



LAWYERS IN THE FUTURE OF US

A note from Indranee Rajah S.C., Senior Minister of State for Law

50 years ago, our pioneer generation stared down an uncertain future, took it on and wrought the Singapore of today - a remarkable achievement by any measure which we celebrated in SG50.

That generation has now handed the baton of nation building over to us. It's our turn to peer into an uncertain future, take on its challenges and write the next chapter of the Singapore story.

The Future of Us exhibition is intended to get Singaporeans thinking about this. To echo John Connor (The Terminator, 1984), the future is not set. Obviously not everything can be anticipated, or is within our control. But much will depend on the vision we have, and what we do to shape it.

The legal industry is no exception. It is timely for lawyers to start thinking about what lies ahead for the industry and the profession. Where do we want to be as an industry and a profession 10, 20, 50 years from now? How are we going to get there? What are the long term issues and challenges? How are we going to overcome them?

These are not things we usually have time to reflect on. Time is a scarce commodity for lawyers - between meeting client demands, billable hours and work deadlines, there's barely enough time to cope with the present, let alone think about the future.

Knowing that, I thought it would be a good idea to get some young lawyers out to the exhibition before the Opening of the Legal Year, after which everything gets busy.

And that's how these young civil and criminal lawyers found themselves at the Future of Us exhibition last week.

The exhibition is not framed in terms of legal matters. But it explores what sort of country and society we might be, and law underpins society and is woven into every aspect of our lives. So as the country changes, law and the legal sector will inevitably change too.

The biggest disruptor will be technology. There is no avoiding it. It will change the way you practice.

- Take the police video at the exhibition for example. It shows a futuristic car collision. Everything is equipped with sensors at multiple points. You could basically re-create how the accident occurred based on the sensor data. That will change the face of evidence. It will be less a matter of human recollection or human perception of speed, lighting or the environment, and more a matter of what the computers say happened - unless you are challenging the computer data, in which case you would need to be sufficiently *au fait* with the technology to do so.
- The bulk of discovery could be done by suitable software. This will reduce time and cost but could mean displacement for lawyers.
- Data analytics could pick up patterns that are now analysed manually (indeed, forensic accounting has already long gone that way). Lawyers won't need to pore over documents trying to figure out what happened. Again cheaper and faster, but again displacement.
- The exhibition envisages a heavily computerised future, with Smart Nation, drones, artificial intelligence and an Internet-enabled lifestyle. This means data on many platforms, and inevitably privacy issues will arise.

Other important issues include:

- How can our legal practices transform into regional players?
- How we can access new markets?
- What new practice areas do we need to develop?
- What capability do we need for the future and how do we build it?
- What business models would allow Singapore law practices to grow?
- What can we do to create value in the legal sector?
- How to overcome cost pressures and raise productivity?

These are the things I asked the young lawyers to think about. I hope others will think about them too. It's really the start of the conversation. I know that as work picks up, more immediate and pressing things will start to become the focus.

However, please keep thinking about these issues. Because before you know it, the future will be upon us. And we must shape it before it comes.

– Indranee Rajah S.C., Senior Minister of State for Law
12 January 2016