

## **Workshop for Court Ushers and Court Officers**

### **Towards Better Administration of Courts**

**11 and 12 December 2019**

The IJLS, in collaboration with the judiciary, organised a two-day workshop for court ushers and court officers entitled ‘Towards Better Administration of Courts’ on 11 and 12 December 2019. The objective of this workshop was to enable court officers and court ushers to hone skills that can be translated in the proper administration and efficient functioning of courts. In that regard, they had the opportunity to participate in a training workshop which addressed ethical issues, and management and communication skills.

#### **Day 1**

The first key note speech was delivered by Mr AM Jeenathally, Chief Registrar Supreme Court, who retraced the role of court administrators in Mauritius. The second speaker, Professeur R. Loir, Maître de conférences en droit privé à l’Université de la Réunion, talked about the importance of ethics in structuring the behaviour of court administrators in the performance of their work. In particular, he highlighted that court officers and court ushers are public officers who have a duty to guarantee the independence and professionalism of the court. Ethics as a system of professional values and as an institutional instrument of judiciary is an integral part of court administration which is based on the principle of self-regulation.

The third speaker, Me Sanjeev Ghurburrun, Director of Geroudis Law Firm, intervened on managerial skills. He began by extolling the role of court ushers and officers in the administration of justice. It is important to understand that it is mindset that can enable anyone to achieve anything in life. Me Ghurburrun asked court officers and court managers to project themselves in 5 years and to set out what are their personal and professional goals. Personal goals can include health, for example doing physical exercises, spending time with family and friends; self-value, for example by reading a book. After taking out time for sleeping, health, etc, a person has about 9-10 hours of free time to craft who they want to be. Clearly defining personal goals will have a positive impact on professional goals.

Mr Ghurburrun explained the different techniques for better time management. According to him, one of the biggest downsides of being in public service is the lack of time management skills. It was further stated that how a person spends his/her time defines who he/she is and whether the goals set by that person will be achieved. Furthermore, Mr Ghurburrun carried out a practical exercise to help the audience determine the appropriate allocation of time towards professional as well as personal life. The book titled ‘*Outliers*’ by Malcolm Gladwell was recommended to the audience for further reading on how to better manage time to be successful in life.

Moreover, the resource person provided the following three-steps threshold to determine whether the task at hand is a poor use of time:

- Will this task help me achieve my goal?
- Can it be delegated?
- Is it necessary to be completed right now?

Mr Ghurburrun urged the audience to develop the appropriate mindset to be able to achieve the goals set. He also stated that a person should have a clear picture of where he/she wants to be in ten years and this will help in making effective use of time.

## **Day 2**

Professor Loir intervened on the topic of ‘Une reflexion en vue de l’élaboration d’un code mauricien de déontologie’. He specified that court officers have a code of ethics while court ushers do not have a code of ethics. However, the Code of Ethics for Public Officers applies to court officers and ushers. Professor Loir was particularly impressed by the comprehensiveness of the Code of Ethics for Public Officers and suggested that the principles included therein could be the benchmarks against which court officers and court ushers should regulate their conduct. He provided a detailed examination of the key principles applicable to court officers and court ushers: political impartiality; responsibility towards the public; conflicts of interest; outside employment; disclosure of information; use of public resources; and acceptance of gifts and other benefits.

In the following session, Ms Pertaub dealt with the importance of effective communication at the workplace. She defined communication as the exchange of information between the sender and the receiver. Feedback was also cited as an important aspect of effective communication. Furthermore, Ms Pertaub urged the audience to work on their non-verbal communication as well. The following aspects were cited:

- Kinesics;
- Proxemics;
- Chronemics;
- Paralanguage; and
- Chromatics.

Moving on, it was stated that ‘listening’ also plays an important part of effective communication. A distinction was also made between active listening and passive listening; the resource person stated that hearing, understanding, evaluating and feedback are the essential elements of active listening which will ensure effective communication.

Lastly, a review exercise based on practical scenarios was conducted and the audience was asked to implement all the skills which were taught during the course. The exercises were as follows:

1. Mme Tracasser, a distraught woman comes to the courtroom and asks for her case;
2. Mr Declarer, a witness in a case, throws his weight to you;
3. Mme Gagnebatter, a victim of domestic violence, is crying in court; and
4. Mr Plimalin, a witness, is shouting in court before the magistrate comes.

The participants additionally had the opportunity to put into practice what they learned in the communication skills session through a group work in which they had to prepare a short presentation on how they would train newcomers in the judiciary. They were provided constructive feedback on how to improve their communication skills at the end of their presentation.

The training ended on a high note with all the participants being fully satisfied with the organisation and the way the training had been conducted. Each court officer and court usher

present were given a certificate of participation. The training was a resounding success and the participants suggested that these types of training should be organised more often.