

Forum goes off with a bang!

By Richard Hobson, CEO, Mason Sier Turnbull, Mt Waverley, Melbourne

IF YOU are planning a legal management conference and you want it to go off with a bang, then where else to have it than next to a volcano? That is what Simon Tupman, consultant to the legal profession and author of top-selling book *Why Lawyers Should Eat Bananas*, did when he hosted the Future Firm Forum recently for a group of professionals at the Powderhorn Chateau in Ohakune, New Zealand. Situated at the base of Mount Ruapehu, a small group of Australian and New Zealand managing partners, CEOs, and practice managers, together with a stellar cast of facilitators, got together and discussed ways to create the firm of the future.

We had several stimulating sessions led by Ron Pol, director of Wellington-based Team Factors; Canada's 'Mr Innovation', Ed Bernacki, author of *Wow! That's a great idea*; Gerry Riskin of global consultants to the legal profession Edge International; recruitment specialist Maria Masterantonio of Auckland-based Master Solutions; energy coach Hayley Nicholls; and, of course, with masterful coordination by Tupman himself.

The weekend was one of those rare occasions where you get to meet and mix with everyone and some firm friendships were established. Because of the informal structure of the sessions, it was possible for considerable interaction and in-depth discussion to be had on a variety of topics.

We looked at branding and the misconceptions that abound in relation to it. It seems that almost every law firm believes it is different from its competitors. "We are different!" is the catch cry. Ironically, if everyone is different, then that creates a degree of commonality! The reality is, of course, that what you think your firm represents may not be how it is perceived.

Pol gave us some great insights into branding, recent trends in the legal profession, and what value is all about. Motivating and retaining staff is, of course, a key requirement these days and formed the basis for more discussion.

The wonders of modern technology enabled us to converse with, and view, Riskin in his West Indies home. Our discussions with him were wide-

ranging covering leadership, changing minds and developing knowledge, the impact of technology, and the power of visioning. I think everyone agreed that he was an inspiration.

Masterantonio gave us valuable insights into staff management and retention. During a brainstorming session, we considered a myriad of ideas about how to create the firm of the future now.

Nicholls addressed issues of work/life balance and wellness. We learned about managing energy and focus. A gentle and simpatico leader, we enjoyed some valuable moments of reflection.

We were fortunate that Bernacki was visiting New Zealand from Canada at the time of the forum. Known as Mr Innovation, he took us through the steps involved in designing a new service, among other great ideas. We considered how to improve client service through individual action plans which can be fundamental to developing strong client relationships. The importance of identifying whether you are an adapter or an innovator provoked some fascinating discussion.

The setting for the forum was sensational, and during some of the breaks we were able to soak up the scenery. The meals and service at the Powderhorn were magnificent. We worked out of the forum room where Peter Jackson had been headquartered for part of the *Lord of the Rings* filming, and I think we may have tapped into some of the inspiration that had been there previously. And, of course, the mountain erupted the day after we left!

My enduring memories of the forum will be the firm friendships established with the participants, two of whose firms later achieved distinction at this year's New Zealand Law Awards. Some of the participants showed talents beyond their legal qualifications. There was singing as well as mimicking and a whole lot of fun.

The cost of the forum and accommodation was comparatively modest, but the experience was priceless. If you are at all interested in a wonderful weekend with legal practice management leaders then you should book in early for next year's session. Participation will be limited, and this is likely to become the most sought-after event in the calendar for far-sighted leaders.

From the
Australian Papers

Ex-Gough aide may become top judge

NEW SOUTH Wales Chief Justice Jim Spigelman is considered a prime candidate to become the new Chief Justice of the High Court of Australia. Spigelman is thought to be an ideal candidate for the role currently filled by Justice Murray Gleeson. The judge has worked as an aide to former prime minister Gough Whitlam, and also as a barrister. During his tenure as Chief Justice of the Supreme Court, Spigelman has reduced court waiting times and fought against proposals for mandatory sentencing

The Australian, 28 November 2007, p 9

ASIC might soften line on directors

THE AUSTRALIAN Securities & Investments Commission (ASIC) is considering taking fewer court actions against directors of companies personally. Chair Tony D'Aloisio has told the Australian Institute of Company Directors that the watchdog will conduct a review of past cases such as HIH Insurance, One.Tel, and Water Wheel to find out whether applying liability in this manner is potentially scaring suitable candidates away from taking up board positions. However, D'Aloisio was unable to comment on the James Hardie Industries matter as it is still before the courts. Under his predecessor, Jeff Lucy, ASIC had launched a substantial number of court cases against directors as individuals

The Age, 27 November 2007, p B3

Second judge urges jail for cartels

MARK WEINBERG is the second Federal Court of Australia judge to urge for the introduction of prison terms for participants in price-fixing cartels. Weinberg imposed fines totalling \$A927,000 on those involved in an abalone cartel in Victoria, and said jail should be a sentencing option. He noted the fines of between \$A5,000 and \$A160,000 were appropriate given the less serious nature of the Victorian cartel, but said prison should be an option for more serious cases. Federal Court judge Peter Heerey criticised the Australian Government for failing to introduce criminal sanctions for cartels when he imposed \$A36m in fines against packaging group Visy Industries Australia and its owner Richard Pratt

The Australian, 27 November 2007, p 8

First among equals...

AUSTRALIAN LAW firm Mallesons Stephen Jaques has been recognised with an award from the Commonwealth Equal Opportunity for Women in the Workplace Agency. Mallesons was commended for being the top company with over 500 employees to advocate the advancement of women. The firm was praised for its large number of female partners and directors (20 per cent)

The Australian, 23 November 2007, p 39

