident that the profession will tackle the unique opportunity presented in the midst of this massive challenge. We will evolve because we were pushed outside our comfort zones and discovered some value we otherwise might not have realised. And while we may not know every practical, lasting impact of the last eight months, the most fundamental change has already occurred— within our mindset. Rather than simply do things the way they've always been done, we've opened our minds to challenging the way we work. There is no doubt tradition and custom will remain a part of our profession, but our most recent history has challenged the precedents of years past—and even if our culture hasn't been entirely overruled, it has undoubtedly been questioned. And therein lies the opportunity—to not be wedded to the past, but instead challenge ourselves to evolve and transform into the profession we want to become as compared to the one we've always been.