



## memberprofile

**BRONWYN POTT**  
Chief Executive Officer – Swaab Attorneys  
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# Leading the Way

**Bronwyn Pott** is Chief Executive Officer for Swaab Attorneys, a 10-partner, commercial law firm based in Sydney, Australia. With 60 staff including 30 lawyers, Swaab focuses on eight practice areas: Intellectual Property and Technology; Commercial Litigation; Corporate Advisory; Commercial; Construction & Sustainability; Property, Mortgages and Finance; and Family Law.

Pott joined ALA in 1999 and was encouraged to create a national organization in Australia. As a result, she helped to establish the Australian Legal Practice Management Association (ALPMA), for which she now serves as President. “During this period we hope to turn the current federation into a truly national association, expand into two new territories, and lift the profile of the organization in our largest legal market (New South Wales). It’s an exciting time for the association and a tremendous privilege to be able to build on the great work done by others on the board.”

Inspired by ALA’s Certified Legal Manager (CLM)<sup>SM</sup> program, Pott worked with the University of New England to help develop the Diploma of Practice Management for law firms. “We are very hopeful that it will help to elevate the status of professional managers in the Australian legal profession,” she said. Read on to learn more about Pott and her involvement in the legal management profession.

**1 My main responsibilities are:** setting operational policies. I am also involved in our strategic planning, so I get to play a part in most areas of the firm’s activities.

**2 I became a legal administrator when:** in about 1992, after a role as financial controller with responsibility for most operations, I assumed the wider role of Practice Manager. This role evolved into that of CEO (with enlarged responsibilities) in about 2000.

**3 The thing I like best about being a legal administrator is:** working with very clever people! My favourite role is mentoring our fee earners (including the partners) in regular six weekly cycles. It sounds cheesy, but those sessions have really helped bond us as a firm, and have helped cement the firm’s focus on our culture.

**4 The thing I like least about being a legal administrator is:** dealing with client complaints and the

issues surrounding collections. In part my role involves being a client advocate inside the firm, and while that has helped focus our service levels, it’s a constant balancing act.

**5 The hardest situation I have had to deal with was:** counseling our ‘party’ partner about a harassment claim by a junior member of staff. He was mortified, I was horrified, and we both cried. He wrote a lovely letter afterwards thanking me for my ‘sensitivity,’ but resigned from the partnership a few weeks later.

**6 A major issue facing legal administrators in my country is:** the intransigence of some partners and their unwillingness to defer to

their administrators. I guess it all comes down to egos and respect.

**8 As a legal administrator, I never thought I’d have to:** crawl through factories in China to inspect prototypes of our fit out.

**9 The best advice I’ve received from a fellow legal administrator is:** to improve your respect levels with education. My MBA was a two-and-a-half-year slog, but I’ll be forever grateful for the opportunity the firm gave me to complete it. Going back to a university 20 years after my last attendance was terrifying, and I would never have considered it without the support of our managing partner and the encouragement of a fellow administrator.

**7 To be successful, legal administrators have to be:** flexible, credible, and consistent. You have to make it easier for the legal staff to do their jobs, not harder.

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**10 I think legal administrators are important to the legal industry because:** it's a rare lawyer who has the time or inclination to be a successful administrator – and why should he or she? For overall success, lawyers need legal administrators with focus and ambition to work in parallel with them to achieve the firm's vision.

**11 I knew I was in the right profession when:** in 1996 we had a partnership split that coincided with a property downturn that decimated the firm. I worked what seemed endless hours for months to relocate/resettle the firm on a shoestring (which was fun without access to capital or a salary). When we came up for air to a revitalized firm several months later, I felt a tremendous sense of satisfaction in the knowledge we had achieved something special.

**12 In the office, I try to set an example by:** taking a caring

and non-confrontational attitude toward issues in the office. I have a low tolerance for politics and believe that approaching matters with honesty and goodwill stands me in good stead to handle both internal and external issues.

**13 I try to encourage my staff to:** take responsibility and grow in their roles, mentor their supports, and always look to the future.

**14 If I were not a legal administrator I would be:** a chef I think – I spend my weekends feeding hoards of teenagers, and I really quite enjoy it!

**15 In my spare time I like to:** spend time reading, exploring wineries, traveling, and keeping track of the four kids still at home!

**16 I joined ALA because:** I saw an opportunity to improve my

personal development, to widen my network, and get international experience for the firm.

**17 I use my membership in ALA by:** attending conferences, reading the journal, and encouraging members of ALPMA to adopt ALA benefits for our members.

**18 If I could change one thing about myself it would be:** the ability to manage my time more efficiently.

**19 Three words that best describe me are:** loyal, innovative, and sleep-deprived.

**20 My plans for the next 10 years include:** continuing to develop Swaab into an even better firm, before winding down into a lazy retirement on a beach somewhere with my husband. ♦

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