



WEST RAND ATTORNEYS ASSOCIATION: CHAIRPERSONS REPORT

1. It is my pleasure to welcome you all to this year's annual general meeting of the West Rand Attorneys Association– thank you for being here, your presence is most valued and appreciated.
2. 2020 has been challenging for all of us. The legal fraternity has been impacted by COVID-19. The impact of COVID 19 caused large scale loss of life, severe human suffering and a major economic crisis that will burden us for years to come. Our industry has been deeply affected by the lockdown and business continues to be marred by closures and backlogs in the Courts, deeds offices, master's offices.
3. Our response to this crisis was going to determine our future as a profession, and Attorneys needed to get used to a new way of doing things very quickly.
4. In order to stay in touch, the WAA established a Whatsapp group to distribute and liaise directly with members. During lockdown level 4 – down to level 1 this proved very effective to keep our members informed of the day to day issues experienced in the different courts and state entities.
5. Membership, however, is not growing fast enough and I acknowledge that more effort must be made to grow our membership base.
6. I cannot emphasise enough the importance of a collective voice for attorneys. It is through numbers that we will be heard and that we can effect change. We again urge members to promote the WAA's work and encourage membership.



7. During the past 12 months the WAA has intensified collaborations with Stakeholders to better serve members.
8. Pre-lockdown, virtual court was just a conceptual idea. The COVID-19 pandemic has accelerated change and has forced us into this new digital reality, as it has done in respect of many other areas where resistance to change has kept outdated practices in place.
9. COVID-19 has been the catalyst to catapult the Legal Fraternity towards paperless digital courtrooms which allowed judges and lawyers to work in a secure online and virtual environment.
10. We were introduced to the CaseLines system. Matters now heard by the High Courts must be presented exclusively on CaseLines, with judges refusing to hear matters that have not been registered with, or documents uploaded, on the system.
11. A new world of video conferencing technology was adopted by some of our courts which ensured that the legal system did not grind to a complete halt during lockdown.
12. Although some courts embraced the technology to ensure continuance, others have taken a more conservative approach.
13. This has led to uncertainty and frustration which necessitated urgent meetings with the different attorney associations and the respective Cluster Heads, the Justice Department, and other Government officials.



14. It became abundantly clear that lack of capacity in certain areas meant that we needed to support, collaborate and establish synergies with all stakeholders, government departments and other attorneys' associations.

15. On a personal note, this pandemic has taught me to be more resilient. I understand Resilience as the capacity to adapt to challenges threatening your immediate environment. What I experienced in the midst of this catastrophic pandemic, was that I was over dependant on the pre-covid system. The pandemic reminded me that we are interdependent and that we need to adapt to different systems in order to survive and ultimately to prosper. The old ways are gone forever, and it is now up to us to proactively shape our future in response to the pandemic.

16. Our most precious commodity is **time**. Our clients pay us for our time, and they will continue to pay us if we offer them value for money. With the economy in crisis we will probably have to think of more innovative ways of making our time more accessible and affordable. The technology solutions that covid has brought to the fore has given us back several hours, if not days every month. Let's not let this crisis go to waste. The former status quo is gone forever, and with it, redundant practices that denied us the change to optimise our time and efficiency.

17. We are, if anything and bold and courageous profession. Let us now also be innovative and dynamic and make the future our own. All the best for the new year.

MARIANNE PRETORIUS

CHAIRPERSON : WAA