



Queensland Law Society Accredited
Specialist in Personal Injuries

Trent Johnson – Maurice Blackburn Lawyers



Current position

Asbestos and occupational exposures lawyer (associate from July 2010) at Maurice Blackburn, Maroochydore.

Career path

I completed a nursing degree at QUT in 1996 and was a registered nurse at Caboolture Hospital from 1997 to 2001, working in the emergency department for the last four of those years. During that period I also completed an accelerated LLB and was admitted in 2004. I did general insurance/defendant PI work at HBM Lawyers, then worked as a public liability lawyer at Shine Lawyers Brisbane until mid-2006. I became their office branch manager at Maroochydore until 2009 and senior litigator until late 2009. Since then I have worked as an asbestos and occupational exposures lawyer at Maurice Blackburn, becoming an associate in 2010 and transferring to the Maroochydore office in late April this year.

Why did you decide to practise law?

I saw many serious injuries while nursing and have had an interest in the law since undertaking a law in nursing subject in my initial degree. I was always interested in injuries work and during my second year of nursing I commenced an accelerated law degree. Working shift work as a nurse gave me the flexibility to attend university and work part-time.

Most memorable moment

I acted for a fellow a few years ago who had been horrifically injured in a motor vehicle collision. He was a tough-looking bloke who loved his family, rugby league and restoring muscle cars. His pain was so severe he was contemplating amputating his own leg. At his settlement conference he was in tears and had to keep leaving as his combined medications were making him physically sick. He was terribly embarrassed for others (and me) to see that. We settled his claim and I am still in occasional contact with him and his wife. He is still in pain and struggles to cope, but they are living in their own home and truly thankful for what they have.

Most useful piece of advice

My father has always said, if you start something, finish it. I have always remembered that.

How has being a personal injuries accredited specialist benefited your career?

I considered specialist accreditation in 2009 but decided against it as I heard it was pretty tough and our first child was on the way. Some of my current colleagues did that course and encouraged me to apply in 2011. For me, the benefit of specialist accreditation has been to refresh my knowledge on areas of PI that I may have forgotten and the personal satisfaction of having undertaken a course which is recognised by my peers and colleagues as achieving a level of expertise in our field. For whatever reason, I have found that I am now more interested in presenting on relevant areas of PI law and considering further study. Specialist accreditation is something I am proud of achieving and it has certainly shown me I can do more with my time.

Speaking of PI...

Trent Johnson will present at the 12th Annual Personal Injuries Conference in Brisbane on 27 July.

His session, 'Planning your case', covers the opening phase of a PI matter, including taking instructions from a client and drafting Notice of Claim for Damages (NCD) for vehicle accidents, public liability and workers' compensation.

For conference details, see qls.com.au

What motivates you to continue your legal practice?

I work with a small, passionate group of people. Our clients are hard-working, generally blue-collar workers ranging in age between that of my parents and grandparents. They usually have very little means available to them, limited assets and modest incomes, if any. They are usually struck down in the prime of their retirement when they should be enjoying the fruits of their years of hard labour. Seeing someone suffer from the effects of a terminal illness like mesothelioma is difficult. Any compensation we can obtain for them to afford treatment, palliative care or provide either a home or financial security for their families is always appreciated. Our clients are some of the most deserving and decent people I have ever met.

What is the greatest joy in your work?

Having a win against the odds.

What would you like to be doing in 10 years' time?

Enjoying far more time with my family and friends. I'd also like to be looking for other work because there are no more people suffering from asbestos-related illnesses, or because effective treatments have been developed. Unfortunately, given the current statistics and despite the passionate medical research being undertaken, I think I will be representing the same clients, but will have much more asbestos litigation experience.

What legal issues most concern you?

The biggest issue for me is the lack of precedent asbestos litigation in Queensland and the differing procedural provisions for dust (not only asbestos) related conditions in the various Australian states and territories. Unfortunately in Queensland we do not have a specialist court similar to the NSW Dust Diseases Tribunal and all too often this results in a plaintiff's evidence being taken before, but not judicially considered until after, their death. My personal view is that this is unacceptable and needs to change.

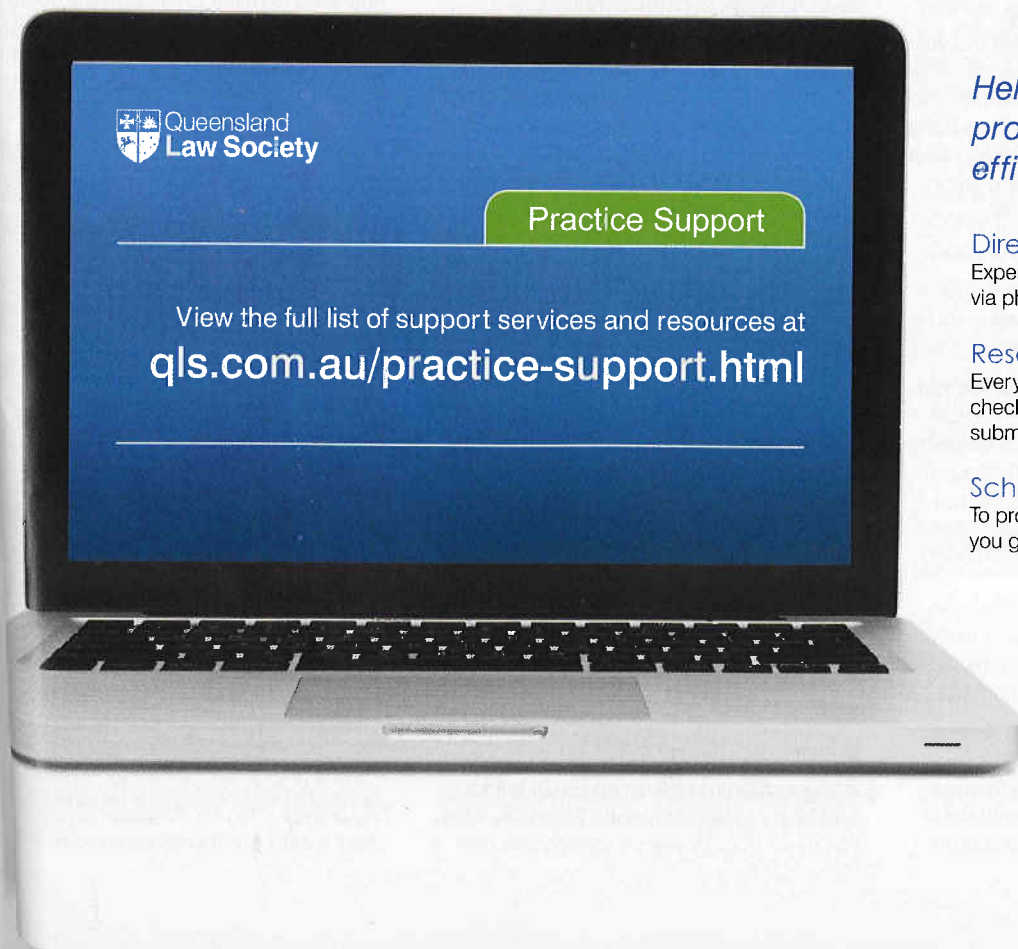
What activities unrelated to work do you enjoy?

My fiancé and I have two young boys with another child expected later this year. I spend a lot of time with family, close friends and our two dogs Bob and Molly. We have a jet ski and our eldest son is now old enough to come out on that. I used to take the jet ski to Moreton Island with a few mates, have lunch on the beach and snorkel the Tangalooma wrecks. Since moving back to the Sunshine Coast it has been my intention to catch up with a few old mates and get back into surfing. Sadly, I am yet to adequately address either one!

How do you manage your work/life balance?

Poorly, we have moved to the Sunshine Coast for the lifestyle and beaches, but as yet I have not spent a whole lot of time here. Whenever I can, I spend time with my fiancé and our boys.

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